

# **The Flemish movement**

**Of**

**French Flanders**

**And**

**The maintenance of Vlaemsch**

**Volume 2**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis will trace the history of the Flemish movement of French Flanders, the various associations involved in it and its prominent figures and examine the importance of the regional language – Vlaemsch – to the movement and to regional identity. It will seek to account for the decline of Flemish in French Flanders with particular reference to economic and social change in this region as well as to central government attitudes and policies regarding minority languages in France. The thesis will analyse the efforts of the Flemish movement of French Flanders to ensure the survival of Vlaemsch, in particular focusing on the support the movement enjoys from Belgian organisations. This will necessitate a discussion of the differences between Vlaemsch and standard Dutch and attitudes within the Flemish movement – and French Flanders as a whole - towards the two language varieties. It will examine the role of education in the maintenance of the regional language and seek to illustrate the limitations of a programme of promotion of a minority language based principally on the teaching of that language. Finally, the thesis will seek to demonstrate that, while Vlaemsch is likely to continue to decline as a language of usual communication in French Flanders, both it and standard Dutch may have a cultural, symbolic and practical role to play in the region for the foreseeable future.

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Aims and objectives**

This thesis will trace the history of the Flemish movement of French Flanders, the various associations involved in it and its prominent figures and examine the importance of the regional language – Vlaemsch – to the movement and to regional identity. It will seek to account for the decline of Flemish in French Flanders with particular reference to economic and social change in this region as well as to central government attitudes and policies regarding minority languages in France. The thesis will analyse the efforts of the movement to ensure the survival of Vlaemsch, in particular focusing on the support the movement enjoys from Belgian organisations. This will necessitate a discussion of the differences between Vlaemsch and standard Dutch and attitudes within the Flemish movement – and French Flanders as a whole - towards the two language varieties. It will examine the role of education in the maintenance of the regional language and seek to illustrate the limitations of a programme of promoting a minority language which is based principally on the teaching of that language. Finally, the thesis will seek to demonstrate that, while Vlaemsch is likely to continue to decline as a language of everyday communication in French Flanders, both it and standard Dutch may have a cultural, symbolic and practical role to play in the region for the foreseeable future.

## 1.2 Theoretical background

However, before examining the specificities of the situation in French Flanders, it is necessary to address certain general questions. The first of these is the relationship between language, identity, nationalism and regionalism which necessitates an examination of theories of nationalism. This is achieved by reference to a number of standard works in the field, such as those of Anderson (1991), Kedourie (1993), Hobsbawm (1990) and Wicker (ed.) (1997), which offer a variety of perspectives. The conceptual framework adopted is thus a synthesis of these perspectives. Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is of particular relevance since it focuses on the role played by the growth of print capitalism in the rise of nationalism. In so doing, Anderson places language at the very heart of questions of national identity, since printing facilitated the creation of standard national languages, which were, in turn, the vehicle which promoted the national culture. It the feeling that they shared in this national culture which gave disparate communities (however imperfectly) their sense of unity. Clearly there was no reason why this supra-community identity should, in the French context, have been limited to the nation state. Indeed in the wake of the Revolution the brutality, both real and metaphorical, of the nation-forging process in France, encouraged many groups with a distinct non-French language and culture to re-evaluate their own identity, along similar lines. From the outset, the Flemish movement of French Flanders highlighted the importance of ensuring the survival of the regional language among their goals. Furthermore, from its earliest days this movement made use of printed matter in its efforts to promote Netherlandic

language and culture in French Flanders. This is typical of the process described by Anderson, whereby the spread of print capitalism has served to promote national, or here regional, identity.

It is also necessary to consider what is meant by the term “regionalism,” since it has several, very different connotations. On the most basic level it may be considered to signify an awareness of a specific regional identity which differentiates a given region from other regional identities and the national identity. The region in this definition is seen as part of the nation. This “passive” regionalism becomes “active” when members of the community seek to promote the specificities of their region, typically language and culture. This often occurs where the regional identity (or elements of it) is perceived to be under threat and may result in calls for cultural autonomy, the right to determine cultural questions at the regional level. Clearly this “active” regionalism may have political implications, with regard to education and the teaching of the regional language, for example. In addition to cultural autonomy, some regional movements call for political autonomy within the nation, or, in more extreme cases, separation from it. This separation may be in favour of independence or to allow the region to become part of another nation with which the region feels it has strong links, usually ethnic, cultural or historic, or a combination of these. In French Flanders each of these visions of regionalism (with the exception of the desire for independence) has enjoyed popularity at various times. Indeed, it is often difficult to discern which particular regionalist vision a given group supports, since groups are often

inconsistent in their terminology and are typically reluctant to admit to any separatist tendencies.

It is also important to take into account the situation of other minority language groups, thus establishing points of reference for the analysis of the situation which obtains in French Flanders. Williams (1991), Edwards (ed.) 1984 and Edwards (1995), amongst others, are key sources here, giving, in particular a wider perspective on the role played by education policies in determining the vitality of minority language communities. In this respect these works are well complemented by Kedourie (1993) and Hobsbawm (1990), which provide important insight into the role of education in the formation of national identity. Weber (1977) and Lodge (1993) provide an historical perspective on the role of education in promoting the standard - and with it national culture and identity – in France.

A further question which requires investigation is the relationship between standard Dutch and the regional Netherlandic dialect, since the Flemish movement of French Flanders has been divided over which language variety should be promoted. A considerable amount of primary source material exists discussing just this issue but the opinions expressed are often contradictory. Supporters of standard Dutch see the two as very similar, whereas advocates of the regional variety see little more than a distant relationship. Brachin (1985) provides an impartial perspective by which the strength of these claims and counterclaims may be evaluated. In the interests of clarity, the Netherlandic dialect of French Flanders, is usually referred to by its regional

name, Vlaemsch<sup>1</sup>, although other unambiguous terms are sometimes employed, the Flemish dialect of French Flanders, for example. However, referring to Vlaemsch as the regional dialect is, in itself, problematic since, as with many non-standard – and non-standardised – minority languages, there is not one language variety but a series of more or less closely related, highly localised dialects.

### 1.3 Structure

A broadly chronological approach is adopted, beginning with the origins of the Flemish movement of French Flanders in the nineteenth century and tracing its development up to the present. Marc Castre also adopted a similar structure in *La Flandre au Lion* (1977), the only published work which focuses on the movement itself. However, a number of issues have arisen at several moments during the history of the movement and are at times difficult to incorporate within the chronological structure: none more so than the question of the teaching of the regional language. Therefore, in view of the importance attached to this issue by all strands of the Flemish movement of French Flanders from its earliest days and the way it dominates the contemporary movement, as well as the sheer volume of material analysed, a separate Chapter (Chapter 6) is devoted to this aspect of the movement's activities.

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of this point, see pp20-1.

Chapter 2 seeks to establish the set of circumstances which led to the development of regional sentiment in French Flanders and particularly to account for the decline in the netherlandophone community in this region. A key work in this respect (as well as in Chapter 6) was Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Weber, 1976), detailing the modernisation and industrialisation of France in the nineteenth century and the impact these processes had on rural life, in particular in the non-francophone regions. National phenomena highlighted by Weber can then be related to the situation in the Nord / Pas-de-Calais, as described, in particular, by Wyteman (1988), Landry and de Verrewaere (1982) and Coornaert (1970).

It can thus be seen that the forces of industrialisation, urbanisation and centralisation conspired to bring about the decline of Flemish in French Flanders, with a similar situation developing in the other regions of France where there was (and often still is) a significant non-francophone population. The extent of this decline has been determined through reference to a number of secondary sources, initially those relating to the emergence of French as the national standard, such as Lodge (1993), Walter (1988, 1994) and Weber (1976) and then those focussing specifically on the linguistic situation of French Flanders, particularly Vanneste (1982) and Willemyns (1997). Primary sources – the *Annales* and *Bulletins* of the Comité Flamand de France<sup>2</sup> (the first Flemish organisation founded in French Flanders) - are also of importance in establishing the relative strength of Flemish at the time of the founding of this organisation.

In the light of this historical background, Chapter 3 establishes a "date of birth" for the Flemish movement of French Flanders: 1853, the date of the founding of the Comité Flamand de France. This chapter then analyses this organisation's stated motivations, aims and strategies. A series of articles published in the Stichting Ons Erfdeel review *Les Pays-Bas Français* are of considerable importance in this respect, particularly those by Nuytens (1982, 1985) and Brachin (1988). However, not surprisingly, it is the primary sources, the *Annales* and *Bulletins* of the CFF which are the most revealing.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter 3 also examines the relationship between the Comité Flamand and the Flemish Movement of Belgium. Given the level and scope of activity of the Belgian Flemish Movement at the time when the CFF was founded, as well as the proximity of French Flanders to its centres of activity, it seemed likely that there would be some degree of collaboration between the two. This supposition was confirmed by Landry and de Verrewaere (1982), Witvoet (1994) and the articles by Nuytens and Brachin, mentioned above, as well as by the *Annales* and *Bulletins* themselves. An understanding of the Flemish Movement and its origins is therefore vital in order interpret its interaction with its counterpart in French Flanders. The principal works consulted to this end were Hermans (ed.) (1992) and Deleu, et al. (1973). To avoid confusion between the two Flemish movements, that of Belgian Flanders is referred to as the Flemish Movement, due to its greater resources, level of organisation and cohesion, whereas the somewhat cumbersome title of the Flemish

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<sup>2</sup> These primary sources are discussed at 1.4 below.

movement of French Flanders is used for its French counterpart. The Dutch title of *Vlaamse Beweging* is used only to refer to the Belgian Flemish Movement.

Thus a clear picture of the early Flemish movement of French Flanders emerges. It consisted principally of an intellectual and social elite, had strong links with the Roman Catholic Church (as was typical of regional movements in France at the time) and also with the Belgian Flemish Movement. Chapter 4 then deals with the period 1919 – 1947, starting with the *Comité Flamand de France* resuming its activities in the aftermath of World War One, the effects of which had been severe in French Flanders. 1947 represents the end of the movement's period of inactivity which followed World War Two and the allegations of collaboration which were so harmful to it. This was an important period for the Flemish movement in French Flanders since it was one in which ethnically based regional and national identity and self-determination were prominent issues. Flemish organisations found themselves victims of anti-German feeling (as they had been both before and after the Franco-Prussian War and in the years leading up to World War One) and were suspected of suspected of harbouring separatist, Pan-Netherlandic and / or Pan-Germanic sentiments. The failure of certain Flemish activists to disprove these suspicions was to have dire consequences for the movement as whole. Landry and de Verrewaere (1982) and Castre (1977) are again important secondary sources.

Chapter 5 examines at the development of the Flemish movement of French Flanders in the period after World War 2. The period 1948 – 1968 is largely characterised by a relative lack of activity on the part of Flemish organisations in French Flanders. During this period, much of the impetus for the promotion of Netherlandic culture within the region came from the Flemish Movement in Belgium. Landry and de Verrewaere (1982) and Castre (1977), as secondary sources, are again the starting point for investigation and Engelaere (1991), published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, provides a good overview of the period. The *Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging* (Deleu et al., 1973) is a valuable source of information on the Komitee voor Frans-Vlaanderen along with this organisation's own publications, *KFV Mededelingen*, for example (cf.Ch1.4).

1968 represented a turning point for the Flemish movement of French Flanders. With Gantois' death a new generation of activists came to the fore who were not directly tainted by allegations of collaboration. Furthermore, part of the motivation behind the events of May 1968 had been the dissatisfaction with the authoritarian, centralised French state, as well as with the dehumanising effects of capitalism, industrialisation and urbanisation. These concerns were easily accommodated in a new regionalist philosophy which gained popularity in French Flanders, particularly amongst certain elements of the student movement at the University of Lille. For the first time in its history the Flemish movement of French Flanders was able to shed its reactionary appearance in favour of a fashionable, progressive one.

The movement then enjoyed a boom period which lasted from 1968 until the early 1980s. This period is relatively well chronicled in works such as Landry and de Verrewaere (1982), Castre (1977) and Vanbremersch (1979), which, by this stage are both primary and secondary sources. They are secondary sources as an historical record of the movement's development at this time and primary sources as their authors were themselves involved in it. Their works therefore offer an "insider's" perspective on the movement.

By the mid-1980s, however, the situation had changed. The successes of the previous decade were being undermined by renewed allegations of far right tendencies. Furthermore, despite the popularity which regional groups and the events they organised had enjoyed, the number of activists running these groups had always been small. Consequently, the levels of activity of the previous 10-15 years were difficult to sustain.

Chapter 6 focuses on the promotion of the teaching of the regional language, which, since the early 1990s is the domain in which the Flemish movement of French Flanders has been most active. As stated above, the sustained importance of this aspect of the movement's activities and the volume of material involved made it impossible to incorporate into the chronological structure of the rest of the thesis. The review *Les Pays-Bas français* is the most useful secondary source for material relating to the teaching of the regional language in French Flanders. Not surprisingly, primary sources also abound. These are, for the most part, produced by the groups which organise standard Dutch and / or Vlaemsch classes and are discussed at 1.4. below.

Having thus charted the development of the Flemish movement of French Flanders from its origins in the 1850s until the present, with a particular focus on its attempts to ensure the survival of the regional language, Chapter 7 sets out to compare the situation in French Flanders with that in other regions of France where there are indigenous linguistic minorities. The intention is to determine to what extent the activities of the Flemish movement of French Flanders were mirrored by those of other regional organisations and to attempt to gauge their relative success. To this end an attempt at quantifying the relative strengths of France's regional languages in terms of "numbers of speakers" - itself a problematic term (cf. Chapters 2 and 7) – is made. This is based, albeit not exclusively, on the *Ethnologue* web-site which offers the most comprehensive and recent statistics, based on - where possible - independent sources.

The classification of minority language situations put forward in Williams (ed.) 1991 is the basis for selecting which regional languages would afford the most useful comparison, in the event Catalan and Francique. The intention here had been to rely on secondary sources, which was possible with regard to Catalan, where Marley (1995) was of particular importance. However, the dearth of secondary sources dealing with Francique meant that information could only be obtained from the regional organisations in Lorraine francique themselves.

## 1.4 Primary Sources

From the founding of the Comité Flamand de France in 1853 until the mid 1920s, the most important primary source are the Comité's own *Annales* and *Bulletins*. These provide much evidence relating to the founding of this organisation, its aims and its membership. The questionnaire on language use in French Flanders, published in the 1856/7 *Annales* is a valuable primary source regarding the decline of Vlaemsch, as discussed in Chapter 2. These *Annales* and *Bulletins* may be found in the Centre Culturel de la Flandre in Hazebrouck which houses the Comité Flamand's archives. Many of the key early editions may be found here, as well as Camille Looten's (cf. Ch3.6.3) articles on the history of the Comité Flamand, Vlaemsch and the teaching of Vlaemsch. The archives are not, however, complete. It should be remembered that these archives have not always had a permanent home and that often only a limited number of copies of a given edition of the *Annales* and *Bulletins* were actually printed. As a result some editions remain solely in private hands while others have simply been lost in the years since their publication. Furthermore, publication of both the *Annales* and the *Bulletins* has, at times, been erratic and the CFF's own catalogue merely lists those editions of which it has copies. It is, therefore, not always apparent whether editions are missing or simply do not exist.

From 1919 until the early 1920s research is largely based on primary sources, namely, again, the *Annales* and *Bulletins* of the CFF. Indeed, it is only in these publications that one can find substantial information regarding the

CFF's activities during the period 1919 – 1947, as other sources tend to focus on the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk<sup>3</sup> (VVF). As the CFF is overtaken by the VVF as the most significant organisation promoting Netherlandic language and culture in French Flanders, so other sources are used more extensively.

*Hoe ik mijn Taal en mijn volk terugvond* by the VVF's leader Jean-Marie Gantois and his correspondence with the prominent Breton nationalist l'Abbé Perrot, published in *Les Pays-Bas français* are the most significant primary sources consulted regarding this organisation. One of the greatest difficulties regarding Gantois and the VVF is the question of objectivity, even regarding secondary sources. As noted at 1.3, above, Landry, de Verrewaere and Castre all had links with the Flemish movement of French Flanders and give Gantois a far more sympathetic hearing, than say the editorialists of the regional newspaper *La Voix du Nord* did in 1945-6 or, the magazine *l'Express*, in a series of articles on regional culture in August 1995, who are overtly hostile (cf. Ch4.4).

However, despite the problem areas highlighted above, researching the history of the Flemish movement from 1853 until 1948 is relatively straightforward since one is dealing with, at most, two organisations, about

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<sup>3</sup> There is some disagreement over the spelling of Vlaamsch in the organisation's name. In the modern French version of Gantois' *Hoe ik mijn Taal en mijn Volk terugvond*, for example, the standard Dutch spelling of Vlaams is used. In this thesis, however, Vlaamsch is used as this is the spelling given in the VVF's *Avis de naissance* reproduced in Deleu, et al., 1973 (p1840). It is to be noted that 'ae' is more commonly used in French Flanders to represent the long 'a' sound designated by 'aa' in standard Dutch. Spelling discrepancies are, of course, common in non-standard language varieties.

which documentary evidence is abundant. Post World War Two, however, especially after 1968, this is not necessarily the case.

As stated at 1.3, the period 1948-1968 is one of relative inactivity for the Flemish movement of French Flanders. Nevertheless, several important publications appeared at this time which are valuable primary sources. Most notable amongst these are the publications of the Komitee voor Trans-Vlaanderen (cf. Ch5.1.2) and those of the Stichting Ons Erfdeel<sup>4</sup> (cf. Ch5.6.1). These publications are still important today and offer, in particular, an insight into contemporary relations between the Belgian Flemish Movement and the Flemish movement of French Flanders. The chief primary source relating to Gantois' activities after his release from prison until his death is the review *Notre Flandre*, of which he assumed control in 1954.

The period from 1968 to the early 1980s was, as noted above, one in which the Flemish movement of French Flanders prospered. Consequently there were more initiatives and organisations promoting Netherlandic language and culture in French Flanders than had been the case previously. Many of these groups produced their own publications, resulting in a considerable volume of primary source material. One of the reasons for this wealth of documentary evidence is the creation of a publishing house, Westhoek Editions, which enjoyed close links with the regional movement in French Flanders. A good deal of this material can be found in the archives of the Comité Flamand de

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<sup>4</sup> *Les Pays-Bas français*, published by the Stichting Ons Erfdeel, is also an important secondary source referred to throughout this thesis

France, since, as it was the most respected regional organisation in French Flanders, other organisations targeted it with information on their own activities. Such material may also be found – albeit less reliably – at the Centre de culture populaire Het Blauwershof in Godewaersvelde. There is no archive at Het Blauwershof, but rather a random selection of mostly second-hand publications relating to Netherlandic culture and language, the Flemish movement of French Flanders and regionalism in general, all of which are for sale.

However, it is the period from the mid 1980s to the present which was to prove the most difficult to research, for a number of reasons. Firstly, there are no secondary sources dealing with the Flemish movement itself<sup>6</sup> more recent than Landry and De Veerwaere (1982); it has therefore been necessary to rely entirely on primary sources, thus exacerbating the problems of objectivity and reliability mentioned above. Publications appeared inconsistently and their precise origins are often difficult to determine. These inconsistencies may be attributed to the varying fortunes of the groups which produced them. Tegaere Toegaen's review *de Koekestuut* is a case in point. Originally intended as a monthly publication, two months passed between the third and fourth editions, six between the fourth and fifth and then more than three years between the fifth and sixth. Furthermore, this sixth edition was undated. It appears to have been the last but, as the organisation itself is no longer active and its former members have proved impossible to trace, this cannot be

stated with any great certainty. Nevertheless, *de Koekestuut* does at least carry a publication date, issue number and the names of its authors. The same cannot be said for many other publications of this period, many of which are undated pamphlets which are either anonymous or identify their authors by initial alone. In others, one finds references to groups of which no mention is made elsewhere, such as the *Comité pour la justice populaire en Flandre* (cf.5.7.1).

The most complete record of these organisations and publications – in the public domain at least – remains the archive of the *Comité Flamand de France*, with *Het Blauwershof* an alternative source of documents and information, within the limitations discussed above. Conversations and correspondence with Flemish activists were sometimes useful for complementing evidence, although disagreements between individual organisations and suspicion of an outsider's questions caused problems here. The principal impression one gains of most aspects of the movement at this time is of ephemeral, small scale initiatives, lacking popular support and any real cohesion.

With regard to the teaching of *Vlaemsch* and standard Dutch in French Flanders, there is an abundance of primary source material. The *Annales* and *Bulletins* of the *Comité Flamand de France* once again provides a good deal of information, as do the publications of those Flemish organisations which

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<sup>5</sup> There are a number of articles dealing with the linguistic situation in French Flanders which post-date Landry and de Verrewaere's work, as well as articles dealing with the teaching of

organise classes in the regional language<sup>6</sup>. The most notable of these is the Comité pour l'Enseignement de la Langue et Culture Néerlandaises (CELCN) which currently co-ordinates the majority of these courses in French Flanders. Furthermore, it proved possible to supplement the information already available by interviewing a number of key figures in this domain. This was more straightforward than with some other aspects of the Flemish movement's activities, partly because some of the courses – those at the University of Lille III, or the Wervicq-Sud experiment, for example - have no connection with the movement and partly, presumably, because organisations are aware of the need to promote their courses, which, in any case, represent a less controversial aspect of the movement's activities.

In Chapter 7, all information pertaining to the Francique movement in Lorraine comes from primary sources, namely the publications produced by the organisations promoting the regional language and culture. Fortunately, these organisations co-operated readily and supplemented their publications with personal correspondence, where necessary. However, as stated above regarding the Flemish movement of French Flanders, relying solely on primary sources in this way does raise questions of objectivity and reliability, which although unavoidable, must be borne in mind.

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Dutch / Vlaamsch in the region, the latter appearing notably in *Les Pays-Bas français*.

<sup>6</sup> Either the regional or standard variety. For an in depth discussion of the relationship between the two, see Ch6.3.

## Chapter 2 Historical background

The origins of the netherlandophone community in France may be traced back to the settlement of what is now the Nord / Pas-de-Calais and Picardie by a number of Germanic peoples – Saxons and Franks in particular - from the fourth century on (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, pp 65-86). This community became officially part of France with the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, date seen by many regionalists as the beginning of the decline of the “Flemish” (see below for discussion of the appropriateness of this term) language in French Flanders. In reality, the influence of French<sup>1</sup> had been strong even before annexation. Having reached its most southerly point – the valley of the Somme - in the fifth century the linguistic frontier between the Romance and Germanic languages had been gradually moving north ever since. Romance languages had been spoken around Lille from the twelfth century at the latest (Vanneste, 1982, p23). Furthermore, despite the 1539 Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts, which elevated the “langage françois” to the status of official language of law (Lodge, 1993, p126), little attempt was made under the ancien régime to eradicate the Netherlandic dialects from French Flanders.

Annexation did, however, represent the beginning of French Flanders' isolation from the rest of the netherlandophone world. Vlaemsch<sup>2</sup> was deprived of cultural and economic support from other netherlandophone areas. Traditional economic links with towns such as Bruges and Ghent were

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<sup>1</sup> The term French is intended to encompass the romance dialects which preceded standard French North of the Somme

<sup>2</sup> The Netherlandic dialect of French Flanders. See below for discussion of the terminology.

disrupted so that with industrialisation and urbanisation - in the nineteenth century, in particular - the poles of attraction for French Flemings were francophone towns, such as Lille, Dunkirk and Valenciennes. As a result, Vlaemsch was to become perceived as a rural language, ill adapted to the progress associated with growing urban centres. This in turn had a negative effect both on the development of the language and on its prestige, as discussed below.

This situation was to change radically after the Revolution of 1789. It was the Revolution which marked the birth of modern nationalism in France. Loyalty to the nation was to replace loyalty to dynasties and / or the Church. To this end, a uniform national identity was required within which the national language and national culture were to play vital roles, as Abbé Grégoire stated, "...l'unité de l'idiome est une partie intégrante de la Révolution" (quoted in Lodge, 1993, p198). Regional languages were seen as inherently anti-revolutionary vestiges of a feudal past:

Le fédéralisme et la superstition parle bas-breton; l'émigration et la haine de la République parlent allemand; la contre révolution parle italien et le fanatisme parle basque. Brisons ces instruments de dommage et d'erreur... La monarchie avait des raisons de ressembler à la tour de Babel; dans la démocratie, laisser les citoyens ignorants de la langue nationale, incapables de contrôler le pouvoir, c'est trahir la patrie, c'est méconnaître les bienfaits de l'imprimerie, chaque imprimeur étant un instituteur de language et de législation... Chez un

peuple libre la langue doit être une et la même pour tous. (B. Barère, quoted in Lodge, 1993, p214)

Such sentiments guided language policies in France for more than 150 years. These policies, coupled with a range of socio-economic and technological factors – industrialisation, urbanisation, improved communications, amongst others – brought about the decline noted in the number of Flemish speakers in French Flanders.<sup>3</sup> These factors will be examined in detail below. However, before such discussion can take place, clarification is required of the terms *Flemish* and *French Flanders*.

Flemish is often used to refer to the language spoken by netherlandophone Belgians<sup>4</sup>. However, this definition is misleading for a number of reasons. Firstly, the official language of language of netherlandophone Belgium is, in fact, standard Dutch, as it is in the Netherlands. *Flemish* should really only be used to refer to the Netherlandic dialects of the Belgian provinces of East and West Flanders, as opposed to those of Limburg, Brabant or Holland (Brachin, 1985, p5). The dialect spoken in French Flanders is most closely related to that of West Flanders and might therefore reasonably be referred to as Flemish. However, an effort has been made to differentiate clearly between the dialect(s) spoken in French Flanders and the dialects of Belgian Flanders. To this end, in this study, the former will be designated by the name

<sup>3</sup> The situation of Flemish is not unique in this respect: a similar pattern is repeated throughout France (cf Weber, 1976) and beyond.

<sup>4</sup> According to Brachin, even by netherlandophone Belgians themselves (Brachin, 1985, p3)

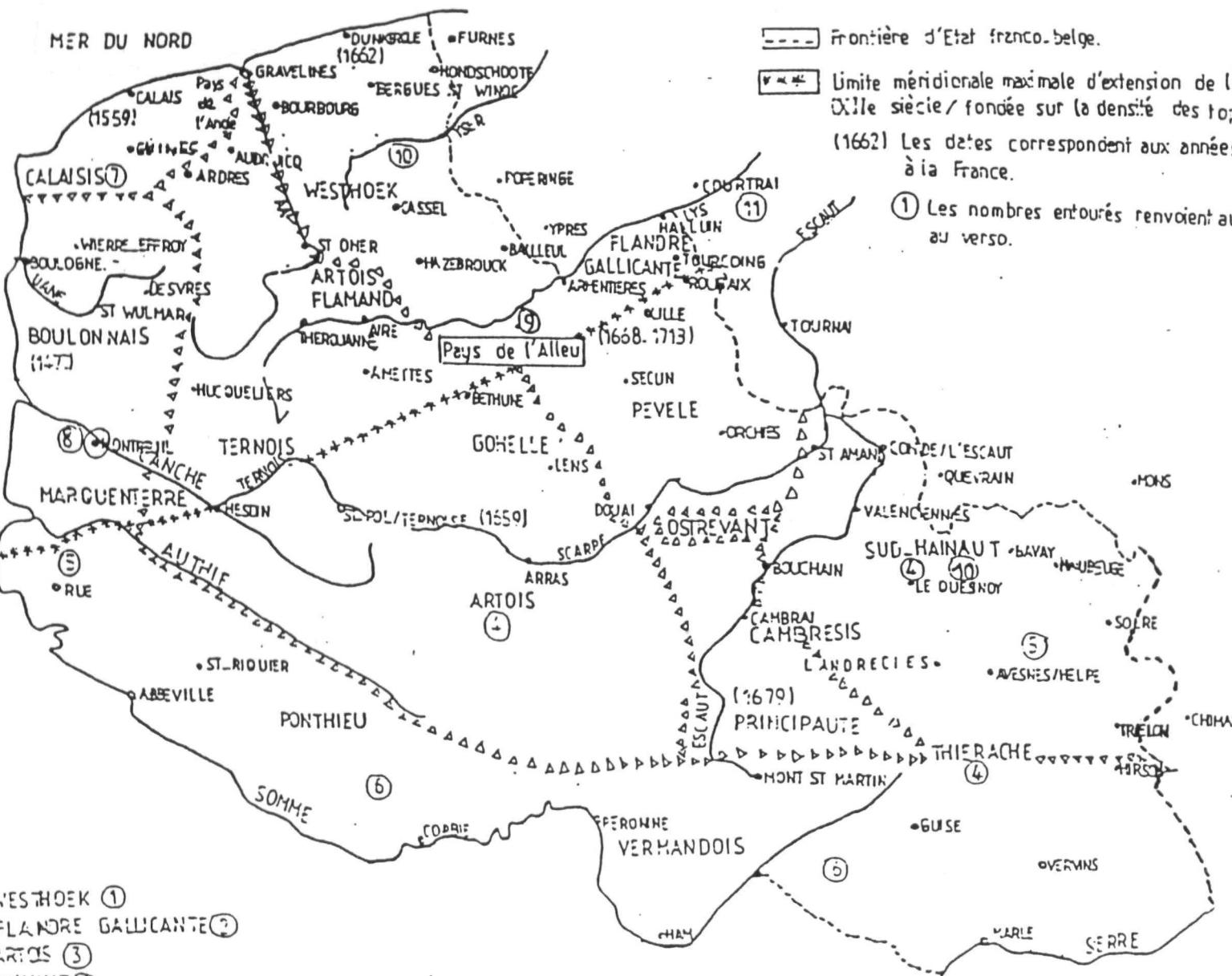
Vlaemsch<sup>5</sup>, in preference to the somewhat cumbersome Flemish of French Flanders or the ambiguous French Flemish dialect. There is a particular need for precise terminology in this matter since the relationship between standard Dutch and Vlaemsch is one which has provoked considerable controversy in the Flemish movement in French Flanders. Some French Flemings see standard Dutch as the standard version of their language, and in the creation of which Vlaemsch played a part, whereas others perceive it as a largely incomprehensible foreign tongue (cf. Ch5). As discussed below, the degree of difference or similarity between the two language varieties would seem to be more an ideological than a linguistic issue.

Also in need of clarification is the term French Flanders. No existing administrative division currently bears the name Flanders in France and its boundaries are principally defined by French Flemings themselves, with those parts of the *Comté de Flandre* today in France serving as inspiration. Most French Flemings would agree with the definition given by Menschen Lyk Wyder:

La Flandre s'étend de la Mer du Nord (Duinkerke) à Douai-Dowaai (150km N-S), a pour métropole Lille-Rijsel, et une population de quelque un million cinq cent mille habitants. (Allacker,F., *La Flandre en France* undated information sheet, Menschen Lyk Wyder, p[1])

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<sup>5</sup> The name by which it is known in this dialect.

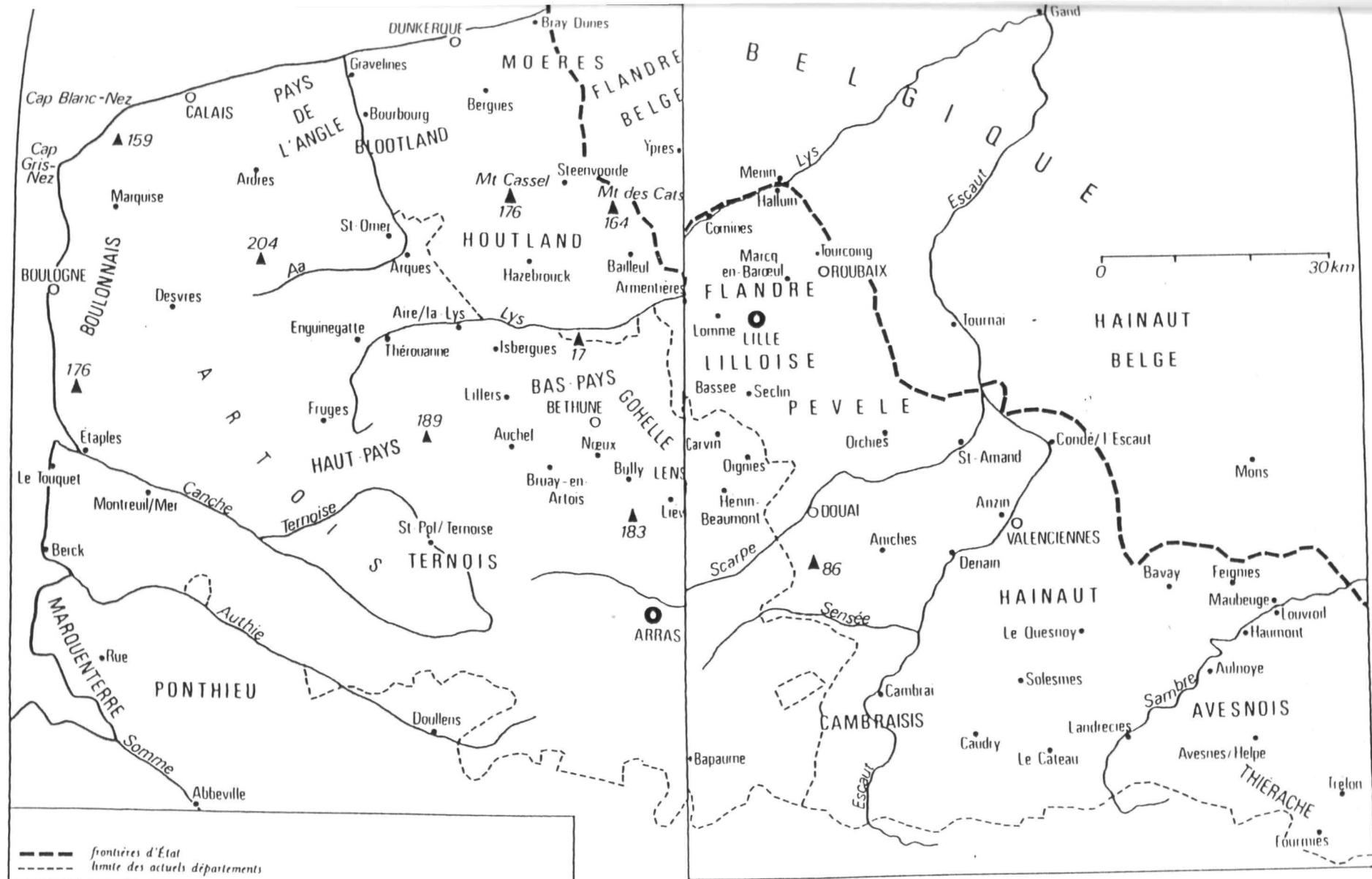


Frontière d'Etat franco-belge.

Limite méridionale maximale d'extension de la langue thiaise (XII<sup>e</sup> siècle / fondée sur la densité des toponymes thiais).

(1662) Les dates correspondent aux années d'annexion à la France.

① Les nombres entourés renvoient aux commentaires au verso.



1. Une « marqueterie de paysages », un « parterre de villes » :

la Flandre, l'Artois, le Hainaut.

Fig 1.2

This definition does not, however, correspond to the area in which Vlaemsch is actually spoken. This is restricted to:

... la partie septentrionale de la Flandre en France, que l'on appelle le Westhoek, de la Mer du Nord à la Lys-Leie (Belle – Bailleul; 50km N.-S.) avec quelque 350 000 habitants et Hazebroek<sup>6</sup> pour capitale.  
(Allacker,F., *La Flandre en France*, p[1])

Of these 350 000 inhabitants, some 80 000 – 100 000 (Sepieter, 1980, p14) are considered to be netherlandophones<sup>7</sup>. Consequently, using the name Westhoek to designate the netherlandophone areas would also give a false impression of the contemporary linguistic situation in French Flanders. Furthermore, the name Westhoek is also given to part of Belgian West Flanders. In this work, therefore, the term netherlandophone French Flanders is preferred. However, it should be remembered that even in this part of French Flanders there are no longer any monolingual speakers of Vlaemsch and French is very commonly used, particularly with outsiders. It is by way of contrast to netherlandophone French Flanders that the area around Lille is traditionally known as la Flandre gallicante or la Flandre romane<sup>8</sup>. Such is the pre-eminence of French in French Flanders today that this distinction is somewhat anachronistic. It does, however, illustrate the long history of linguistic coexistence in the region.

<sup>6</sup> The Dutch spelling is used in the original

These figures come from a University of Lille survey dating from 1971 and represent the most widely quoted estimate for numbers of Vlaemsch speakers in France: no figures relating to minority language use appear in the official census. Furthermore, the definition of

Another name frequently used when discussing French Flanders is les Pays-Bas français. The Pays-Bas français encompass, in addition to French Flanders, the traditional regions of Hainaut and Artois, in other words all of the contemporary administrative region of the Nord / Pas-de-Calais, plus part of the department of Somme, as far as the river Somme<sup>9</sup> (cf. fig. 1.1). Several organisations today active within the Flemish movement of French Flanders seek to extend their action to the whole of the Pays-Bas français which they see as a political, economic and cultural whole (cf. Ch6). This can cause confusion when they seek to promote Vlaemsch and / or standard Dutch as the *regional language*, when clearly for much of the Pays-Bas français it is not and never has been. Other terms are used by some authors to refer to specific parts of French Flanders. Some of these names – Blootland, Houtland, for example - are Netherlandic in origin, others - such as Flandre gallicante or Flandre maritime<sup>10</sup> – French (cf. fig. 1.2). These names are often applied to localities with no specific fixed boundaries and are not employed with the greatest consistency. Consequently they have not been used in this work.

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a “speaker” is itself highly problematic since issues such as level of competence and frequency of use need to be addressed.

<sup>8</sup> Also, under the Ancien Régime, “Flandre wallonne”, as discussed above.

<sup>9</sup> Landry and de Verrewaere restrict their definition of the Pays-Bas français purely to the region Nord / Pas-de-Calais (cf. fig 1.2).

<sup>10</sup> Flandre maritime does not appear on either of these maps but is the name often given to the coastal area around Dunkirk and (according to some) extending as far inland as Bergues, Hondschoote and Bourbourg. The term originates from the division of French Flanders into two *intendances*, Flandre Maritime and Flandre Wallonne (centred on Lille) (Wyteman, 1988, p160). However, as with many of these historical / traditional names, they are not always consistently applied today. The fact that neither map uses the term gives an indication of the inconsistent application of terminology.

As has been suggested above, it is after the Revolution of 1789 that the decline of Vlaemsch accelerated in French Flanders. In addition to the Republic's ideological hostility to regional languages, as reflected by Barère's comments above, it should not be forgotten that, in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, France was under very real threat from its neighbours. Potentially anti-Republican minority groups therefore represented a danger to national security, particularly in border regions, such as French Flanders. Furthermore, conceiving the Revolution in national terms, by promoting the concept of national identity, the 1789 revolutionaries were automatically excluding these minority linguistic / cultural groups. Indeed, in many cases they were actually presupposing that these groups allegiances lay elsewhere, in the case of the netherlandophone French Flemings with those with whom they shared a common language and culture in the – hostile - Austrian Netherlands.

The 1789 revolution was a bourgeois one; its power bases were therefore urban, with Paris pre-eminent. Consequently efforts were made to accelerate and develop the centralisation begun under the ancien régime with the regions being made more subordinate to the capital. The region as an administrative concept, bound to certain traditional geographical, cultural and political notions, was replaced by smaller and therefore less powerful units, the *départments*, whose names carefully avoided any suggestion of regional identity. So, in 1790, la Flandre disappeared from the administrative map, to

be replaced by the unimaginatively named Nord and Pas-de-Calais *départements*.<sup>11</sup>

Hostility towards regional languages increased under the Consulate and the Empire, unsurprisingly with France at war. However, even when peace had come, the lot of France's linguistic minorities did not improve.

The founding of the Kingdom of Belgium in 1830-1 did little to help French Flemings: in fact it served to distance them still further from the rest of the Netherlandic world. The Roman Catholic southern provinces of the Kingdom of the Netherlands had broken away from the Protestant North, partly as a result of the religious problems which had divided the Low Countries since the sixteenth century but also because of the language question. The Walloons, influenced by French liberalism, had provided much of the impetus for the 1830 revolution against the authoritarian William I and in its aftermath maintained the political and cultural upper hand. Thus Netherlandic culture was temporarily in decline on both sides of the Franco-Belgian border.

As the century progressed, France felt her security increasingly threatened by the emergence of a united Germany. That this external threat came from a power speaking a language related to Vlaemsch was a factor which was to cause problems for speakers and supporters of this language in France well into the 1960s (cf. Ch4 & 5) and still causes them to be regarded with

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<sup>11</sup> Some elements within the Flemish movement of French Flanders have advocated the creation of a *département* Flandre and the renaming of the region Nord / Pas-de-Calais Pays-Bas français

suspicion even today. Francique and Alsatian, the other two Germanic languages spoken in France, suffered in a similar way after being reincorporated into France following World War I.

In addition to this insecurity with regard to external powers, France's internal instability should not be underestimated. A country, which fluctuated between republic, monarchy and empire on average every 25 years between 1789 and 1871, was unlikely to show much tolerance towards tendencies which potentially undermined its territorial integrity. Once again successive French regimes conception of the nation was a decisive factor.

Issues of national security and the rise of nationalism across Europe do not account for the persecution of regional languages in France alone, nor does persecution necessarily result in their decline. One factor, however, provides both the motive and the means for eliminating regional languages and is particularly potent in the case of Vlaemsch: industrialisation.

Ever since the Revolution French governments have portrayed regional languages as reactionary, as enemies of progress, to which they have inevitably fallen victim. However, what has been meant by the term "progress" has chiefly been the establishment of capitalism which has necessitated industrialisation, the establishment of a national market and demographic change, all of which have worked against regional languages (Anderson, 1991, pp37-46).

As soon as the policy emerged of developing manufacturing industry on a large scale in France, its regional languages came under threat. Under the Ancien Régime with a parochial, essentially agrarian economy, these languages did not represent an obstacle to production. Indeed, to an extent they served to preserve the existing economic and social order inasmuch as they hindered social and geographical mobility. Consequently, no real measures were taken against them.

An industrial economy, however, required the development of urban centres and a mobile workforce. In the Nord / Pas-de-Calais both urbanisation and industrialisation occurred on a large scale. While the total population of the *département* Nord did little more than double between 1851 and 1990 (1 158 885 – 2 532 589, INSEE, quoted in *Quid*, 1998, p829), the major towns grew much more rapidly (cf. fig. 1.3)

Fig. 1.3

Town	Population 1851	Population 1990
Lille	72 537	950 265 (1)
Valenciennes	10 201	336 481 (2)
Douai	25 203	160 343
Dunkirk	27 047	190 879
Lens	2 796	323 174 (3)

Source: I.N.S.E.E., quoted in *Quid*, 1998, p830

Nota:

- 1) Figures refer to the entire conurbation
- 2) First figure is for the population in 1861

3) Although Lens is not in the *département* Nord, its proximity to Lille suggests that migrants would, to a certain extent arrived from the same areas. The figure given is for the entire conurbation.

Furthermore, the *département* Nord's urban population was soon greater than its rural population, a situation not reflected in many other regions of France (cf. fig. 1.4).

Fig. 1.4

Year	Urban population		Rural population	
	Nord	France	Nord	France
1846	485 200	8 647 000	647 800	26 755 000
1872	820 800	11 235 000	627 000	24 868 000
1901	1 298 300	15 970 000	569 000	23 055 000
1911	1 403 000	17 509 000	558 000	22 096 000

Source: Wyteman (ed.), 1988, p236, *Annuaire statistique régionale*, Lille, I.N.S.E.E., 1951, p46

As the above table shows, by 1911 over 71% of the *département*'s population was living in towns, considerably above the national average of just under 48%.

As Weber, amongst others, has shown, urbanisation has often worked against France's regional languages which tend to be stronger in rural communities (Weber, 1976, especially Ch6 & Ch12). This situation is particularly significant in French Flanders where Vlaemsch and French had coexisted for centuries and where now all the significant urban growth was taking place in

Francophone towns as well as in nearby towns in Artois and Hainaut. Thus, within French Flanders, the population shift was from the netherlandophone areas to the francophone<sup>12</sup>. The threat this represented for Vlaemsch was all the greater; people were not going to Paris where they would be exposed to a more evidently alien culture, they were merely moving to what was traditionally the Francophone part of their own region<sup>13</sup>. The transition was therefore easier and must have facilitated the emergence of French as the dominant partner in a diglossic situation. Those – predominantly rural - parts of French Flanders which did remain netherlandophone now appeared backward, left behind by progress and missing out on the new prosperity. Vlaemsch consequently lost prestige; it was seen – by francophones and undoubtedly by netherlandophones, especially the more ambitious, as well – as being a language of uneducated peasants, ill-suited to the modern, urban society. This is particularly the case since the netherlandophone urban centres with which French Flanders had historical links, Bruges and Ghent, for example, were now in a foreign country.

Furthermore, better communications and less need for child labour meant that schools were better attended in towns, thus facilitating the frenchifying influence of this institution, discussed below and in Chapter 5 (Weber, 1976, pp321-325).

<sup>12</sup> Willemyns shows Dunkirk to have been "mainly Francophone", as early as 1806 and "almost exclusively" francophone by the early 20th century, despite having a largely netherlandophone hinterland (Willemyns, 1997, p58).

<sup>13</sup> It was not only urbanisation which brought Francophones and non-Francophones into contact. Weber, also discusses the impact of military service in this respect. Here the Frenchification was reinforced by French classes and World War One (Weber, 1976, pp292-302).

However, economic and demographic change alone do not account for the decline of Vlaemsch. Central government hostility to regional languages in France after the 1789 revolution and the reasons for it, have been discussed above. It is now necessary to consider how this hostility was translated into policy and what the effects of these policies were.

Firstly, the principle established by the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts was maintained: French and French alone was accepted as the language of administration and law. During the Napoleonic conquests this language policy was pursued throughout the Low Countries, into present-day Belgium and Holland, regardless of whether the local population actually understood the language. The message was clear: there may be a constitution spelling out the individual's rights but he or she would only know what these rights were if they could speak French. This insistence on the use of one official language was not – however repressive and unfair it may have been – the main thrust of French language policy. This was to be in the field of education and the means the zealous *instituteur*.

The idea of using schools in the fight against regional languages dates from early in the Republic. On 10<sup>th</sup> September 1791 Talleyrand addressed the *Assemblée Nationale* and stated:

Les écoles primaires vont mettre fin à cette étrange inégalité: la langue de la Constitution et des lois y sera enseignée à tous et cette foule de dialectes corrompus, dernier reste de la féodalité sera

contrainte de disparaître: la force des choses le commande." (quoted in Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, pp270-1)

This desire duly became law on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1793 when it was decreed that, "Dans toutes les parties de la République, l'instruction ne se fait qu'en français" (quoted in Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p271). However, this decree was later relaxed to allow regional languages to be used to facilitate the teaching of French. Although regimes changed, central government attitudes towards regional languages remained constant. Indeed, for Vlaamsch an already unfavourable situation became even worse when, on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1853, the Conseil Académique du Nord expressly forbade the teaching of the language, a decision which was to prove the catalyst for the founding of the Flemish movement in France (cf. Ch3). However, while these measures were potentially damaging for regional languages, the relatively small percentage of children regularly attending school - particularly in those rural areas where such languages were strongest - limited their effectiveness. (Weber, 1976, pp319-23)

As the nineteenth century progressed and industrialisation gathered pace, the need for educated workforce increased, to such an extent that between 1881 and 1886 a series of laws proposed by J. Ferry and R. Goblet made free, non-religious education compulsory for all children between the ages of six and thirteen. However progressive and liberal these laws may seem, it should be remembered that the education of the working classes was a matter of economic necessity and that, by obliging children to attend school, all

measures previously taken to promote French at the expense of regional languages now became much more effective. During their seven years of compulsory education children were continually exposed not only to the French language but also French culture, French history and the French republican notion of citizenship, all of which they were to accept as their own. Furthermore, educational success was largely dependent on a child's ability to express him/herself in French, thus giving a considerable advantage to those using standard French at home, chiefly the middle and upper classes. Once again the prestige of regional languages suffered. Their use was stigmatised and punishable; in French Flanders speaking Vlaemsch was put on a par with spitting, with the instruction, "Défense de cracher par terre et de parler flamand" painted on many playground walls (Sepieter, 1980, p27)<sup>14</sup>. There was no place for regional cultures within the identity which the *instituteur* was charged with forging.

School was the ideal place to promote the notion that regional languages were old fashioned and synonymous with ignorance, a notion particularly evident in French Flanders as large numbers of people were moving to the Francophone towns which were the very symbols of "progress". *Instituteurs*, many of whom shared a netherlandophone background with their pupils, having survived the educational process, became the strongest advocates of it, almost fanatical in their efforts to ensure that their young charges left school speaking and writing good French, for this was what being educated was

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<sup>14</sup> Duneton (1973) and Jakez Hélias (1975) note similar situations in Occitanie and Brittany, respectively.

considered to mean<sup>15</sup>. Thus Flemish children were taught to be ashamed of their mother tongue and culture and even now the older generation of Vlaemsch speakers in netherlandophone French Flanders are wary of using the dialect in front of people they do not know, worried about the judgement which may be passed on them for using a “peasant dialect”(cf. Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, pp270-3).

Thus the education system worked against Vlaemsch and other regional languages in two ways: firstly, by exposing children to French and insisting that they make progress in it: secondly, by altering pupils’ perception of their mother tongue and downgrading it in their esteem. The law of August 9<sup>th</sup> 1936 prolonging compulsory schooling until the age of 14 allowed this process to continue for a further year. Indeed it was not until the law of January 11<sup>th</sup> 1951, pertaining to, “l’enseignement des langues et dialectes locaux”, more often known as the loi Deixonne, was passed that the situation eased for regional languages. Although this law was much criticised by minority language activists, as regional language classes were optional and difficult to accommodate in the normal school day, it did represent a measure of progress for some languages. Vlaemsch, however, in common with Alsatian, Francique and Corsican, did not initially benefit from these concessions and it was not until 1983 that the dialect could be officially studied in schools in French Flanders (cf.Ch6).

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Weber, 1976, pp310-314 and Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, pp270-3.

By the end of World War Two, the situation of Vlaemsch was precarious. Industrialisation and urbanisation had eroded its foundations, government had repressed it, education had discredited it, and in the immediate post-war period those who sought to promote it were suspected - and often accused - of collaboration. Some, such as Jean-Marie Gantois, were imprisoned (cf.Ch4). The Flemish movement of French Flanders did not recover from these allegations until the late 1960s. Given these circumstances there was little to encourage the young people of French Flanders to learn Vlaemsch, particularly when one takes into consideration the effects of one of the most powerful post-war phenomena: the mass media.

The growth of the mass media since World War Two has posed problems not only for Vlaemsch, but for all minority languages in France and beyond. Today France itself fears for its own language in the light of Anglo-American media power.

Ever since 1881 and the introduction of free primary education for all, children from minority language groups have been exposed to French culture, presented as their own, through the written word. Newspapers, written almost exclusively in French became accessible to a now literate populace. Flemish organisations recognised both the threat this posed and the opportunity it afforded them to promote the regional language and culture. Consequently, almost every organisation promoting Flemish culture in French Flanders has produced its own publications, sections of which have often been written in either Vlaemsch or standard Dutch. However, such publications have seldom

had the means to reach a mass audience (cf. Ch5.6.1 & 5.8). Furthermore, in the nineteenth century in particular, few French Flemings had ever been taught to read their mother tongue. Only once large numbers of French Flemings were literate in Vlaemsch could a netherlandophone press have any impact on the language situation in French Flanders.

Although schools and the press conspired to exclude Vlaemsch from "high culture", the dialect was able to survive in the field of popular culture, in particular in the form of folk songs played in the *estaminet*, which itself played an important role as a meeting place in Flemish society. However, the development of cinema, television and radio undermined these traditional focal points of popular culture as well as that culture itself. First radio and then television brought French language – often via dubbed American and English programmes and films - and culture directly into the homes of French Flemings. Today it is possible for netherlandophone French Flemings to receive television programmes in standard Dutch from Belgium and the Netherlands, although these developments may have come about rather too late to bolster Vlaemsch, which, in any case, many see as a separate language (cf. Ch6). Moreover, such programmes are not focused on French Flanders and are consequently of less interest to viewers and listeners in that region. This fact, coupled with the differences between standard Dutch and Vlaemsch, could actually serve to emphasise the foreignness of Netherlandic culture. The Flemish movement of French Flanders has long sought to establish a presence for Vlaemsch and regional Netherlandic culture in the audio-visual media in France. To date the only real success in this field has

been the creation of Radio Uylenspiegel, broadcasting in both French and Vlaemsch and which serves as a forum for the promotion of netherlandophone culture in French Flanders, most particularly folk music (cf.Ch5.6).

Clearly, a number of factors have contributed to the decline of Vlaemsch in French Flanders. Some are specific to the case of Vlaemsch, some to regional languages in France and others - the impact of the mass media, for instance - to minority languages throughout the world. On occasion anti-Vlaemsch language policies have been to blame, on others changing socio-economic conditions have been the determining factor.

Francophone and netherlandophone communities have coexisted in the region for hundreds of years and cultural and economic interchange between the two was undoubtedly commonplace and consequently diglossia must also have been. Although it is not impossible for two languages to survive in contact, in such a situation the balance between the two languages is delicate (Edwards, 1994, pp86 & 103). The decline of Vlaemsch shows that, in this case, the balance has been disrupted. This disruption was initially brought about by French Flanders' isolation from the rest of the netherlandophone world, as a result of the French annexation confirmed by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. Once part of France and above all after the Revolution, French Flanders fell victim to the repressive policies of successive governments. Finally, the economic development of Northern France from the middle of the

nineteenth century onwards resulted in the growth of the francophone towns in French Flanders at the expense of netherlandophone rural areas.

However, while Vlaemsch has been in decline, the sense of regional identity has endured, the existence of the Flemish movement of French Flanders is proof of this. Indeed, it is partly because of the decline in the language that French Flemings have become aware of the need to take steps to preserve their cultural heritage. It is the significance of language issues to this cultural struggle and the methods employed to halt or reverse the decline of Vlaemsch which will be discussed in this thesis.

### **Chapter 3 The origins of the Flemish movement of French Flanders (up to 1914) and its attitude towards the language question**

The earliest awakenings of consciousness of Flemish identity in France date from the 1850s, culminating in the foundation of the Comité Flamand de France in 1853. Why, however, should the Comité Flamand have been founded at just this moment?

Clearly, the Comité was not born in a vacuum; groups interested in the arts and regional history in French Flanders, such as the Antiquaires de la Morinie, or the Commission Historique du Département du Nord, in which Edmond de Coussemaker, first President of the Comité Flamand de France, was active, both predate the Comité itself. The Société Dunkerquoise pour l'Encouragement des Lettres, founded in 1852, moved away from the primarily historical brief of the two aforementioned organisations but was limited to Dunkirk. However, what the Comité was to do, which was new, was to prioritise - in theory at least - Vlaamsch and thus in turn a stronger notion of contemporary identity. That an organisation should have been formed in France to promote netherlandophone language and culture, suggests that an awareness already existed that both were, if not under threat, then at least undervalued when compared to the national language and culture.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that the impulse to form the Comité Flamand de France came entirely from within French Flanders itself.

Throughout Europe notions of nationalism were taking root. 1848 had seen revolutionary nationalist activity in the Hapsburg Empire, where German, Hungarian, Slav and Rumanian nationalists vied with each other; Italy, where serious attempts were being made to create a united Italian state and the Ottoman Empire, where the provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia sought to break away from Turkish rule to combine with the Hapsburg province of Transylvania to form a Romanian state. Similarly, rather closer to home for French Flemings, national unification was a subject of much discussion and deliberation in the German states.

Whilst one could not suggest that such a sentiment of violent, political nationalism existed in French Flanders, the often romantic idea of national identity would have been communicated, particularly with charismatic leaders like Lamartine, Mazzini and Kossuth making propaganda a high priority, both at home and abroad. (Thompson, D., 1966, pp224-230)

Clearly national identity was a matter of considerable importance throughout Europe in the late 1840s / early 1850s. For French Flemings, however, the movement which had the greatest significance was the Flemish Movement in Belgium. At various points in their history Belgian Flanders and French Flanders had been one entity, albeit often under foreign domination. Thus traditional links still existed which for geographical reasons were easy to maintain. Furthermore, the nationalist movement developing in the netherlandophone regions of Belgium - unlike that developing in many other parts of Europe, Ireland or Poland, for example - was not based on the idea of

reconstituting a former state but on a linguistic and religious identity, an identity which netherlandophone, Catholic French Flanders also shared. Flemish consciousness in Belgium dates from after independence from the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1830 opposition to which had previously united the two linguistic factions. Whilst Article 23 of the new Belgian constitution theoretically ensured freedom of language, French dominated in parliament, government, administration, the army and the legal system. Just as French had found disfavour in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, so now did the Dutch dialects in the new Belgian Kingdom (as did Walloon dialects) as the French language was put forward a unifying factor, distinguishing the new country from its former dominators. However, the same nationalist currents which were affecting other parts of Europe soon came to be felt in netherlandophone Belgium. Romanticism and its glorification of popular languages and the role played by language in the emancipation of peoples, found a sympathetic response in these provinces and in the absence of a unifying enemy, netherlandophone Belgians began to balk at the political and cultural hegemony of the French language. Furthermore, Belgian fears of French annexation led to a desire on the part of the netherlandophone Belgians to assert their own identity.

From the early 1830s a Flemish (netherlandophone) cultural movement, started to grow for which the national language and its right to equality with French was a key consideration. The three main centres of this movement were Gent, around civil servant Jan Frans Willems, the Catholic University of Louvain, around Priest and lecturer Jan Baptiste David and Antwerp around

the writer Hendrik Conscience. All three of these men had contact with members of the Comité Flamand de France. Indeed, one of Conscience's greatest works, *de Leeuw van Vlaanderen* recounts the story of the battle of the Eperons d'Or, dear to French Flemings.

In 1840 Willems and David presented a petition to the Belgian government asking for a bilingual statute in the provinces, a petition which, despite much support and its moderate request, was rejected. However, the Flemish groups continued in the work. The 1846 census in Belgium showed netherlandophones to be the majority of the population and armed with this knowledge and spurred on by the effects of the 1845-8 economic crisis, the Flemish movement became more politicised. Electoral reform in 1848 extended the franchise to a proportion of the Flemish middle class many of whom had been involved in the Flemish cultural movement. This new political power coincided with a split in the cultural movement between the liberals of the Willemsfonds and the Catholics of the Davidsfonds. Representatives of each organisation were to be found amongst the members of the Comité Flamand de France in 1853. This split was damaging to the Belgian Flemish Movement but by no means terminal.

After 1848, the Flemish Movement in Belgium started to make real, if slow progress. In 1856 an official commission was established to examine Flemish grievances in which Conscience and David were both involved. As a result of the rejection of the Commission's recommendations, the Flemish movement became more militant. Independent Flemish political candidates (including

some liberals) allied themselves with the existing Catholic party, the most favourable of the political parties already in existence, resulting in the election of the first Flemish members of parliament in 1863, which resulted in the first use of Flemish in parliament. As of 1873 language reforms were passed which slowly redressed the balance in favour of the Flemish language in Belgium. Clearly this activity in Belgium must have been an inspiration to those who, just at the time the Belgian Flemish movement was starting to make progress, founded the Comité Flamand de France. The role played by Belgian Flemings in the development of the Comité Flamand is discussed at 3.6.2. It is, however, interesting to note that, just as Belgian Flemings were beginning to establish political power in the 1860s, relations between Belgian and French Flemish organisations became more distant partly, it is true, because of the departure of Louis de Baecker and disagreement of the importance of the language question but perhaps also because the Comité Flamand de France felt that, in the climate of the 1860s, association with Flemish nationalist politics was too dangerous.

However, one cannot account for the birth of Flemish consciousness purely by referring to external influences, in particular given the difference in aims between the likes of De Coussemaker in French Flanders and those of nationalist leaders elsewhere in Europe.

Clearly to found the Comité Flamand de France, there was a feeling that netherlandophone language and culture needed to be defended. However, did they need defending from the threat of extinction or merely from being

undervalued and dismissed by Paris centred French culture? Indeed the primary concern of the Comité in its constitution is the assertion that "Les Flamands n'ont pas de littérature" (*Annales du Comité Flamand de France*, 1853, p3) and one of the Comité's principal objectives, enshrined in its statutes, is to refute this allegation, as their counterparts in Belgium had done with such success (*Annales du Comité Flamand de France*, 1853, p3). Nowhere in the statutes is mention made of the need to defend Vlaemsch from extinction in France, which, although in continual contact with "une autre langue", remains "pleine de vigueur" "sacrée" and "indestructible". (*Annales du Comité Flamand de France*, 1853, p1)

Nevertheless, the Comité's founder members would have been aware of the fundamental changes taking place in their region, both socially and economically. Even if they did not perceive Vlaemsch as being directly under threat, certainly the way of life of their region was, this threat being posed, as has been suggested in the previous chapter by the widespread demographic changes brought about industrialisation in northern France and its inherent frenchification. Concern about these changes and the ensuing move towards laity was one of the motives for a large number of clergy supporting the Comité, as shall be discussed later in this chapter. Similarly, just as the events of 1848/9 elsewhere in Europe helped raise the nationalist question, so those in France arose fears of revolution from the left and another reign of terror. French Flanders had resisted revolution in 1789 and the Catholic 'haute bourgeoisie' who provided much of the impetus for the formation of the Comité would have been amongst the conservative majority of the electorate

who voted overwhelmingly against the radicals and socialists in April 1848.

Indeed, the Comité in its historical and cultural work, tended to look beyond the 1789 revolution, to Flanders' medieval golden age, when Flanders was 'de prunk van allen landen', in the words of Michel de Swaen, to a time when the monarchy and the church were pre-eminent (Nuytens, 1985, pp97-8). De Coussemaker, member of the Conseil Général du Département du Nord since 1849, was held in considerable esteem by and had considerable influence with the legitimist bourgeoisie of the Département du Nord. However, while these factors may account for the general climate which was conducive to the formation of the Comité Flamand, in the short term its foundation may be seen as a direct reaction to the issuing on January 27th 1853 of a decree by the Conseil Académique du Département du Nord, which formally forbade the teaching of Vlaemsch in the département's schools. Had Duruy's proposal in 1866 to ban the use of Vlaemsch in the teaching of the catechism been adopted, the situation would have become worse still, since this was one of the rare educational environments in which use of Vlaemsch predominated in French Flanders. The Napoleonic state clearly did not intend to allow Vlaemsch to flourish. Even if De Coussemaker and the other founders of the Comité Flamand did not fear directly the extinction of Vlaemsch they must clearly have seen its exclusion from the classroom as further undermining its prestige and threatening it as a language of culture, just as its prestige was growing again across the border in Belgium.

### 3.1 The foundation of the Comité Flamand de France and its objectives at the time of founding.

The statutes of the Comité Flamand de France were drawn up on April 10th 1853 by Edmond De Coussemaek, Louis de Baecker, Auguste Ricour, Raymond de Bertrand, Hippolyte Bernaert and Pierre Meneboo. These statutes were then accepted 'tels qu'ils ont été adoptés par la société le 10 avril 1853' (*Annales du Comité Flamand de France*, 1853, p6) by Fortoul, the Minister for Education. In other words the Comité Flamand de France, an organisation pledged in theory to maintain Vlaemsch in France, had the full approval of the very ministry which, in the form of the Conseil Académique du Département du Nord, had banned the use of Vlaemsch in schools just seven months earlier. One must ask oneself whether it is the education minister's commitment to the destruction of Vlaemsch or the Comité Flamand's commitment to its maintenance which should be called into question.

The Comité certainly chose to foreground their commitment to Vlaemsch by choosing as their motto 'Moedertaal en Vaderland', although choosing to name the organisation itself in French and emphasising that they were the Comité Flamand de France, thus distancing themselves from any separatist connotations that the use of the word 'Vaderland' may have had. Indeed one should not infer with hindsight any Pan-Germanic ideas or separatist tendencies from the use of 'Vaderland', rather a pride in the 'terroir' and its past glories, the battle of Comines, the works of Michel de Swaen, for example, and a desire to preserve them for posterity.

Similarly, one may see in the choice of a motto in Vlaemsch for the Comité the same motives that lead many learned societies and schools to chose mottos in Latin. Nevertheless, the Comité Flamand chose Moedertaal en Vaderland as its device, thus deliberately highlighting the importance of Vlaemsch in what they wanted to achieve. Should one, however, interpret this as a commitment to actively working to maintain the language? It should be remembered that De Coussemaker, at least, considered the 'langue maternelle' to be 'indestructible', it is therefore unlikely that any large-scale attempt to propagate it would be deemed necessary. Indeed, nowhere in the Comité's statutes is such an undertaking made, Vlaemsch being mentioned only once, in Article 2: 'Le Comité a pour objet l'étude de la Littérature Flamande; la recherche et la conservation des documents historiques et littéraires en Langue Flamande'.(*Annales du Comité Flamand de France*, 1853, p4) Clearly, as has previously been suggested, the Comité's commitment is not to the propagation of the language but to its preservation and valorisation; indeed the commitment to the language was only through the medium of culture. This is further emphasised in Article 3 of the Statutes, where the Comité undertakes to gather information and documentation on a wide range of historical and cultural subjects, legends, folk songs, customs and traditions, literary institutions such as the Chambers of Rhetoric, for example(*Annales du Comité Flamand de France*, 1853, p4). Vlaemsch is important in that allows one to study these subjects but does not warrant mention as a subject of study in itself.

### 3.2 Relations between the Comité Flamand de France and central government.

It may thus be shown that the Comité Flamand de France was not, from its very conception, intended as a proselytising movement in favour of Vlaemsch in Northern France. However, even the degree of language centred work which the Comité undertook to pursue in its statutes could, in the France of Napoleon III, be seen as a potential source of conflict with central government, certainly if they were to be pursued with the same degree of vigour as in Belgium. However, it should be remembered that the statutes of the Comité Flamand de France were not only accepted by the Ministry of Education but accepted 'tels qu'ils ont été adoptés par la société'. Clearly, in terms of its stated agenda at least, the Comité was neither perceived as a threat to national unity nor as seeking to pursue work contrary to government policy, policy which of course included eradicating Vlaemsch from the classroom. Should such an attitude on the part of a normally hostile institution come as a surprise, however? The Comité Flamand did, as shall be shown, have the support of a great number of establishment figures, De Coussemaker himself being a member of the Conseil Général du Département du Nord since 1849. Indeed De Coussemaker carried on correspondence with Louis-Lucien Bonaparte, who was to become an honorary member of the Comité (Nuytens, 1985, p110).

Furthermore, as an officially accepted 'société savante' the Comité received not only official approval - comments made in the 1858 *Review des Sociétés Savantes* were particularly complimentary about the Comité's programme and the extent to which it was fulfilled (Nuytens, 1985, p110) and in 1854 the Minister of Education had stated that the Comité's *Annales* was amongst the best new publications of the year (Nuytens, 1985, p107) - but also official funds (Nuytens, 1985, p107). Indeed, the Ministry of Education asked for the Comité's co-operation on certain projects, such as the compilation of an archaeological directory of France (Nuytens, 1985, p109) and one of the most significant works of the early years of the Comité Flamand was De Coussemaker's *Chants Populaires des Flamands de France* (1856) was actually commissioned by the Minister of Education (Nuytens, 1985, p109). That the Comité Flamand was receiving financial support from the authorities suggest firstly that, in the years subsequent to its founding, the Comité's activities were as well accepted as its statutes had been in 1853 and secondly that, should the Comité Flamand wish this financial aid to continue, it would not take too active an interest in more controversial matters, such as the teaching of Vlaemsch. Hence, on July 1st 1866, when the Minister of Education sought to ban the teaching of the catechism in Vlaemsch, the Church protested but the Comité Flamand remained silent.

Thus the picture which emerges of relations between the Comité Flamand de France and the French state in the years immediately following the former's founding is far more one of co-operation than of conflict. The Comité Flamand was very much in the mould of the Sociétés Savantes encouraged

by the Ministry of Education and therefore unlikely to seek to involve itself in promoting radical regionalist feeling or even in promoting Vlaemsch in anything other than conservation terms.

### **3.3 Membership of the Comité Flamand.**

The statutes of the Comité allowed an unlimited number of members who were divided into resident members and correspondent members (*Annales du CFF*, 1853, p5). In addition to these two categories were the honorary members, amongst whom the Comité counted in 1853 the German philologist and writer Jacob Grimm, the honorary President, Alberdingk Thym, member of the Royal Academy of the Arts in Amsterdam, a Dutch Catholic and one of the few Dutchmen interested in the Flemish movement and Baron de St Genois, lecturer and librarian at the University of Gent, President of the Willemsfonds. In addition to St Genois and several other honorary members of the Comité Flamand, other leading figures in the Belgian Flemish Movement such as Snellaert and Hendrik Conscience, were correspondent members. Saint-Genois, Snellaert and Conscience were, however, far from isolated cases. Between 1853 and 1914, the Comité Flamand de France counted a total of no fewer than 105 resident and honorary members and 39 correspondent members from Belgium (Withoek, A., 1994). Of the Comité's 11 honorary members in 1853, 7 were Belgian and one Dutch; 36% of the correspondent members in that same year were also Belgian (*Annales du CFF* 1853, pp11-16). Belgian Flemish publications, such as *De Eendragt*, *Gentsche Mercurius*

and *Het Handelsblad* (Antwerp) spoke positively of the Comité immediately after its foundation (Nuytens, M., 1985, p106).

Fig. 1.1: Total numbers of members of the Comité Flamand de France, 1853.

Honorary members	11
Resident members	44
Correspondent members	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>

As far as the two main categories of member, above, were concerned, anyone with an interest in French Flanders, its traditions, culture and history could become a member, provided they were elected by a majority of the Comité's existing membership and paid the annual subscription of 5 francs (*Annales du CFF*, 1853, p5). As is to be expected, the majority of members (in the case of the resident members, the vast majority) came from the *arrondissements* of Dunkirk and Hazebrouck, although a good number (almost half of the correspondent members in 1853) also came from across the border in Belgium (see fig. 1.2, below).

Fig. 1.2: Division of members according to place of residence

Location	Resident Member 1853	Correspondent member 1853	Titular Member 1903
Lille	5	2	41
Dunkirk	7	1	52 (3)
Hazebrouck	9	1	27
Bailleul	3	4	19
Bergues	4	3	11
Douai	1	-	1
Gravelines	-	1	6
Wormhout	1	1	4

Bourbourg	-	1	4
Cassel	-	1	8
Boulogne	-	-	1
St Omer	-	-	3
Tourcoing	1	-	1
Other (2)	13	16	76
Roubaix	-	-	4
Hondschoote	-	2	4
Cambrai	-	-	6
Bethune	-	-	3
Armentières	-	-	1
Lens	-	-	2
Valenciennes	-	-	1
Out of region	-	2	24 (4)
Belgium	-	24	20
Holland	-	2	-
Germany	-	5	-
England	-	-	1
Not given	-	1	-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>320</b>

#### Nota

- 1) Includes honorary members
- 2) Villages and small towns in the Nord/Pas-de-Calais with two or less members
- 3) For 1903, Dunkirk includes Malo-les-Bains, Grande-Synthe, Petite-Synthe, Coudekerque Branche and St Pol-sur-Mer.
- 4) Includes sixteen members from Paris

As can be imagined, by far the most active category of member was the resident member who was able to attend the Comité meetings and amongst the resident members members of the clergy predominate (see fig. 1.3, below). Even amongst secular members the Catholic faith was an issue as central as the 'moedertaal' or the 'vaderland', indeed 'vertus domestiques, foi

catholique' and 'langue maternelle' were, in the eyes of the Comité Flamand, indivisible (*Annales du CFF*, 1853, p2).

Fig. 1.3 Membership of the Comité Flamand de France in 1853 and 1903 according to member's occupation.

Occupation	Resident Member 1853	Correspondent Member 1853	Titular Member 1903
Librarian / Archivist	-	4	13 (1) (c)
Artist	-	3	7
Commerce / Finance	2	2	9
Industrialist	-	-	7
Landowner	1	1	19
Teacher (a)	2 (2)	2	6 (27)
Liberal Professions	4	5	59
Clergy	30	15	139
Civil Servant	4	5	23
Civil Servant (Belgium)	-	2	3
"Man of Letters"	-	8	-
Functionaries of learned societies	-	9	9
Other	-	1	6
Retired	-	-	6
Military	-	-	4
Not Given	1	10	10
<b>Totals</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>67 (d)</b>	<b>320</b>

#### Nota

- a) Number in brackets represents members of the clergy also listed as teachers. The term "teacher" is used to refer to all levels.
- b) Includes one member listed as an author.
- c) Includes the town libraries of Hondschoote, Hazebrouck, Dunkirk, Bergues and Wormhout, on whose behalf the respective mayors had joined, as well as one museum.
- d) Column two total actually represents correspondent members + honorary members.

The picture which emerges of the membership of the Comité Flamand from figs. 1.1 – 1.3, above, is one of a small town / rural Catholic, bourgeoisie, who would have had the benefits of an education, for the most part at least, in French. Dr Nuytens, in his article *Uit de vroegste geshiedenis van het Comité Flamand de France (Les Pays Bas Français, 1985)* even goes as far as to suggest that the majority of the Comité's members probably had no more than a rudimentary knowledge of Vlaemsch at best. Those who actually spoke fluent Vlaemsch - for the most part the rural lower classes - are conspicuous by their absence from the membership lists of the Comité Flamand. This is hardly surprising given that they were often uneducated, if not illiterate (Nuytens, M., 1976, p137). One might therefore reasonably assume that their interest in an academic society – even supposing that a majority of the Comité's members had been predisposed to vote for them and that they would have been able to afford the 5f subscription – would have been limited. Given the composition of its membership, it is debatable whether the Comité Flamand would have been able to bring about a programme of revitalisation of Vlaemsch. It is true that the majority of its active members came from the right geographical area, albeit with a tendency to be resident in small towns, rather than the more rural areas which, even by the mid-nineteenth century were the true bastions of Vlaemsch. However, there was a considerable difference in social class between the members of the Comité Flamand and those French Flemings for whom Vlaemsch was the main language of communication. Reference to fig. 1.3 shows the former to be predominantly middle / upper middle class professionals, whereas the latter were

predominantly unskilled agricultural workers. Given the lack of social mobility typical of the late nineteenth century<sup>1</sup>, how much contact could there have been between the two? Furthermore, knowledge of French was increasing amongst netherlandophone French Flemings in the light of successive education laws, in particular after 1882 and the loi Jules Ferry. Therefore, for the most part, when such contact did occur, the onus is likely to have been on the lower class netherlandophone to express him / herself in French? The obvious exception to this scenario being the situation of the clergy who were in daily contact with the netherlandophone population and who became the focus for efforts to teach Vlaemsch, particularly after their opposition to the 1866 attempt to ban the teaching of the catechism in Vlaemsch.

Again as a result of social differences, there was necessarily a discrepancy between the type of language to which the Comité Flamand was so passionately committed and the type of language actually used by the true netherlandophones for daily communication. Whilst, it is true, highlighting the bond between 'vertus domestiques' and 'langue maternelle' (*Annales du CFF*, 1853, p2), it was the literary language of de Swaen, Ricour and Steven, amongst others, which the Comité Flamand sought to preserve, a language which was far removed from the functional every day language of an agricultural society. Indeed, it is undoubtedly this literary language which De Coussemaker has in mind in his introduction to the first volume of the *Annales* of the Comité, when he claims that the "idiome flamand" is "plus riche et plus fécond qu'on ne le croit communément" (*Annales du CFF*, 1853, p2). Clearly,

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<sup>1</sup> Or at least the lack of mobility between the lower classes and the middle / upper middle classes

he wishes educated Francophones in French Flanders to see beyond the widely held belief that Vlaemsch was the unsophisticated language of uneducated peasants.

Thus, one might suggest that the very composition of the Comité Flamand worked against it being able to halt the decline of Vlaemsch in Northern France, especially with so many solid establishment figures in its ranks, people who would not have wished to be seen as indulging in antiRepublican activities. In the Comité's defence, it should be remembered that the clergy, who made up such an important part of its membership, became the language's leading promoters. Whether or not the Comité could take credit for their actions is another matter.

### **3.4 Activities of the Comité flamand de France**

The bulk of the work of the Comité Flamand consisted in the production of the *Annales*, which appeared for the first time in 1853 and the *Bulletins*, also first published in 1853 and which were published every 3 months. Both of these publications were written in French. Up until his death in 1876, De Coussemaker himself was the greatest contributor to both publications, perhaps his greatest work being the *Chants Populaires des Flamands de France*, published in 1856. The majority of the articles in the *Annales* and the *Bulletins* were, according to the Comité's statutes, on subjects of regional cultural and historical interest. The Comité Flamand was also involved in

work abroad - collaborating with the Germanisches Museum in Nuremberg or the Société Archéologique du Grand Duché de Luxembourg - for example, as well as regularly participating in the Nederlands Congresen, such as the one in Antwerp in 1856. Here, however, it is the Comité Flamand's work promoting Vlaemsch which is of interest.

Perhaps the most significant language work published in the *Annales* is the study on the Vlaemsch / French linguistic border in French Flanders, published in 1856/7. The idea of establishing the linguistic situation with greater precision was by no means a new one. The first such survey had been carried out in 1844 by Victor Derode and a second by the Commission Historique du Département du Nord in 1842/3, on which De Coussemaker and de Baecker had collaborated. Clearly the demographic and linguistic situation in the region had changed quite considerably in the intervening years, as De Coussemaker himself pointed out at a meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1855. The new study he proposed was to have a wider scope than its predecessors. Whereas the 1842/3 study consisted of a questionnaire given to all mayors in the arrondissements of Hazebrouck and Dunkirk, the new one was to be distributed to members of the clergy and primary school teachers as well. The new survey also differed from its predecessors in that it was also distributed to those 'communes' in the Pas-de-Calais where Vlaemsch was still spoken, mostly along the southern border of the arrondissements of Hazebrouck and Dunkirk, the *communes* of Clairmarais, Haut - Pont, Lysel, St Omer, Nouvelle~Eglise, Vielle-Eglise, Wardr~que, St Omer Cappel, Rachenghem, Ruminghem, Offekerque, Ste Mariekerque, St Folquin and Oye

Dünkelde

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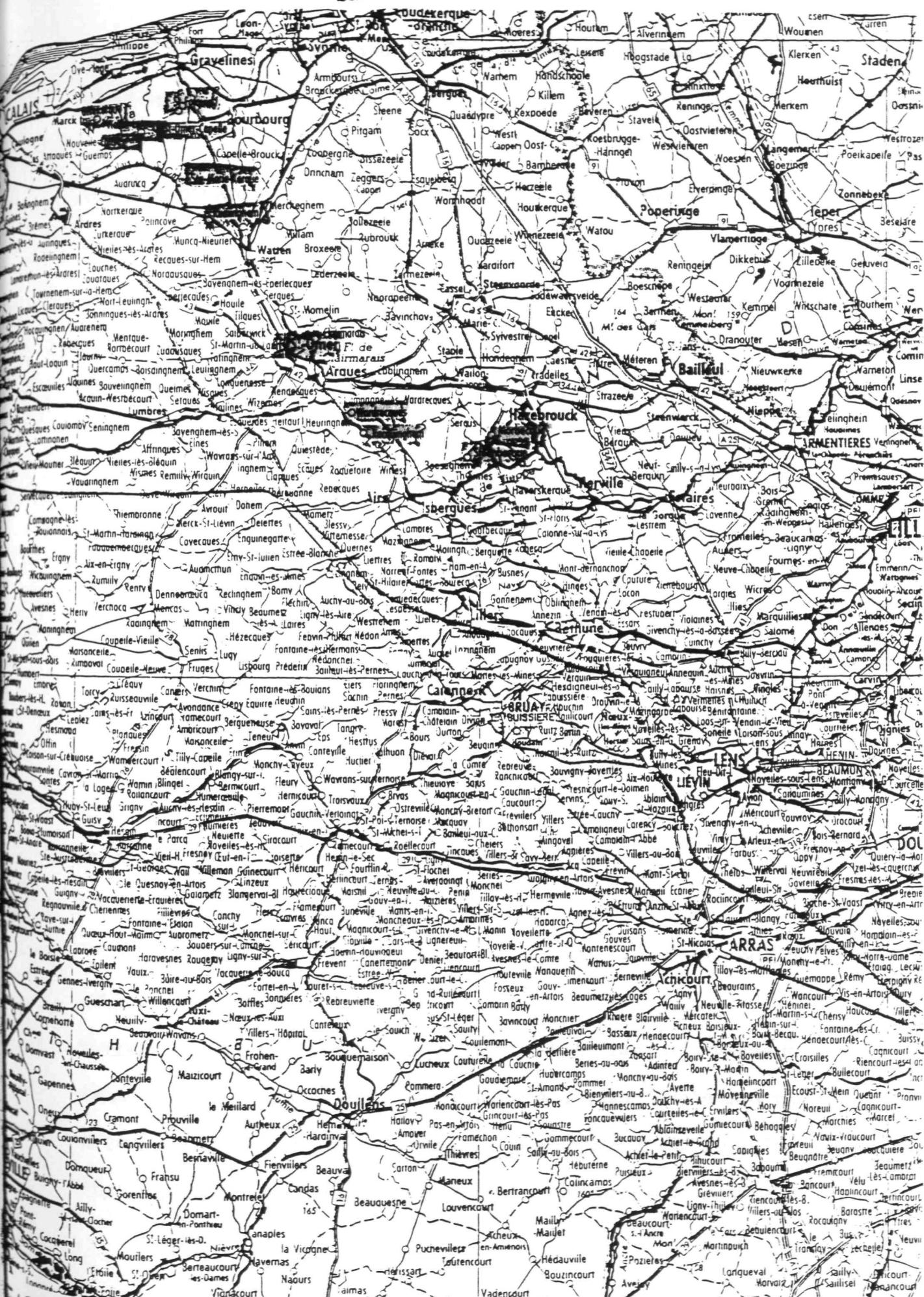


fig 1.4

(see fig. 1.4). Collaborating with De Coussemaker in this endeavour were Victor Derode and l'Abbé Camel.

The questionnaire was made up of 20 questions which were intended to show:

- 1) Whether people spoke exclusively Vlaemsch or exclusively French
- 2) Whether people spoke both languages
- 3) In the above case, which language dominated and in what proportion
- 4) Whether priests conducted their services exclusively in Vlaemsch or exclusively in French
- 5) Whether they conducted their services in both languages and if so, in what proportions
- 6) Whether the catechism for the first communion was conducted in Vlaemsch or in French
- 7) Whether the marriage banns were published in Vlaemsch
- 8) Whether churchgoers used prayer books in Vlaemsch
- 9) Whether those so doing were in the majority or minority
- 10) Whether people read books in Vlaemsch
- 11) Whether people read religious works in Vlaemsch or in French and in what proportions

Further questions were posed on which dialects were used, the answers to which formed the basis of De Coussemaker's work *Quelques Recherches sur le Dialecte Flamand de France*, published in the *Annales* of 1858/9 (p 79).

These questions were designed to elicit a yes or no answer in an effort to

overcome the ambiguities inherent in such a survey but as De Coussemaker himself admitted, "Ce genre de travail n'est pas susceptible d'une exactitude rigoureuse et mathématique" (*Annales du CFF*, 1856/7, ppp394-5).

99 completed questionnaires were received from the arrondissement of Dunkirk, 91 from the arrondissement of Hazebrouck and 16 from the arrondissement of St Omer. These results were then used by Mr Bocave to compile a map dividing the *communes* in question into:

- 1) Those where exclusively Vlaemsch was spoken
- 2) Those where exclusively French was spoken
- 3) Those where both languages were spoken but where Vlaemsch predominated
- 4) Those where both languages were spoken but where French predominated

Clearly, in terms of its scale and scope, this was an important work in the study of Vlaemsch in France and provides the benchmark by which one may assess the current decline in the number of netherlandophones in French Flanders. Indeed, even in 1856 signs of decline could be seen in the *communes* of the Pas-de-Calais and in two of those bordering on the Pas-de-Calais, Steenbeque and Morbèque compared to Derode's survey. However, giving a clear picture of the linguistic situation and actually trying to change it do not necessarily go hand in hand; it could even be argued that this work enabled the Ministry of Education to see how effective its anti-Vlaemsch

policies had been and to assess what remained to be done. In their conclusions to the survey De Coussemaekere and his collaborators did make a plea for the teaching of Vlaemsch, a plea which went completely unheeded and which, after the banning of a Breton language group in 1858, the Comité Flamand was loath to pursue.

The Comité Flamand did, however, initiate several attempts to promote Vlaemsch, principally in two phases. Firstly, in the period immediately after its foundation, a phase which was curtailed as the language issue became increasingly contentious in the late 1850s / early 1860s and secondly at the beginning of the 20th century. As one might expect with the Comité Flamand and its predilection with written Vlaemsch, these initiatives came in the form of publications in Vlaemsch, the first of which, the *Nieuwen Almanack voor het Jaar OLHJC 1854*, was initially proposed in the very first year of the Comité Flamand's existence. Despite being in Vlaemsch, this publication even had the support of the Minister of Education, who felt it could be morally beneficial to the working classes. (Nuytens, M., 1976, pp104-5) It even received support from abroad, from the *Gentschen Mercurius* in Belgium. Unfortunately, the *Nieuwen Almanack* was not a great success, being born, according to Dr Nuytens, of the over-enthusiasm of Edmond De Coussemaekere (Nuytens, M., 1976, pp105-6).

However, undeterred, two further publications, *Het Biekorfken* and *Lettervruchten der Vlamingen van Frankrijk* were launched in 1855. The former was in fact a series of publications which had resulted from a

suggestion made by the Archbishop of Cambrai, a supporter of the Comité Flamand, to produce inexpensive religious and moral books for the working classes. (Nuytens, M., 1976, pp105-6) For once the Comité Flamand had been persuaded to promote Vlaemsch directly with the people who actually used the language and whose support was vital to its survival. It is perhaps significant that the idea came both from outside the Comité Flamand and from a member of the Clergy. *Lettervruchten der Vlamingen van Frankrijk*, a three monthly literary review, was much more in the usual style of the Comité. However, neither met with markedly more success than the *Nieuwen Almanack* and all three were soon abandoned. In the case of *Het Biekorfken*, a fundamentally sound idea may have been undermined by the lack of literacy among the targeted readership – particularly in the regional language – as discussed above. Even where the working classes were literate, successive education reforms made even those who spoke Vlaemsch fluently more literate in French, the language of school instruction. As the century progressed and the effects of the education reforms of the 1880s began to be felt, this would be increasingly the case. Whatever the causes of the failure of these publications, there seems to have been no great desire on the part of the Comité Flamand to persevere with them; the main thrust of the Comité's work would always be the French publications, the *Annales* and the *Bulletins*, which did meet with rather more success. After 1864 the latter included the *Review du Mouvement Flamand* by L'Abbe Camel, which at least kept French Flemings aware of the broader issues of the Flemish Movement as a whole but which was again published in French.

No further attempts were made to launch a netherlandophone publication until the turn of the century when *Tisje Tasjes Almanack* appeared. Published under the auspices of the Comité Flamand in Hazebrouck, the first edition appeared on October 9<sup>th</sup> 1899 and publication continued until 1914. Production was interrupted by the outbreak of war and did not resume until 1924, when it reappeared as a bilingual publication. The last edition appeared in 1940<sup>2</sup>. The first editor was L'Abbé Despicht, a member of the Comité Flamand and the then President of the Comité, Camille Looten, was initially involved in printing and distribution. Another prominent figure in the French Flemish Movement at the time, L'Abbé Jules Lemire, assisted Despicht with editorial duties. Lemire was once again involved in the post World War 1 version assisting the new editor Gabriel Plancke. The longevity of *Tisje Tasje* suggests a degree of success unknown to previous Vlaemsch publications in France. Indeed, at the height of its pre-war success, circulation attained 6,000 copies (Verbeke, L., in Deleu, et al. (eds.), 1973, p535). To this day the collection of *Tisje Tasje* retains great popularity in the library of the Comité Flamand in Hazebrouck. Its success was no doubt due, in part at least, to its more populist and entertaining content, the humorous stories, jokes and wise words of 'Tisje Tasje', the late 18th/early 19th century French Flemish folk bard, Joannes Baptista van Grevelinghe. *Tisje Tasjes Almanack* thus succeeded in blending the Comité Flamand's love of local literary tradition with something entertaining and accessible to ordinary netherlandophone French people, far removed from the literary dryness of the

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<sup>2</sup> There was a break in publication in 1933

*Lettervruchten der Vlamingen van Frankrijk* or the equally dry moralising of *Het Biekorfken*.

This overview of the Comité Flamand's work suggests that in 60 years not very much was achieved or even undertaken. It should, however, not be forgotten that activities promoting the regional language only represented a small part of the Comité's stated programme. The statutes of the Comité Flamand, as set out in 1853, show quite clearly that its primary interest was in literature, history, folklore and general culture and that the Comité saw no contradiction in studying these aspects of French Flanders without making the promotion of the language itself a priority. Furthermore, discussion here has been of concrete action taken rather than of the lobbying carried out by various members of the Comité over a number of years for the teaching of Vlaemsch, as and when this was judged prudent. Once more one must return to the fact that, in the early days of the Comité Flamand especially, the nature and seriousness of the threat to Vlaemsch in France was not fully appreciated, as is indicated by De Coussemaek in his introduction to the goals of the Comité in the *Annales* of 1853 and reiterated by another prominent member, Bonvarlet, in 1861 (Nuytens, M., 1976, pp113). The Comité's work was far more involved with looking back and preserving the patrimony than looking forward to unperceived dangers.

### 3.5 The development of the Comité Flamand de France from 1860 to 1914

Perhaps the best way to understand the development of the Comité Flamand and thus the Flemish movement in France during these years, is to look at some of the key figures who shaped it, not in purely biographical terms, but as representatives of the various elements within the Comité. Thus the personalities to be discussed are not necessarily those who are of the greatest importance to the Comité Flamand as an organisation but rather those who give the greatest insight into the character of the Flemish movement in France at this time. Thus Louis de Baecker is discussed, for example, despite only having been a member of the Comité for 13 years, whereas Alexandre Bonvarlet, the Comité's second President (from the death of De Coussemaker in 1876, until his own in 1899), is not.

#### 3.5.1 Edmond De Coussemaker

Edmond De Coussemaker, more than anyone else, characterises the early Comité Flamand which he dominated during the first 23 years of its existence, the period during which he was President.

He was born in 1805 in Bailleul, into a minor aristocratic family at a time when the horrors of revolution were still fresh. Memories of these horrors were revived just a few years before the founding of the Comité Flamand with

the events of 1848. These factors may have helped bring about De Coussemaker's passion for the pre-revolutionary 'golden age' of Flanders. It was this passion which inspired De Coussemaker and his fellow founder members to create the Comité Flamand. He summed up his motives thus:

Quelques Flamands de France ont pensé qu'il était de la dignité du pays et qu'il pouvait être utile de ne pas laisser périr les débris et les derniers vestiges de la civilisation de leurs ancêtres, civilisation qui n'avait pas été sans gloire. (*Annales du CFF*, 1853, p2).

These sentiments may have been given direction by the growth of the romantic movement in Paris at the time he was studying law there and with which he may have had some involvement<sup>3</sup>. (28) Traces of this romanticism can be seen throughout the statutes and published works of the Comité Flamand. Indeed, De Coussemaker's own contribution to these published works was vast; no fewer than 70 works in the *Annales* alone on a wide range of subjects. De Coussemaker was "le type même de l'érudit qui contribua à garder le souvenir de l'héritage culturel régional" (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p278).

Perhaps his most significant work was the *Chants Populaires des Flamands de France*, published in 1856 which preserved a vast number of Flemish folk songs, some of which had no other written version. This work has been and continues to be, a vital work of reference and source of inspiration to the folk

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<sup>3</sup> Speech given by Camille Looten on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Comité Flamand de France, published in *Annales du CFF*, 1903, p45

groups which have proliferated in French Flanders since the late 1960s(cf.Ch5). The *Chants Populaires* also serves as an indication of De Coussemaker's – and the Comite Flamand's - attitude to Vlaemsch: it was important when bound up with culture and it had to be preserved so that the culture could continue to live and be appreciated, rather as Latin was seen as indispensable at the time for cultural and intellectual reasons.

This attitude is again apparent in De Coussemaker's comments on the results of the language survey published in the *Annales* of 1856 when he writes, somewhat complacently, "Si le flamand a une tendance & se retirer devant la langue française, cette marche est très lente"(*Annales du CFF*, 1856-7, p395). His true concern is with the " état littéraire de la langue" where he sees "decadence complète" (*Annales du CFF*, 1856-7, p395). For this reason he suggests that Vlaemsch should be taught at primary level, using as an example the problems which could arise if no-one were able to read old deeds and legal documents written exclusively in Vlaemsch, asking:

Ne sera-ce pas une honte pour nos descendants de devoir recourir à des interprètes pour des actes ou' il s'agit des intérêts les plus graves et les plus precieux, ceux qui se rattachent aux droits de propriété et à l'existence des familles?(*Annales du CFF*, 1856-7, p395)

One cannot help but feel that De Coussemaker, in commenting on land titles, also sought to allude to cultural heritage. Clearly De Coussemaker favours

the teaching of Vlaemsch in French schools and there is considerable evidence to suggest that, in the broadest terms, so did the majority of members of the Comité Flamand (cf 3.5.3). It has been suggested that this commitment was at best half-hearted, however, one of the major problems facing De Coussemaker as President of the Comité Flamand was how to promote regional interest whilst avoiding allegations of engaging in activities against the interests of the state, particularly after 1860. The very climate of interest in national identity which, in the late 1840s, had helped to inspire the creation of the Comité Flamand, now conspired against it. The romantic failures of the 1848 revolutions were, in the case of Italy and - more importantly in the long term for the Comité Flamand - Germany, becoming political realities. As a result, Napoleon III determined to maintain national borders as established at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. At the 7<sup>th</sup> Nederlands Congres in Bruges in 1862, talk of pan-Netherlandic union abounded (Nuytens, M., 1985, p114). The Comité Flamand's desire to distance itself from such discussions was illustrated by member Jean-Jaques Carlier's refusal to give a planned reading and for DeCoussemaker to reaffirm the Comité Flamand's commitment to the French state, stating:

"Fiers d'appartenir à la grande nation qui est aujourd'hui le flambeau de la civilisation, les Flamands de France sont non moins fiers de leur origine" (Nuytens, M., 1985, p115) Here we see another distinguishing trait of De Coussemaker's philosophy, shared by the Comité as a whole; that, whilst they were 'Flamands', they were, most importantly, 'Flamands de France'. This vital concept is highlighted in the very name of the Comité. The Comité

Flamand was not seeking to destabilise or break away from the French state but to preserve and win recognition for their local culture within the whole. Furthermore, he sought to underline the contribution netherlandophone culture had made to the French state (and the world) as what De Coussemaker saw as the "berceau des libertés publiques modernes" (Nuytens, M., 1985, p115). Given the large number of members of the Comité Flamand who, like De Coussemaker, were, to some degree or another, public servants, one must ask oneself whether this is surprising. It is difficult to conceive of upper middle class figures, closely linked to the established regime, indulging in pursuits perceived by that regime as undesirable. Certainly in the 1850s the government itself did not, as is clearly illustrated by the support De Coussemaker and the Comité Flamand enjoyed.

However, by the 1860s this earlier support could no longer be counted on: regionalist / nationalist groups were viewed with increasing suspicion within France. Early 1866 saw a protest about an article written by Alexandre Bonvarlet in the *Review des Sociétés Savantes*, which accused him of expressing sentiments against "la patrie" (Nuytens, M., 1985). Whilst De Coussemaker's defence of Bonvarlet led to the Minister of Education, Duruy, claiming the whole incident had been a misunderstanding, the dangers of pursuing regional interests had been made only too clear. That 6 months later the Comité Flamand failed to oppose Duruy's plan to ban the teaching of the catechism in Vlaemsch, suggests a certain wariness - with regard to the language question at least - on their part.

The 1870 Franco-Prussian War could only make things worse for the Comité; here was the realisation of France's fear of German nationalism and expansionism. Inevitably, the Comité Flamand was open to suspicion of harbouring Pan-Germanist ideas, in particular as one member, Henri Blanckaert and one German honorary member, Oetker, did (Nuytens, M., 1985). This suspicion, nurtured by three wars, was to persist to the detriment of the Flemish movement in France for 80 years, if not more (cf.Ch4 & Ch5). These difficulties notwithstanding, the Comité Flamand made, in 1870, its most categorical statement in favour of the teaching of Vlaemsch in the form of a memorandum addressed to the Chambre des Députés by Count de Charency, member of the Comité Flamand and Conseiller Général for the *département* of Orne. In his concluding remarks, de Charency makes 6 specific requests:

- 1) That, in any commune in France where a language other than French is spoken, primary school teachers should be allowed to use the regional language to facilitate the teaching of French and with the use of books in that regional language.
- 2) That primary school teachers be free to teach children so wishing to speak and write the regional language correctly.
- 3) That primary school teachers appointed after 1875 in a *département* where a regional language is spoken, should be obliged to prove their competence in that language.

- 4) That, in secondary schools, the regional language should be taught and count as a modern language towards the Baccalauréat.
- 5) That chairs for the study of regional literature, history and archaeology be set up in universities, with at least one hour per week devoted to the study of the language itself.
- 6) That regional legal traditions be studied with regard to their relationship to Roman, Celtic, Germanic and feudal law at universities within the Law faculty.

(*Bulletins du CFF*, 1870, pp338-9)

De Coussemaker introduces these points by stating that these have always been the goals of the Comité Flamand, which has never ceased campaigning to these ends. However, as has been shown above, despite this commitment, the Comité Flamand's campaigning on behalf of Vlaemsch had been rather timid and largely ineffectual. It is to be noted that these requests were not limited to the teaching of Vlaemsch in French Flanders but encompassed all of France's regional languages.<sup>4</sup> Given the events of that year in Alsace-Lorraine, such a declaration was - particularly for the Comité Flamand - a bold one. Nevertheless, bold, specific and forward looking though these requests / recommendations may appear, in practical terms they had no impact.

This early period of the Comité Flamand draws to a close with, in 1876, the death of Edmond De Coussemaker. He had dominated the Comité during its first 23 years and in his person, one may see the essence of the Comité itself - cultured, Catholic, of high social standing and French - committed to his

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<sup>4</sup> H. Gaidoz, director of the Review Celtique, collaborated with de Charency on the work

region's history, culture and language but only within the context of the French nation. The work of the Comité Flamand under his Presidency can leave little doubt that, for a variety of reasons, of these it was regional history and culture which were the Comité's true priorities. This was not to change in the period immediately after his death, when the Comité's primary concern was quite simply to survive, thus rendering involvement in the increasingly controversial language question more and more unlikely. If one is to criticise the Comité Flamand for its failure to make this a priority, one must nevertheless not lose sight of the fact that it was the sole organisation at the time promoting netherlandophone culture in France and that, as its moving force, Edmond De Coussemaekmer merits recognition. His death, particularly coming at the time it did, threatened the organisation's very existence. Indeed the early years of Bonvarlet's presidency were the worst times for the Comité, as Camille Looten, the Comité's third president, was to say at the 50th anniversary of its founding:

Aux environs de 1876, date du décès de Monsieur De Coussemaekmer, decimé par la mort, le chagrin, le découragement de la majorité de ses membres, il [the Comité Flamand] fut sur le point de sombrer.<sup>5</sup>

As France sought to recover from the shock of 1870/1, regional interests became submerged in the effort to strengthen the heart of the nation. That the Comité did survive owes much to the work of Alexandre Bonvarlet, Van Constenoble and Ignace De Coussemaekmer, as is acknowledged by Looten.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Camille Looten, speech, cf. footnote, above, published in *Annales du CFF*, p1903, p51

<sup>6</sup> Camille Looten, speech, cf. footnote, above, published in *Annales du CFF*, p1903, p51

### 3.5.2 Louis de Baecker<sup>7</sup>

However, as great a contribution as these men undoubtedly made to the Comité Flamand, a discussion of their achievements would, in terms of the broader picture of the Flemish movement in France, contribute fewer new elements than one of a man who actually left the Comité in 1866. Indeed, his departure is itself of interest.

In terms of his social background he had much in common with Edmond De Coussemaker. Born in St Omer in 1814, he became both a lawyer and a magistrate and was sufficiently wealthy as to retire early to his manor in Nordpeene to devote himself to his studies. Like De Coussemaker he was a member of the Commission Historique du Département du Nord and like De Coussemaker his interest in the history and culture of French Flanders met with official approval - he was Inspecteur des Monuments Historiques du Département du Nord and Correspondant pour les Travaux Historiques in the ministry of education. One may even find points common to the intellectual interests of both De Coussemaker and de Baecker, such as de Baecker's *Chants Historiques de la Flandre* (1855), for example. These points of mutual interest were sufficient for de Baecker to be among the Comité Flamand's six founder members in 1853 and for him to become its first Vice President. However, it is regarding the language question that the initial differences

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<sup>7</sup> Spelling of "de Baecker", taken from membership list of Comité Flamand de France, published in *Annales du CFF*, 1853, p11.

between the two men are to be found. De Coussemaker was primarily interested in culture - particularly from the point of view of musicology - with language important as the means of expression of that culture and cultural tradition. De Baecker, on the other hand, was primarily interested in philology, thus in the language itself, as illustrated by his work *Les Flamands de France, Etudes sur leur langue, leur littérature et leurs monuments* (1851) or, perhaps even more strikingly, in his *Grammaire comparative des langues de la France* (1858). In the latter publication can also be seen de Baecker's desire to place the study of Vlaemsch and netherlandophone culture into a wider context. De Baecker saw the culture and language of French Flanders very much as a part of Netherlandic culture as a whole, stating:

Le mot nederlandsch survécut à toutes les révolutions philologiques; on l'employa encore lorsqu'au 17ème siècle l'esprit de parti eut inventé les langues flamandes et hollandaise et fait croire ainsi que les Flamands avaient un langage différent de celui de la Hollande, tandis que l'un et l'autre ne sont en réalité qu'une seule et même langue.

(Brachin, P., 1988, p68)

It would be wrong to infer from this that de Baecker was a partisan of pan-Netherlandic ideas. Rather he stressed the cultural homogeneity of what he termed Néerlande, the low countries, Holland, Belgium and French Flanders. To this end he sought to collaborate with Netherlandic scholars from those countries. Such collaboration, more commonly with Belgium than with Holland, was important in the early days of the Comité Flamand. Indeed, as

has been suggested, the founding of the Comité Flamand cannot be divorced from the growing Flemish Movement in Belgium, in particular given the correspondence between both de Baecker and De Coussemaker with leading figures from the Belgian movement. De Coussemaker had been corresponding with Jan-Frans Willems since the late 1830s and De Baecker knew both Jules de Saint-Genois and Snellaert, both of whom figure among the Comité's members - as honorary member and correspondent member respectively - in 1853 (*Annales du CFF* 1853, pp12 & 15). At the same time, the Comité Flamand was corresponding with Belgian Flemish societies involved in the promotion of netherlandophone language and culture, such as the Willemsfonds (Gent), de Morgenstar (Brussels), Met Tyd en Vlyt (Louvain), De Leeuw van Vlaenderen (Courtrai), De Vereenigde Vrienden (Rumbèque) and the Maetschappy ter bevordering der nederlansche tael en letterkunde (Antwerp) (*Annales du CFF* 1853, p16). Clearly Belgian support was vital to the success of the Comité Flamand in its formative years and continued to be of significance subsequently. However, the Comité Flamand took care to avoid close links with the more politicised elements of the Flemish Movement.

Similarly, representatives of the Comité Flamand participated in the Nederlandse Congressen, which, aside from being the foremost forum of Netherlandic culture and learning, also created, in the 1850s, the first Dutch language dictionary to use standardised spelling, thus seeming to confirm de Baecker's belief in the homogeneity of Netherlandic culture and language.

De Baecker remained a firm believer in such international co-operation and in 1862 produced a report for the French Ministry of Education on "L'histoire et état des lettres en Belgique et dans les Pays Bas", in which he praises the two countries for their educational infrastructure and the vigour of their culture, which he saw as developing free from the influences of their two large neighbours, France and the nascent Germany. In this report he also puts the case for the teaching of Dutch in France, citing three principal reasons:

- 1) That Vlaemsch is 'pleine de vie' in Northern France. He believed that it was important to capitalise upon this, since a knowledge of Vlaemsch / Dutch would facilitate the learning of North European languages - an argument used by many subsequent advocates of Vlaemsch.
- 2) That, without studying the Dutch language, one could not have a complete or accurate understanding of the Germanic world.
- 3) To banish the misconception that Dutch is no more than a dialect of German, lacking finesse and culture and thus to make known the cultural / intellectual boom taking place in Belgium and the Netherlands. De Baecker hoped that France would then be inspired by the example of the Low Countries and experience its own period of cultural and intellectual regeneration (Brachin, P., 1988, p69).

It is, perhaps, not surprising that de Baecker came to leave the Comité Flamand in 1866,<sup>8</sup> the year of Duruy's abortive attempt to ban the teaching of the catechism in Vlaemsch. He felt he no longer had a place in an organisation now devoting itself even more fully to the study of folklore and archaeology and considered the Comité too timorous regarding the language question.(Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p279) Nevertheless he maintained close links with the organisation long after leaving it and certainly did not cease his work on behalf of Netherlandic culture.

Having twice sought to establish a chair of Netherlandic language and literature in the 1850s<sup>9</sup>, without success, de Baecker achieved his aim of bringing these subjects to university teaching in France in the late 1860s. From 1868 to 1870 de Baecker lectured at the Salle Gerson, an annex of the Sorbonne, dealing with just these subjects. His courses did not, however, meet with great success and it was only after the Vice-Rector intervened on his behalf that de Baecker was able to continue for a second year, de Baecker's qualities as a teacher rather than those as a scholar being called into question (Brachin, P., 1988, p70). His second year in the Salle Gerson was interrupted first by the Franco-Prussian War and then by the Commune; there was not to be a third.

Even if de Baecker's efforts to promote Netherlandic language and culture through his classes did not meet with the success he desired, he did produce

<sup>8</sup> Nuytens, M., 1985, p112, gives a date of 1861 for his departure; Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p279, give the later date of 1866

<sup>9</sup> At the College de France in 1852 and the University of Douai in 1854

several important works at this time. His *Histoire de la littérature néerlandaise, depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à Vondel* was based on his lectures of 1868-9 and was published in Louvain in 1871. This work again reflects his desire to avoid the parochial interests of French Flanders in favour of the broader concerns of Netherlandic culture. The same can be said for his *Etudes Néerlandaises*, which won him the Prix Halphen from the Académie Française in 1872.

In de Baecker one may see a desire to take Vlaemsch forward in France, by studying it and by forging links with the other netherlandophone cultures, some of whose vigour, it was hoped, would thus be transmitted to their French counterparts. In his departure from the Comité Flamand, one may see an apparent confirmation of the Comité's indifference to these concerns. It should, however, be remembered that it was de Baecker himself who decided to leave. It was, therefore, his perception that his aims would not best be served within the framework of the Comité Flamand rather than the Comité Flamand which directly rejected de Baecker's principles. Nevertheless, the Duc de Charency's 1870 declaration notwithstanding, questions are raised about the Comité Flamand's desire to make promotion of Vlaemsch a true priority in its work. That de Baecker continued in his study and promotion of Vlaemsch and the netherlandophone culture of French Flanders after leaving the Comité does, however, also show that, although the Comité Flamand de France was undoubtedly the fulcrum of netherlandophone cultural activity in France at the time, it did not have a monopoly on such activity.

### 3.5.3 Camille Looten

Canon Camille Looten was undoubtedly the greatest figure of the third generation of the Comité Flamand de France. Born in Noordpeene in the Département du Nord in 1855, he was elected third President of Comité Flamand in 1899 and remained in this position until his death in 1941, throughout one of the most difficult periods in the history of his region.

Looten's origins were somewhat less illustrious than those of De Coussemaker or de Baecker. He represents another important group of supporters of the Comité Flamand: the clergy. The list of articles attributed to him in the *Annales du Comité Flamand de France* is as impressive as that of De Coussemaker himself. These articles show that, like De Coussemaker, his principal interests were literary and historical.

His works on Michel de Swaen, J.Cats and Guido Gezelle are just some of his important contribution to the study of netherlandophone literature in France. However, his *Bibliographie du Mouvement Flamand en Belgique* in the *Bulletins* of 1907 indicates his interest in events across the border, in what he terms "La nation soeur et voisine", whose contribution to the Comité he recognised (Looten, C., in *Annales du CFF*, 1903, p54). Similarly *La Question du Flamand* (*Bulletin du CFF*, 1921) illustrates that in Vlaemsch itself. This is not surprising given that Vlaemsch actually was Looten's 'moedertaal', a fact which set Looten apart from most other French born members of the Comité

Flamand. Indeed it is the commitment to Vlaemsch and its teaching, that he shared with Louis de Baecker, rather than his work within the Comité Flamand, which is of greater interest here.

The teaching of Vlaemsch in French schools had been under attack since the Revolution and when the desire to promote a united national identity had first been expressed and had become policy. During the course of the nineteenth century a succession of laws, passed between 1833 and 1896, intensified the pressure against Vlaemsch instruction. It will be recalled that it was partly as a response to the 1853 decree from the Conseil Académique du Département du Nord, banning the teaching of Vlaemsch, that the Comité Flamand had been formed. However, as long as state education only reached a relatively small proportion of the population, the promotion of French at the expense of Vlaemsch was bound to be a slow process. For many French Flemings Vlaemsch remained the principal language of communication in the home, in the work place<sup>10</sup> (most particularly in agriculture) and, crucially, in church. Hence, perhaps, the complacency shown regarding the strength of Vlaemsch - as a language of daily communication - by the Comité Flamand in the 1850s, when the threat was perceived as being only to the cultivated language. However, from the 1880s onwards central government took much firmer control of the education system. The loi Jules Ferry, passed in 1882, making primary education compulsory in free, secular, state schools with attendance checked by local government commissions, ensured that the full impact of government education policy was felt to a far greater extent. The 1886 loi

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<sup>10</sup> For those French Flemings who were still working in netherlandophone areas. The migration to francophone towns has been noted in Chapter 1.

Goblet secularising teaching staff, distanced children from the influence of the priests who were often the most active promoters of Vlaemsch. When, in 1889, teachers became civil servants, government control was merely confirmed.

The Comité Flamand, for all its good intentions and occasional lobbying on the part of the teaching of Vlaemsch (as in 1870, cf. Ch2, above), had been powerless to halt this process. Indeed in 1866 it had been the Church, in particular the Archbishop of Cambrai, Mgr Regnier, who had led the opposition to Duruy's proposed law and had succeeded in ensuring that it was not passed (Nuytens, M., 1985, p118). This link between the Roman Catholic Church in Northern France and the teaching of Vlaemsch was to become crucial; after the passing of the loi Jules Ferry, it was the clergy, through the teaching of the catechism in Vlaemsch, who were able to ensure that children received some instruction in Vlaemsch.

This commitment to the regional language, and the Flemish movement as a whole, on the part of the Catholic Church - Looten was by no means the only member of the clergy to play an important role in the Comité Flamand - requires explanation. Relations between the Catholic Church and the state had been difficult since the 1789 revolution as republican governments sought to promote the power of the secular state, a process which was to culminate in 1905 with the separation of Church and state. One might see the Church's championing of Vlaemsch and other regional causes as an attempt to disrupt the smooth running of the state. Neither the Catholicism nor regionalism sat

well with the republican ethos. Furthermore, after 1882 in particular, it was clear that the Church would be determined to avoid being excluded from the education system. However, the Church's support for Vlaemsch and culture in France was not merely a reaction to government policy.

Firstly one must not disregard the personal commitment of priests like Looten, Lemire, Canon Flahaut (one time Vice-President of the Comité Flamand) to French Flanders, its culture and the Comité Flamand. In summing up the importance of the latter in his speech at the organisation's 50th anniversary celebrations, Looten also revealed something of the Church's underlying motivations:

Il [the Comité Flamand] a vivifié les sentiments qui tiennent le plus fortement à notre coeur et que nous désignons sous le nom générique de patriotisme, passion sacrée qui nous fait chérir d'un amour inaltérable, au sein de la grande patrie commune, la petite patrie particulière, sa langue, son ciel et son climat, ses collines et ses vallées, ses bois et ses rivières, ses vieilles coutumes et sa toujours jeune religion - passion qu'il faut nourrir plus que jamais à notre époque. (*Annales du CFF* 1903, p55).

There are several points of interest in this extract. Firstly that patriotism for French Flanders, within the context of the French state, is considered 'sacré', just as De Coussemaker had described Vlaemsch itself as 'sacré' when talking of the objectives of the Comité Flamand in 1853 (*Annales du CFF*

1853, p1). This emphasis on the linking of the “grande patrie” with the “petite patrie” may, furthermore, be seen as an attempt to pre-empt criticism of unpatriotic regionalism or separatism. Secondly, that this sacred patriotism binds together the land, the language, tradition and religion; to cherish one is to cherish all, to further one is to further all.

It is here that one may find the principal reason why so many members of the clergy became members of the Comité Flamand and why so many continued to promote the teaching of Vlaemsch in France: through the maintenance of the language, they believed the culture and its traditions would survive and thus the traditional virtues of the community and the family, in the words of L'Abbé Lemire:

...la force de notre race.. .l'amour de nos traditions et des libertés locales, le respect du foyer et par conséquent la pratique de toutes les vertus abritées dans le sanctuaire de la famille.<sup>11</sup>

The threat to these virtues was perceived as coming from the French state - especially bearing in mind that the two speeches quoted above were both made in 1903, just two years before the separation of Church and state in France - it is true, but also from the economic and industrial development that was so changing the region.

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<sup>11</sup> Speech made by Jules Lemire on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Comité Flamand de France, published in *Annales du CFF*, 1903, p401

Thus it was the clergy who continued to teach Vlaemsch in France, whilst state schools continued to persecute the language. However, it was not long before action was taken regarding the teaching of the catechism in Vlaemsch. As of 1896 priests were forbidden from using the regional language either to preach or to teach the catechism. Any continuing so to do after this interdiction were liable to have their salaries - paid by the state until 1905 - cut. Despite this measure, many priests continued to use Vlaemsch, still the primary language of communication for many of their parishioners.

This action represented the nadir as far as the Vlaemsch instruction was concerned. An improvement in the situation was, however, slow in coming. Before becoming President of the Comité Flamand Looten had been noted by none other than Guido Gezelle for his interest in Vlaemsch (Landry & de Verwaere, 1982, p281). One might have thought that, on taking office and particularly as a member of the clergy, Looten would have made the teaching of Vlaemsch a priority issue for the Comité. However, despite declarations of belief in the importance of the mother language, such as the one cited above, it was not until after World War One that he made moves in this direction. At the Regionalist Congress in Lille in December 1920 Looten pledged himself in favour of the teaching of Vlaemsch and expressed his opposition to education minister de Monzie's refusal to allow regional languages to be taught. Such a declaration, made at this time, left him open to accusations of harbouring anti Republican sentiments. These he answered, stating, "La République, c'est la liberté de conserver la langue qui est la nôtre et le droit de rester ce que nous sommes."(Verbeke, L., 1970, quoted in translation in Landry & de

Verrewaere, 1982,<sup>12</sup> p280) His opposition, plus that of other regional groups, led to de Monzie, making certain concessions which allowed Looten to establish, in 1926, the first chair of Dutch language and literature in France at Lille's Catholic University, with René Despicht, the pre-war editor of *Tisje-Tasje* as Head of Department.

Curiously, however, whilst promoting Netherlandic studies in this way, Looten had, in his role as President of the Comité Flamand, refused to support the new edition of *Tisje-Tasje*, which first appeared in 1924. It has been suggested that Looten's failure to do so was so completely at odds with his personal philosophy regarding the language question (Verbeke, L., 1970, quoted Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p280) that he must have been put under pressure by other members of the Comité. Although no further explanation is given, in view of Looten's active involvement in the pre-war version, such a hypothesis cannot be excluded. Whatever the case, this incident serves once more to underline the Comité Flamand's ambiguous attitude to Vlaemsch.

Clearly the question of teaching Vlaemsch in France was and is of great importance to the future of the language. While figures such as Camille Looten, amongst others, emerged in the late nineteenth / early twentieth century to speak out in favour of teaching the regional language, all efforts, save de Baecker's few courses in the Salle Gerson and Looten's much more notable success at Lille's Catholic University, ended in failure. It is, however,

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<sup>12</sup> The date of publication given for Verbeke's work is that quoted in Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982.

debatable whether establishing a university chair is the best way to save a language. It might be suggested instead that this is another manifestation of the linguistic / cultural elitism which characterises much of the early work of the Comité Flamand. Indeed, it has been shown that it was not the Comité Flamand which played the most active part in promoting the teaching of Vlaemsch among netherlandophone French Flemings, but rather the clergy. However, while the clergy did make laudable attempts to maintain the regional language, their reasons for so doing were ultimately backward- rather than forward-looking. In hoping to maintain the language as a means of sustaining the traditions and customs of an increasingly anachronistic community, it might be argued that they were, in fact, condemning it. Impassioned as Lemire's exhortation, "Conservez avec soin cette langue, relique du passé"<sup>13</sup> may have been, it is not indicative of a forward-looking attitude towards the language.

### **3.5.4 L'Abbé Jules Lemire**

L'Abbé Lemire serves as further example of the close links between the Catholic Church and the Comité Flamand de France, of which he was a member for over 30 years, until his death in 1928. He was born in 1853 - the year the Comité Flamand was founded - into a family of agricultural workers, in Vieux Berquin, near Hazebrouck, a commune which, according to the Comité Flamand's 1856 survey was predominantly netherlandophone.

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<sup>13</sup> Lemire, speech, as above, quoted in *Annales du CFF* 1903, p398

Nevertheless, Lemire's family were Francophones; it was not until he was studying at a traditionalist seminary in Cambrai, where hostility to the secularisation of the state was prevalent, that Lemire learnt Vlaemsch, at the age of 23<sup>14</sup>. Despite what might be seen as a somewhat late conversion, Lemire was a strong advocate of Vlaemsch, which he described as the "idiome d'une noble race"<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore he saw the Roman Catholic faith and Vlaemsch as being inextricably linked, claiming "l'un suscite l'autre"<sup>16</sup>.

Like Looten and many priests in French Flanders, he believed in the teaching of Vlaemsch as a means of perpetuating the traditions of community and family life, ideas which would have abounded in his seminary in Cambrai. He also shared de Baecker's view that speaking two languages was an advantage and something which should be encouraged. Speaking at an archaeological congress in Bruges in 1902, he was full of praise for Belgian industrial prowess and adaptability, to which he termed the use of two languages as "deux clefs"<sup>17</sup>. Lemire, like de Baecker, felt that, for both linguistic and cultural reasons, the Vlaemsch speakers of Northern France could facilitate communication between France and the Germanic world. As a result of the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, Lemire considered French Flanders uniquely placed to perform this function (*Annales du CFF*, 1903, p403).

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<sup>14</sup> Weber suggests that many priests in parts of France where regional languages were spoken were not native speakers but learnt these languages in order to be able to communicate more effectively with their parishioners. Weber furthermore suggests that many Priests may well have been reluctant to do so (Weber, 1976, p)

<sup>15</sup> Lemire, speech, as above, quoted in *Annales du CFF* 1903, p399

<sup>16</sup> Lemire, speech, as above, quoted in *Annales du CFF* 1903, p403

<sup>17</sup> Lemire, speech made at the closing ceremony of the Archaeological Congress, held in Bruges, 14/8/02, published in *Bull. du CFF*, 1902, p188

Within the Comité Flamand Lemire was particularly close to Camille Looten. The two collaborated with the Belgian poet Guido Gezelle, to produce, in 1890, an anthology of works by writers from French Flanders. Lemire represented the Comité Flamand at the annual congress of the Sociétés Savantes in 1891 and wrote articles on the old trades of Hazebrouck and country lifestyles as well as on philology and etymology and a biography of his mentor, l'Abbé Dehaene. However, compared to Looten and De Cousseemaker, for example, his list of works in the Comité Flamand is relatively small. The main reason for this was his career in politics.

Lemire's interest in politics may perhaps be traced back to his days in the seminary or, more probably, to his meeting Mgr Manning, the English Catholic Bishop of London whose intervention had ended a London dock strike in 1888. Similarly influential were Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891) encyclical on the condition of the working class and his *Lettre aux Français* of 1892 (Coornaert, E., 1970, p317), in which he urged the French people to support the Republic. Lemire subsequently developed a Christian Democrat ideology in which the independent spirit of his region, French Flanders, played an important role (Nuytens, M., 1982, pp16-17). He was first elected député for Hazebrouck in 1893, an office which he held until his death 35 years later. From 1914 he was also mayor of Hazebrouck. Much of his campaigning was carried out in Vlaemsch which most commentators agree was a major factor in his electoral success, although it has been suggested that he did not write the speeches in Vlaemsch himself (Nuytens, M., 1982, p17).

In his capacity as a député, he not only campaigned using the regional language but also on behalf of it, particularly in 1902 when he stressed the service which a knowledge of Vlaemsch could do for French industry, claiming, "...celui qui parle bien le flamand arrive en quelques semaines à comprendre l'allemand" and "on ne doit détruire une langue, parce qu'un homme qui ne sait qu'une langue ne vaut qu'une langue et celui qui sait deux en vaut deux"<sup>18</sup>. In total he raised the issue of the teaching of Vlaemsch three times in parliament, in 1902, 1910 and 1919. Similarly, in 1919 he spoke out in parliament in defence of the Germanic languages of Alsace-Lorraine, a region returned to France by the Treaty of Versailles after nearly half a century as part of Germany, claiming that, "la langue, c'est l'âme d'un peuple" and emphasising that, "Ceux qui le [the Germanic regional<sup>19</sup>language] parlent dans ces chères provinces, le parlent par tradition. En le parlant, ils ont toujours eu des sentiments français"<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, he reiterates the economic arguments he had used in defence of Vlaemsch 17 years before.

However, as with those who had spoken out for the teaching of Vlaemsch before him, Lemire met with no real success. Undeterred, he decided to ask Looten to contribute in Vlaemsch to *Le Cri des Flandres*, the newspaper which he had founded in 1910. Laudable though this initiative may have been, the idea was by no means original; the Comité Flamand had been publishing *Tisje Tasjes Almanack* since late 1899 and other regional newspapers also carried occasional pieces in Vlaemsch. Nevertheless,

<sup>18</sup> *Journal officiel*, 18/2/02, extract reproduced in *Les Pays-Bas français*, 1983, p29

<sup>19</sup> He apparently does not differentiate between Alsatian and Francique

<sup>20</sup> *Journal officiel*, 18/2/02, extract reproduced in *Les Pays-Bas français*, 1983, p29

despite his self-professed support of Vlaemsch, when Paul Fredericq, a Gent historian, had, in 1897, come up with a concrete plan to promote Vlaemsch, Lemire had rejected it (Nuytens, M., 1982, p18). It might be suggested that his actions on this occasion do not seem to be those of a man truly committed to the regional language or, alternatively, that he was suspicious of foreign initiatives. However, in the light of Lemire's admiration of Belgium, the latter suggestion seems somewhat doubtful, in particular given his collaboration, in 1911, with a group of Dutch students, which led to plans to form a new organisation whose sole objective would be the promotion of Vlaemsch in France. These plans, however, came to nothing. When such an organisation did come into being after World War One, in the form of the Union des Cercles Flamands de France (founded in 1923) - later to become the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk - Lemire was bitterly opposed to it, considering that it could be exploited by those wishing to undermine national unity (Nuytens, M., 1982, p27).

Further questions are raised about the extent of Lemire's commitment to Vlaemsch by the role he played in the debate over the teaching of the catechism in the regional language. At the forefront of this debate were not Lemire and the Comité Flamand but the traditionalist priests. When Lemire did become involved in the debate, it was as a mediator between the state and the diocese of Cambrai and then as much to safeguard the conditions of the priests as to defend Vlaemsch. In fact, relations between Lemire and the traditionalist clergy were not always harmonious. His desire to reconcile Catholics to the Republic was not looked upon with favour and in 1914 he was

refused permission to stand for parliament by the new bishop of Lille. Lemire's decision to stand anyway led to his suspension, which was later revoked.

The essence of Lemire's politics was social improvement for the working classes <sup>21</sup>and regionalism. As of 1902 he was a member of the Fédération Regionaliste Française and he opposed a centralised state. Nevertheless, dedicated as he was to French Flanders, which he termed "la petite patrie", he was just as committed to the Republic, "la grande patrie". His belief in the importance of regional languages and cultures was founded on the conviction that they enriched France and that they contributed to the formation of the French identity <sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, making people proud of their local tradition in a national context would make them more devoted to the nation; "faire aimer la grande patrie en faisant estimer davantage la petite," as he said<sup>23</sup>. Similarly, he saw no reason why speakers of a regional language should be viewed with suspicion by the state, stating in the debate over Alsace-Lorraine in 1919:

Il ne faut point céder à la tentation de croire que quiconque se sert d'une autre langue que la langue nationale dit quelque chose contre la patrie. Non. C'est une tradition qui se conserve. <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> He was the creator of the 'jardins ouvriers', for example.

<sup>22</sup> *Journal officiel*, 18/2/02, extract reproduced in *Les Pays-Bas français*, 1983, p28

<sup>23</sup> *Journal officiel*, 18/2/02, extract reproduced in *Les Pays-Bas français*, 1983, p28

<sup>24</sup> *Journal officiel*, 14/10/19, extract reproduced in *Les Pays-Bas français*, 1983, p31

His whole regionalist philosophy is perhaps best summed up by his diary entry of 15th June 1902, when he states, "J'aime la Flandre dans la France. Je veux conserver la Flandre pour la donner à la France." (Nuytens, M., 1982, p21).

Jules Lemire undoubtedly helped to raise the profile of the regional language question in French Flanders during his time as a député but his concrete achievements on its behalf are few. His brand of republicanism distanced him from the traditionalist clergy who were the staunchest supporters of Vlaemsch, as well as from many members of the Comité Flamand. It would be wrong to equate separatism with regionalism and the promotion of Vlaemsch and the regional culture of French Flanders. However, Lemire's vision of a French state in which regional language and culture were looked upon not as a threat but as elements which enriched the national heritage, would not be realised for many years. Consequently, his approach to the regional question was not likely to succeed. If serving his "petite patrie" meant going against the interests of the "grande patrie", then Lemire remained, as a former government Minister said at his funeral, "un serviteur de la France". (Looten, C., 1989)

### **3.6 Other organisations promoting netherlandophone language and culture in French Flanders, 1853 - 1914.**

While the Comité Flamand de France represented the most important organisation of the early Flemish movement of French Flanders, that does not mean that it was the only one. Although the four figures discussed above were all, at one time or another, members of the Comité Flamand, some of the most important initiatives undertaken by them on behalf of regional language and culture in French Flanders were developed outside the Comité<sup>25</sup>. Most other projects were small-scale and usually met with limited success at best. In this context one should mention the *Volksbibliotheken* set up by Hippolite Bauduin in Roubaix and Bergues in 1865 to encourage the reading of Vlaemsch texts. Despite the support of the Comité Flamand and the former mayor of Bergues, de la Roiere, as well as some government interest, the *Volksbibliotheken* did not survive for very long. Similarly short-lived was Belgian poet Guido Gezelle's review *Ons Oud. Vlaemsch*, founded in 1884 expressly for French Flanders. Other activities were more localised, such as l'Abbé Dehaene's free Vlaemsch classes in the Collège St François d'Assise in Hazebrouck - where l'Abbé Lemire was a young philosophy teacher - in the 1870s and 1880s.

One cultural initiative which met with rather more success, was the review *Le Beffroi*, published between 1900 and 1913 by Léon Bocquet. Léon Bocquet was born into a family of illiterate agricultural workers in 1879 in Marquilles, 30km from Lille. Despite his background, Bocquet attended both the state and catholic universities in Lille and gained a *licence ès lettres* and a *diplôme d'études supérieures*. During his time at university he developed a great

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<sup>25</sup> De Coussemaker was a notable exception in this respect.

admiration for Camille Looten and with the support of lecturers and fellow students, Bocquet and two other students from the *faculté des lettres*, Gossez and Blanquernon, founded *Le Beffroi*,<sup>26</sup> intended to be "purement littéraire et purement septentrional" (Mascarello-Georges, A., 1983, p181). *Le Beffroi* soon attracted young people interested in regionalism as well as the patronage of the Lille poet, Samain and the Belgian poet Rodenbach.

The review's aim was to provide a showcase for regional literary talent, to help them become known in Paris and abroad, in an attempt to break away from the cultural centralisation which prevailed in France at that time. They organised, for example, a poetry competition in 1910, which offered as its prize the chance for the winner to have his work published purely for his own profit. The works published were also intended to make the region and its heritage known to a wider public. The Exposition Internationale in Lille in 1902 was very useful in this context, allowing the review to make contacts abroad, in Germany, Holland and the United States. *Le Beffroi* was also very much in favour of the promotion of Vlaamsch and of other Netherlandic cultural groups in France. Bocquet was later to become a friend of Jean-Marie Gantois and to describe the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk as an important movement for regional language and literature in French Flanders (Mascarello-Georges, A., 1983, p184).

The review was initially published monthly and then bi-monthly. Each edition was 36 pages long and no more than 250 copies of each were published.

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<sup>26</sup> Named after one of the most apparent of the region's cultural symbols

Although it is true that the *Le Beffroi* survived longer than many of its contemporaries, its readership and therefore its influence was very limited. This publication did prove useful to some of its contributors, particularly the Belgian symbolist poets. It is interesting to note that although Belgian writers collaborated extensively with *Le Beffroi*, these tended to be francophone rather than netherlandophone. When printing of the publication eventually ceased in 1913, it was for want of readers. The immediate influence of *Le Beffroi* was necessarily limited but it did provide a precedent for the regionalist reviews which appeared in French Flanders after World War One, such as Gantois' *Vlaemsche Stemme in Frankrijk*. Bocquet was later to write successful regionalist novels, such as *L'Agonie de Dixmude* (1916) and *Heurtebise* (1935) which may be seen as making a useful contribution to regional culture but whose impact on Vlaemsch, like that of *Le Beffroi* itself, was minimal.

### **3.7 Conclusions**

The French Flemish movement in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century (represented almost exclusively by the Comité Flamand de France) may be seen to have been inspired, in part at least, by the romantic notions of national identity common in Europe at that time. However, it had little in common with most of its counterparts elsewhere in Europe. It bore most similarities with the early Belgian Flemish Movement - with which it had considerable contact – but as international tensions rose and

as the latter movement became increasingly politicised, so the similarities and contact began to diminish, without ever actually disappearing.

One of the principal differences between the Comité Flamand and other analogous movements in Europe was the former's attitude to the language question. Although maintenance of Vlaemsch in France was, in theory, central to the Comité's ideology, this theoretical commitment was not reflected in practice. Indeed, this failure to foreground the language issue was one of the reasons for the growing distance between the French Flemish movement and its Belgian counterpart. Although the Comité Flamand de France had, in part, been formed as a response to a direct threat to the regional language - the Conseil Académique du Département du Nord's ban on the teaching of Vlaemsch in 1853 - the nature of this threat was misunderstood and thus under-estimated. The Comité Flamand, dominated by an educated élite, placed the emphasis in its efforts to maintain Vlaemsch on the preservation and glorification of the cultivated language. As a result of the social and intellectual background of this élite, they appear not to have grasped the importance of the popular language in use every day by ordinary netherlandophone French Flemings. This was perhaps inevitable, given that very many members of the Comité Flamand had little or no knowledge of Vlaemsch and for those who did, it was often not their mother tongue.

Thus the Comité Flamand's strategy regarding Vlaemsch may be seen as one of conservation rather than promotion. Valuable though the preservation of literary works and folk songs and studies on the language itself undoubtedly

were, they betray a somewhat pessimistic attitude towards the regional language. The Comité gives the impression of having abandoned hope of halting the decline of Vlaemsch and is merely concerned with conserving linguistic and cultural treasures for the day the language is no longer spoken at all.

A clear priority for those wishing to save Vlaemsch as a living language was to ensure that it would be taught, in particular taught to the young. Central government opposition to this has been mentioned on numerous occasions above and although the Comité Flamand regularly expressed its support for Vlaemsch courses in schools and universities, the situation actually continued to deteriorate, giving a rather poor impression of the effectiveness of the Comité's lobbying. In the field of education, the greatest success was the establishment of the chair of Dutch at Lille's Catholic University, a success which took 73 years to achieve. Even in this success one once again sees the insistence on the cultivated language being taught to an élite, which clearly was not likely to bring about a reversal in the decline of Vlaemsch, perhaps the only reason central government was willing to make the concession. It is interesting to note that, when the Comité Flamand did adopt a more populist approach, in the form of the publication *Tisje Tasjes Almanack*, from 1899 to 1914, that it was a considerable success, making the decision not to support it after the war all the more curious. This decision was perhaps indicative of the Comité seeing itself increasingly as a historical / archaeological society - the reason for de Baecker's departure as early as 1866.

Nevertheless the teaching and promotion of Vlaemsch was maintained outside the Comité Flamand by the clergy. In the face of government hostility the clergy remained defiant, Jules Lemire saying that if you want to speak Vlaemsch "le gouvernement ne peut pas vous en défendre" (*Annales du CFF*, 1903, p398). However, the strongest partisans of the regional language were often the traditionalist clergy who saw the promotion of Vlaemsch as a way to perpetuate an increasingly anachronistic society in the face of the evils of the modern world, to bind people to their traditional "coin du sol national" (*Annales du CFF*, 1903, p398) in preference to the godless cities. This view was even shared by some of the more enlightened Clergy, such as Jules Lemire. Thus, whilst the clergy played an important role in maintaining Vlaemsch in the short term, their long term objectives for so doing may actually have condemned them to failure.

Far healthier, it may be suggested, were the arguments put forward by de Baecker, de Charency and Lemire again, that Vlaemsch had an economic significance for the future of France. However, at a time when concessions to regional languages were definitely not on the government agenda and even arguments showing the benefits to the French State were viewed with suspicion, a willingness to incur government wrath was required on the part of the advocates of the regional language in French Flanders. However, a substantial proportion of the Comité Flamand's members held positions tied to the state, as magistrates and mayors, for example. Furthermore the Comité Flamand had, at various times and particularly in the early days, enjoyed a

degree of official support - support which was, on occasion, translated into finance. It is therefore not surprising that this willingness was not present in the ranks of the Comité Flamand de France.

Thus, while the Comité Flamand de France may be credited with bringing a Flemish movement into being in French Flanders, this was first and foremost a literary and historical movement; long term success in terms of halting the decline of Vlaemsch was strictly limited. However, the next 35 years were to see great change in the nature of the Flemish movement of French Flanders and in attitudes towards Flemish identity and the Comité Flamand still had a role to play.

## Chapter 4 The Flemish movement of French Flanders from 1919 - 1947

### 4.1 Introduction

The period under discussion, a time of enormous social, political and economic upheaval, is clearly one of great significance for France as a whole. For French Flanders it begins with the devastation of World War I and ends with the devastation of World War II. For the Flemish movement in France it is a time of change, hope and ultimately disaster. At the end of World War I, the Comité Flamand remained the only defender of Netherlandic culture active in France; a mere 5 years later the focus of Netherlandic language and culture had moved away from the Comité Flamand to such an extent that it largely disappears from works dealing with Flemish consciousness, even those as detailed and scholarly as the *Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging* (Verbeke, L., in Deleu, et al. (eds.), 1973, pp533-8). However, by the end of World War 2, the Comité Flamand is once again the sole bastion of Flemishness in French Flanders and the image of the Flemish movement in France had been so compromised that the survival of a Flemish movement and by association, of Vlaemsch - in the short term at least - was in considerable doubt. Accounting for this reversal in fortune will be one of the principal considerations of this chapter.

Why, in the aftermath of World War I, did the Comité Flamand and the French Flemish movement as a whole not suffer the same accusations of Pan-Germanism that had followed the Franco-Prussian War or those of collaboration that would follow World War 2?

## 4.2 The Comité Flamand during World War I

It must be remembered that much of French Flanders was actually a battle ground during World War I and that, unlike most of France, part of it, including Lille (from 12/10/14 - 16/10/18) was actually occupied by the German forces. These two factors are of importance when assessing both the activities during the period and perceptions of these activities both within and without French Flanders.

The Comité Flamand officially suspended its quarterly meetings from June 1914 until 12th June 1919, as well as publication of the *Annales* (until 1921) although unofficial activity continued, as circumstance permitted, throughout this period. Looten's description of the excursion organised at this first meeting leaves little doubt about the extent of the devastation in French Flanders and the "épreuves redoutables" which the "race flamande" had endured during these years (Looten, C. 1919, p14). The Comité's activities during this period may be divided into those carried out by members of the Comité Flamand which were beneficial to the Comité's stated aims but which resulted purely from individual initiative and those which were actually organised by the Comité itself.

In the former category one might mention efforts made to save artefacts and documents from the ravages of war. Particular mention is made in the of the Comité Flamand of the endeavours of Vice President Emile Théodore, who throughout 1914 - 15, saved a great number of works of art, religious relics and rare manuscripts, either from German hands or from total destruction (Looten, C., 1919, pp5-6), although he was by no means alone in this work. Such acts, as well as being in the Comité's tradition of conservation, were also favourably

viewed beyond the confines of the Comité Flamand, not the least because of the dangers people like Théodore sometimes encountered and as symbols of defiance against the invader.

The activities organised by the Comité itself consisted in a series of 15 meetings held between 21st April 1916 and 19th July 1917 at a member's house in Lille. It must be remembered that, from 12th October 1914 to 16th October 1918, Lille was occupied by German forces. The meetings were held without the knowledge of the German police and were eventually curtailed when the situation in Lille became too dangerous. Of the 11 papers taken from these meetings, published in the *Annales* of 1921, 7 were historical (2 ecclesiastic history), 2 musicological (one dealing with church music), one literary and one dealing with the history of the Comité Flamand itself (*Annales du CFF* 1921, pp6-43). Vlaemsch was only mentioned in so far as it was the language used in the poems of Michel de Swaen, subject of the meeting of 29th March 1917 and in the songs under consideration at the meeting of 12th September 1916. Thus, even in occupied Lille, the Comité Flamand maintained a programme true to its traditional preoccupations, although Looten felt they had been obliged to broaden their scope somewhat (*Annales du CFF*, 1921, p4).

However, perhaps more important than the content of these meetings is the fact that they were held without the blessing of the German authorities, thus avoiding allegations of Pan-Germanism and / or collaboration.

Such allegations were also avoided thanks to the role played by many members of the Comité Flamand in the conflict. 34 members of the Comité, including 3 committee members, were killed during the war (Looten, C., 1919, pp19 -21) and

24 more, both soldiers and civilians (amongst whom L'Abbé Lemire, one of 8 members to be awarded the Legion d' Honour) were decorated for their actions (Looten, C., 1919, p11). Indeed the military Governor of Dunkirk, General Lévi, speaking at the meeting of 12th June 1919, particularly praised the courage of the French Flemish troops in the fighting (Looten, C., 1919, p15). Furthermore, that General Lévi should not only be present at this first meeting after the cessation of hostilities but also figure among the Comité's honorary members (along with Field Marshall Foch), serves as an illustration of the mutual esteem held by the respective parties. Indeed at this same meeting Looten is at pains to thank both the military and the press for the part they have played in facilitating the organisation of the event (Looten, C., 1919, p15) - a far cry from the situation in 1945/6, when the regional press, in the shape of *La Voix du Nord*, was instrumental in bringing the allegations of collaboration against members of the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk (cf. Ch4.8).

Thus the Comité Flamand survived World War I with its reputation intact, if not enhanced - indeed its membership, 340 in 1914 (Looten, C., 1921), increased to 551 (including 12 honorary members and 18 correspondent members) in 1921 (*Annales du CFF*, 1921, pp I - XXII). Clearly its own conduct during the conflict was in part responsible for this as, was its continued vision of the love of the "petite patrie" leading to greater love of the nation as a whole, a vision restated by Looten in the 1921 *Annales*, when he claims that the trials of the war years, particularly the German occupation, served to draw the two closer together (Looten, C., introduction to *Annales du CFF*, 1921, p2). Furthermore, unlike 1870, France had not suffered the ignominy of defeat - a factor again in 1940 - and the need to rally the citizens was not so great. Similarly, given that French Flanders had already suffered so much from the war, there was neither the

desire and nor the motive to carry out the same sort of witchhunts which were to characterise the immediate aftermath of World War II.

#### 4.3 The Comité Flamand de France's Post-war Objectives

Whilst the Flemish movement in France may have found itself in relatively good condition, what did this mean for Vlaemsch in France? Looten, aware that the linguistic situation was continuing to turn in favour of French (Looten, C., introduction to *Annales du CFF*, 1921, p2) reaffirmed his commitment to the preservation of Vlaemsch, both in the *Annales* of 1921 (Looten, C., introduction to *Annales du CFF*, 1921, p3) and at the Congrès Régionaliste of December 6th and 7th 1920, foregrounding again the argument that a good knowledge of Vlaemsch would help learn German and English and as a result be beneficial to France's commercial and technological advancement. In addition, he highlighted the importance of teaching the catechism in Vlaemsch. However, serious in his commitment to Vlaemsch though Looten undoubtedly was, the Comité's first priority in the immediate post war period was to help in the rebuilding and restoration of the region, which it saw itself as particularly qualified to do, given that it had helped ensure the survival of many of the region's artefacts. Clearly this was an undertaking which would preoccupy the Comité for a number of years and which would in turn limit its activities on behalf of the language, which had always suffered in the face of the Comité's historical and conservation work. The Comité did also, however, undertake to forge closer links with Flemish groups across the border in Belgium, links potentially of benefit to Vlaemsch in France. It is of interest that, when announcing the Comité Flamand's intentions in this respect, he characterises its programme as an example of, "régionalisme

sérieux, confondant dans un même culte la petite patrie et la grande" (Looten, C., introduction to *Annales du CFF*, 1921, p4). It is perhaps thanks to this philosophy that the Comité Flamand has managed to continue with its endeavours on behalf of Netherlandic language and culture and because of it has, with regard to the language, been doomed to fail.

#### 4.4 Other Flemish Groups in French Flanders, 1919 - 24

Although the Comité Flamand de France found itself in good health in the immediate post war period, it was not to maintain the near monopoly it had previously enjoyed in the Flemish movement for long. Indeed, as early as 1918 a new regionalist publication appeared in French Flanders, *Les Cahiers de l'amitié de France et de Flandre*, under the direction of André Mabille de Poncheville. Scathing though Gantois was about this "union contre nature" expressed in this literary review's title and its numerous shortcomings, even he acknowledges the role it played in introducing French Flemish activists (himself included) to Netherlandic literature and history (Gantois, J-M., 1942, p31).

The *Cahiers de l'amitié de France et de Flandre* were followed in 1919 by Gaspard den Bussche's regionalist review *le Beffroi de Flandre*, which, in addition to issues from inside French Flanders, also dealt with literature and the arts in Belgium. Whilst Gantois was later to characterise the review as moderate and not encompassing all aspects of Flemish thought (Gantois, J-M., 1942, p28), it did play an important role in the development of the Cercles Flamands which were to subsequently form in French Flanders, providing Gantois (writing under the pseudonym Gandavensis) amongst others, with a forum to express their

views. Indeed, by 1926, the review had come under the influence of Gantois' Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk (VVF) to such an extent that he was able to refer to it as "notre review" in a letter to the prominent Breton nationalist, l'Abbé Perrot<sup>1</sup>. Publication of *Beffroi de Flandre* ceased in 1928; it was succeeded by the VVF's own review *Le Lion de Flandre*.

The third of these regionalist publications to appear in the post war period was *Le Mercure de Flandre*, founded by Valentin Bresle - friend and collaborator of Gantois - under the name of *Bibiologia* in Lille in 1922. *Le Mercure de Flandre* focused more on the arts than *Le Beffroi de Flandre* and it too was superseded by the VVF's own publications, publication ceasing again in 1928.

However, whilst these reviews undoubtedly played an important part in the growth in interest in Netherlandic culture in French Flanders, a more significant development was taking place in the seminaries of French Flanders. As has been illustrated in the previous chapter, the Roman Catholic Church - or at least the ordinary parish priests of French Flanders - enjoyed, in the words of Gantois, "une réputation méritée de flamandophile" (Gantois, J-M., 1942, p35). Indeed such priests were the bastions of many of France's regionalist movements. The immediate post war period was to see them make a great contribution to the revitalisation of the Flemish movement in northern France, with the formation of the "Cercles Flamands".

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of 2/6/28 from Jean-Marie Gantois to l'abbé Perrot, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, 1981, p128

The first of these was organised by L'Abbé Antoine Lescroart at the seminary of Annapes, near Lille, in October 1919. The son of a farmer from Wormhoudt, Lescroart sought to teach Francophone priests the grammar and spelling of Vlaemsch in preparation for ministry in the netherlandophone parishes. He then expanded his programme to include traditional songs from French Flanders as well as French Flemish and other netherlandophone literature. In addition Lescroart founded in 1923 *De Vlaemsche Stemme*, in an attempt to compensate for the dearth of study material available to the Cercles Flamands. Published initially quarterly and then monthly from August 1923 until 1926, this review was written in Vlaemsch.

In the years subsequent to the founding of Lescroart's group, another 3 appeared <sup>2</sup> in other seminaries across French Flanders. The reasons for this increase in interest may be traced to the pre war situation; indeed, it might be suggested that these groups would have come into being somewhat earlier had the war not intervened. Many of the priests who had preferred to face official sanction rather than stop teaching the catechism in Vlaemsch, had long been dissatisfied with the efforts made by the Comité Flamand de France on behalf of the language itself (cf. Ch3). It was they who were now inspiring a new generation of Flemish activists. Furthermore the efforts of the Belgian group Pro-Westlandia in the years 1912-14 had provided considerable encouragement to this younger generation. This group had organised tours promoting primarily Flemish traditional music and song throughout French Flanders, being particularly active in Steenvoorde, Hazebrouck, Bailleul and Cassel. In addition,

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<sup>2</sup> The *Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging* (op cit.) mentions four Flemish Circles. Landry & de Verrewaere mention only three, op cit., 1982, p284

the concern expressed by Looten that French was rapidly taking over French Flanders is unlikely to have been his alone and the desire to act most definitely was not.

However, the respective strengths of these various Cercles Flamands should not be overstated. When Gantois set up his first group in 1923, also in the seminary of Annepes, it had only 5 members, Gantois included, and almost no resources (Gantois, J-M., 1942, p47). They met for one hour a week and until the appearance of Lescroart's *Vlaemsche Stemme*, based their study on pre World War catechism texts from Cambrai and Snoek almanacs, with the help of a pocket dictionary (Gantois, J-M., 1942, p42). Nevertheless, Gantois was still able to publish his 5 part *Grammaire à l'usage des Flamands de France*, which ran to 50 copies and which focused on the dialect of French Flanders, again with the seminary circles in mind.

When considering the achievements of these circles, it must not be forgotten that the majority of those involved in them were actually very young. Lescroart founded his group at the age of 22 and Gantois his at 19. They had therefore not experienced the difficult period for the Flemish movement following the defeat of 1870 and were thus less likely to exercise the extreme caution exhibited by the more mature leadership of the Comité Flamand, particularly regarding the language question. Indeed, their very youth was bound to affect their view of this issue; they would be living in the future which seemed to be full of menace for Vlaemsch in France and as a result were perhaps more aware of the urgency of action rather than the considered conservation of the Comité Flamand. This may in turn help to explain their determination to develop the movement beyond the isolated initiatives which characterised this new Flemish

movement until 1924. It is perhaps also not unfair to attribute a certain naïveté to these young activists. Their subsequent activities suggest a genuine belief that they could save Vlaemsch in French Flanders and attempting to do so remained one of their primary objectives (cf. Ch4.6 & Ch4.8).

Not content with acquiring a reading knowledge of Vlaemsch / Dutch alone, Gantois' group decided to forge ahead in oral practice of the language. However, this experiment met with resistance from the seminary's Francophone authorities and was banned and Gantois was forbidden to attend Dutch classes at Lille's Catholic University (Gantois, J-M., 1942, p47). Despite the difficulties encountered, Gantois' group did have its successes, such as his Vlaemsch grammar book, the organising of a weekly evening of Flemish song and discussion and the creation of a small Vlaemsch / Dutch library in the Annapes seminary. In addition, it was in this group that Gantois met Marcel Janssen, a future collaborator in the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk.

However, it was in October 1923, once Gantois had left the seminary that his circle, now entitled the Cercle Michel de Swaen, after French Flanders most revered poet, that it began to make real progress. It was during his 8 years at Lille that Gantois met Looten, for whom he had great admiration and who encouraged Gantois and Lescroart to found the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p285; cf. also Verbeke, 1973). Indeed it was at the VVF's 7th Congress (1930) that Looten was awarded his honorary doctorate from Leuven Catholic University and that he became a member of the Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde.

At this point it is perhaps useful to consider Gantois himself in some depth, not for the controversial figure he was to become but for his motivations in becoming involved in the French Flemish movement, as they may well help elucidate those of this new generation of activists and quite simply because - like De Coussemaker and Looten before him - Gantois came to symbolise the movement. Indeed, when the French weekly magazine *L'Express* featured La Flandre as part of a series on the regions of France, Gantois was the only French Flemish leader to be mentioned, albeit in somewhat unflattering terms<sup>3</sup>.

Born in Watten, just on the French side of the linguistic border, in 1904, into a middle class, Francophone family (his father was a doctor), Gantois could not speak a word of Vlaemsch until the age of 18. As he says in *Hoe ik mijn Taal en mijn Volk terugvond*, published in 1942, he came into contact with Vlaemsch at the village market and as a forbidden language at school (Gantois, J-M., 1942, pp40-1). The development of his interest in Netherlandic language and culture may be attributed principally to his educational environment. Initially, he famously discovered his heritage when his Catholic secondary school was relocated in Normandy to escape the perils of the First World War. His subsequent return to French Flanders saw him pursue his new interest first at school and then in the seminaries where, as stated above, Flemish consciousness was undergoing something of a rebirth. Thus far Gantois' development as a Flemish activist could easily see him fitting into the mould of the Comité Flamand de France, Middle class, Catholic, erudite. However, it was Gantois' insistence on the language question and this from a popularist standpoint, which largely distinguishes from the membership of the elitist Comité

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<sup>3</sup> *L'Express*, Aug 1995

Flamand, for the most part preoccupied with historico - cultural affairs. Gantois' attitude to Vlaemsch was undoubtedly coloured by the fact that he discovered it relatively late and viewed it as something akin to mysticism, as is apparent in *Hoe ik mijn Taal en mijn Volk terugvond*. Furthermore, the difficulties and hostilities (which he describes at length in this book) he encountered in his study of Vlaemsch, helped instil him with, if not bitterness, then certainly great determination to do all he could to ensure the language's survival. It must also be remembered that one of the principal aims of the Cercles Flamands in the seminaries was to be able to preach to netherlandophone parishioners in their own language; Gantois was therefore not only exposed to a belief in the importance of maintaining the language but also of using as an every day tool for communication, an inherently populist notion. This is not to suggest that Gantois was uninfluenced by the established Flemish movement in France; in fact he lists not only Looten's work but also *L'Abbé Dehaene et la Flandre*, by Lemire and the Annales and *Bulletins* of the Comité Flamand de France amongst his most important formative influences (Gantois, J-M., 1942, p15).

#### **4.5 The formation of the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk**

By 1924 this new wave of interest in Flemish culture and language was well established but, as has been suggested above, comprised various small-scale initiatives, often limited to just one institution. The question of how to develop further was now of importance. The leaders of the new groups, principally Lescroart and Gantois, were faced with three choices: join the long-established Comité Flamand de France, carry on as before or combine their efforts.

The first alternative had obvious drawbacks. The Comité Flamand, whilst frequently stating its commitment to Vlaemsch, was most often content to limit its endeavours to expressions of this commitment. Its true field of operation had always been historico-cultural, a domain which, given the need for reconstruction after World War One, was to preoccupy it even more. Similarly the Comité had long shown a reluctance to over commit itself to activities which might be seen as against the interests of the Republic and this was exactly how the Republic viewed the active promotion of regional languages amongst the mass of the populace - particularly when the promoters were the clergy. This promotion of the language remained the priority for the Cercles Flamands. Furthermore, President of the Comité Flamand, Camille Looten actively encouraged the Lescroart and Gantois not to join the Comité Flamand but to create the own organisation. Whether this is because he felt the aims of the Comité on the one hand and those of Gantois and Lescroart on the other were not entirely compatible or because he felt that the Flemish movement in France was in need of new impetus is not entirely clear.

The problems inherent in the various groups and publications continuing as before are readily apparent. Whilst they had succeeded in raising Flemish consciousness in certain areas and amongst certain groups, saving Vlaemsch in France clearly required reaching a far wider audience. This in turn would necessitate greater resources than the individual groups had at their disposal. Conversely, mere survival for a small group, starved of resources, was more difficult - indeed the publications which did remain outside the VVF's direct control had all disappeared by 1928. Clearly Flemish activists did not wish to waste the progress they had made. Added to these considerations is the simple fact, readily apparent to a pragmatic organiser like Gantois, that to have several

groups pursuing approximately the same goals, via the same methods in approximately the same area, dividing support, was inefficient.

Thus, on March 7th 1924 at a meeting at Mont des Cats, the Cercles Flamands decided to combine: the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk was born. Looten was named as Honorary President, and Justin Blanckaert, a local notable whose family had participated in the 13th and 14th century campaigns against the French crown, President. Gantois settled for the less prestigious office of secretary but was the true force behind the movement. The choice of what Gantois calls a "civil"<sup>4</sup> for this rôle was a definite statement of policy on his (and it is to be supposed the movement's) part. He felt that, whilst the clergy was vital to the French regionalist movements, it should remain "inspirateur, voire factotum, dans la coulisse". Indeed he states more cynically, "Des "éminences grises ont toujours eu plus d'influence que les gens couverts de titres dont ils se servent comme d'une façade"<sup>5</sup>. Gantois' motive for this course of action was principally to avoid too stringent control from the ecclesiastical hierarchy, though having a secular figurehead may also have been useful in giving the VVF a more populist appeal. This declericalisation may have been one of the reasons for Lescroart playing a less prominent rôle in the new organisation - particularly after the demise of the *Vlaemsche Stemme* in 1926 - although perhaps as with de Baecker and De Coussemaekere in the early days of the Comité Flamand, the organisation was rather too small for two strong personalities.

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from Gantois to l'Abbé Perrot, dated 12/6/28, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, as above, p130

<sup>5</sup> Same letter, p130



Gantois' intention was that the VVF should remain a purely cultural organisation, stating its aims thus:

Le VVF groupe tous les Flamands des Pays-Bas français qui veulent faire respecter la personnalité de leur pays, préserver son visage propre, développer son génie, refaire une flandre digne de son génie, réveiller son âme, lui rendre une expression libre et fière, défendre et cultiver sa langue, développer sa littérature, rénover ses traditions artistiques.

(Quoted in Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p285)

Nothing in this statement of intent could be construed as controversial, or even original. In particular there is no mention of any form of political action. Regarding politics, Gantois' pronouncement was that the VVF should be "ni à gauche, ni à droite mais en dehors et au dessus" (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p285). One might consider such an attitude - at best - somewhat naive; even before 1924 it had been apparent that the French government had considered the question of regional identity as having repercussions for national security. It had furthermore considered the teaching of regional languages as a potential danger to national security and the integrity of the state and had made policy accordingly. It is clear that, even if the French Flemish movement had no political agenda, the regional language question was, in the eyes of the French government at least, a political one. By its championing of Vlaemsch the VVF was, therefore, implicitly involved in politics. It may still have been feasible for Gantois to claim that the VVF was to be "ni à droite, ni à gauche" in 1924. However, given the politicisation of the ethnicity question during the 1920s and 30s - particularly in the light of the rise of racial politics in Germany - was it still feasible 10 years later?

#### **4.6 The activities of the VVF, 1924 – 40**

The VVF's first important undertaking was the establishing of its annual congresses, the first of which took place on the Mont des Cats in 1924, the last in Lille on 29th August, 1943. Each of these congresses dealt with a different theme, reflecting the breadth of the VVF's interests. The 1930 congress dealt with the Belgian poet Guido Gezelle, that of 1931 with the windmills of Flanders. One of the most important, however, was that of 1936 in Warhem which examined the question of the teaching of Vlaemsch. Justin Blanckaert, the league's President, also a local councillor, gave a detailed report on the situation of the language and the congress as a whole asked all local councillor's, irrespective of party allegiance, to put pressure on the government to include the teaching of regional languages in the new curriculum being drawn up as a result of the raising of the school leaving age. Indeed, in 1937 the town of Warhem made an official request for Dutch to be taught at its state schools.

These congresses met with considerable success with more than 200 people participating in Dunkirk in 1937 (Deleu et al. (eds.), 1973, p1840). Frequently it was the host town's municipal authorities who provided the venue for the event, as was the case in Dunkirk in 1937, for example, with the mayor - irrespective of political allegiance - giving the opening speech. In fact many prominent local political and religious figures (the Bishop of Lille, Mgr Quillet had offered his support and encouragement to the VVF as early as 1925) participated in the congresses, as well as well respected figures from inside the French Flemish

movement, such as Camille Looten (cf. 4.5, above). Thus, right up to the outbreak of war, the VVF's congresses, offering a programme only more radical than that of the Comité Flamand had ever been in its insistence on the importance of the language issue, enjoyed broad support from the establishment of French Flanders.

The annual congresses also saw the organisation of language and literature competitions which met with considerable success in stimulating the production of Netherlandic literature in French Flanders.

In addition to the annual congresses, the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk was also active in the field of publishing. The first wave of Flemish regionalist publications (*Mercure de Flandre*, *De Vlaemsche Stemme in Vrankrijk*, *Beffroi de Flandre*) and even the relaunched *Tisje-Tasje* (cf. Ch3) disappeared between 1926 and 1928. There was, therefore, clearly a need for some form of expression for the VVF, particularly as Gantois had come to think of the *Beffroi de Flandre* as "notre review"<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, the VVF paid public tribute to *Le Beffroi* and stated that, "L'expérience [of publishing the *Beffroi de Flandre*] a prouvé l'opportunité d'un organe qui se consacre à l'éducation du sens régional du public de Flandre"<sup>7</sup>. Thus, in 1929, the VVF brought out two new publications, *De Torrewachter* and *Le Lion de Flandre*, both under its direct control.

The two publications were rather different in character and were aimed at two distinct groups of reader, intending to cover the breadth of Flemish interest in

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<sup>6</sup> Letter from Gantois to l'Abbé, 2/6/28, *Les Pays-Bas français*, p128, as above.

<sup>7</sup> *Avis de naissance* of *Lion de Flandre* and *De Torrewachter*, reproduced in Deleu et al. (eds.), 1973, p1840.

France. The driving force behind both publications was Jean-Marie Gantois, who wrote many of the articles himself. *Le Lion de Flandre*, published initially bi-monthly and then, as of 1937, monthly, was a general, cultural, regionalist review, "spécialement destinée à l'élite intellectuelle du pays"<sup>8</sup>. Its articles focused particularly on folklore, art, history and toponymy in French Flanders and included much of the most significant work on these subjects at the time. By the outbreak of World War 2, 1,200 copies of *Le Lion de Flandre* were being sold every month (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p289).

*De Torrewachter*, on the other hand was intended to appeal to a much broader readership. This monthly newspaper was written in Dutch (as of 1926 the VVF had decided to promote standard Dutch rather than the Netherlandic dialect of French Flanders in its official publications and courses<sup>9</sup>. This publication achieved considerable success amongst those French Flemings able to read Dutch, circulation peaking at 10,000 copies per month in 1944 (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p289). It contained articles of general interest, usually shorter than those of *Le Lion de Flandre*, as well as humorous stories, somewhat reminiscent of *Tisje - Tasje*. Collaboration on *De Torrewachter* also served to bring together groups of Vlaemsch speaking priests who later produced the review *Flandre Notre Mère*, which dealt with all aspects of French Flanders and the French Flemish movement.

From its very conception the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk sought to encompass a wide spectrum of regional interest in French Flanders - it was, after

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<sup>8</sup> As above

<sup>9</sup> For discussion of the motives and implications of doing so, see chapter 4

all, a "Verbond" uniting the various "Cercles Flamands". Furthermore, it enjoyed good relations with the other representative of Flemish interest, the Comité Flamand, particularly with Camille Looten. Indeed, when Looten delivered a paper on French Flanders at the study day organised by the Fédération Régionaliste Française on bilingualism and cultural duality (20th March 1929), this paper was subsequently published in *Lion de Flandre*<sup>10</sup>. The suggestion being that, far from seeing the Comité Flamand as a rival, the VVF not only concurred with what Looten said but was happy to allow him to speak on behalf of French Flanders, rather than just of the Comité Flamand. Similarly, Gantois published several articles in the *Bulletins* of the Comité Flamand<sup>11</sup>.

Thus, by the outbreak of World War 2, the VVF found itself in a strong position; its membership was healthy, its congresses well attended and its publications selling well. Furthermore, as has been seen, the VVF enjoyed the support of many establishment figures in French Flanders as well as popular support. Clearly both elements of support would be vital if the VVF were to make any progress in its attempts to reverse the decline of Vlaemsch in French Flanders.

One may put forward various explanations for this upsurge in regional sentiment in French Flanders after World War One. Internationally, national self-determination and nationalism were very much at the top of the European political agenda in the wake of the Versailles peace settlement, very much as they had been when the Comité Flamand de France had been founded in 1856. World War One had served to accelerate the destruction of the old order, the last

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<sup>10</sup> Gantois, J-M., article in *Lion de Flandre*, No.3, May / June 1929, pp5-8

<sup>11</sup> Gantois, J-M., report on 15<sup>th</sup> Congress of Bleun Brug, *Bull. du CFF*, 1925, No.4 pp168-171.

remains of feudal Europe had been swept away with the demise of the Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires and that of Czarist Russia. It also represented the birth of mechanised mass destruction; the marvels of the modern age - engineering, aviation, mass production - could no longer be seen purely as a source of progress but also as a source of danger. The attempt to come to terms with the insecurities this caused helped contribute in some countries to the birth of a 'cult of the nation', which in Nazi Germany, for example, challenged established religion. In the regions of France the response to increased alienation from the progressive, Paris centred, secular state, was a desire to reaffirm identity, particularly in terms of faith, 'terre' and consequently mother tongue, the most potent symbols of continuity. As a result, the regionalist movement of French Flanders was by no means the only one to enjoy increased support in France.

Within French Flanders, however, the growth in the regionalist movement should not be seen purely as post war phenomenon; the period from 1899 - 1914 had seen new publications such as *Tisje-Tasjes Almanack* appear and the tours by the Belgian group Pro-Westlandia had met with an enthusiastic reception. It may therefore be suggested that the war had merely brought about a suspension of this growth. Indeed, the desire to preserve the regional way of life in the face of perceived hostile change had been a motivation for the formation of the Comité Flamand more than 60 years before. Now, however, French Flanders had suffered four years of the worst that the modern industrial age could do, destroying its, monuments, communities and churches; that the desire to rebuild all three and thus reaffirm the continuity was strong as the sense of their loss is illustrated by the words of Camille Looten in his Introduction to *Bulletin du*

*Comité Flamand de France* of June 6th 1919<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, the inhabitants not only of French Flanders but of Northern France as a whole, felt those parts of France which had not been fought over or occupied did not understand the extent to which they had suffered. Indeed it has been suggested that some elements within the Paris administration believed that the people of the North were exaggerating their suffering to obtain privileges from the government (Wytteman (ed.), 1988, p303).

Furthermore, the inter war period saw an acceleration in economic change in Northern France. The agricultural community at the heart of Flemish culture in France was disappearing at a faster rate than ever. Between 1921 and 1931 the number of people employed in agriculture and fishing dropped from 123 669 to 109 247 whilst at the same time those employed in industry and transport increased from 532 374 to 639 645 (Wytteman (ed.), 1988, p303). The growth in the latter case is far greater than the drop in the former partly as a result of a greater number of women working in industry (131 067 in 1921, 167 218 in 1931, (Wytteman (ed.), 1988, p305)) and partly as a result of immigration. Both of these factors clearly represent further shocks to the traditional regional culture. It should also be remembered that industrialisation in the Nord / Pas-de-Calais was (with the exception of Dunkirk, itself by this time largely Francophone) concentrated in traditionally Francophone areas, Lille - Roubaix - Tourcoing, Valenciennes and the Lens mining basin. The result was thus not only industry replacing agriculture, urban growth at the expense of rural decline but also accelerated growth in French at the expense of Vlaemsch. Clearly by the 1920s

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<sup>12</sup> Gantois, J-M., report on 15<sup>th</sup> Congress of Bleun Brug, *Bull. du CFF*, 1925, No.4 pp168-171.

the threat to French Flanders, its language and culture had reached a point where it was no longer the concern of a reactionary, intellectual elite.

However, if the events of 1914 - 1932 had caused a degree of alarm amongst those who saw traditional values being eroded, the post war period up to 1932 was one of economic growth - so much so that Jean - Pierre Wytteman, considers it the department's true "Belle Epoque" (Wytteman (ed.), 1988, p314). After 1932 this growth could no longer be sustained. Crises in ad textiles, metallurgy and railways saw a 25% drop in industrial production in 1935. Unemployment increased accordingly, from 3 500 in the department Nord in April 1931 to 70 000 in April 1935. Regional unemployment, according to conservative estimates, contributed 10% of the national total. Regionalists, suspicious of the radical change taking place in French Flanders, would seem to have been proved right. Whilst the VVF had seen steady growth in its support during the 1920s, it was in the 1930s that its popularity was consolidated, as shown by the increased circulation of *De Torrewachter*, *Le Lion de Flandre* and the increasing prestige and quasi official character of its Congresses. Furthermore, as the economic crisis deepened, so did agitation from the radical left. In October 1934 banners at a march for jobs in Lille called for "Les soviets partout" and extolled the virtues of the USSR. In June 1936 254 552 workers were on strike in the department Nord, 1 265 factories occupied (Wytteman (ed.), 1988, p314). The 1936 election saw the Front Populaire left wing alliance win 54% of votes cast in the department, with the communists (22%) making particular progress (Wytteman (ed.), 1988, pp314-5). Whilst such agitation did not make so much direct impact in the rural heart of Vlaemsch speaking Flanders - although the 1936 elections saw the right lose its monopoly on the 4 seats of the Hazebrouck - Dunkirk arrondissement, centrists winning one and the

SFIO another (Wytteman (ed.), 1988, p312) - its repercussions most certainly did. The strength of communism, the international, industrial, urban, atheist anathema of rural, Catholic, French regionalism undoubtedly contributed to increased support for the latter.

Politically in the department Nord, as elsewhere in France, the vigour of the left's actions provoked a conservative response. The Croix-de-Feu movement, drawing much support from the lower middle classes and the shopkeepers, who had been particularly badly hit by the depression, numbered 20 000 members in the department<sup>13</sup>. This movement, with its power base in the urban centres, had a rural counterpart in the "chemises vertes," led by Henri Dhalluin. Whilst neither movement may be directly associated with the Flemish regionalist movement - the Croix-de-Feu in particular was dedicated to the greater glory of the "patrie" - they are indicative of an upsurge in conservative political thought, somewhat akin to the cultural conservatism of the VVF, for example. Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church, the traditional ally of Flemish regionalism in France, was not surprisingly keen to counter this growth of the far left and during the 1930s support for Action Catholique and Catholic youth organisations was particularly high in the Nord.

It would, however, be incorrect to ascribe the rise in popularity in the French Flemish movement purely to national and international currents beyond its control. That would be to underestimate the vigorous programme of events organised by the VVF, which, particularly from the 1928 onwards, through their diversity, were able to reach a broader cross-section of the public than had been

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<sup>13</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 31/7/26, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p121

the case with any previous Flemish initiative in France. This was the result of a concerted effort on the part of the VVF with good central organisation, which strove to break free from the notion that interest in netherlandophone culture in French Flanders was the preserve of the Catholic intelligentsia from the upper echelons of regional society. Indeed, when writing to Breton leader Perrot as early as July 1926, Gantois cites the VVF's "organisation impeccable" as its most important quality (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p289). Furthermore, in the shape of Gantois, the VVF undoubtedly had a leader of great ability and energy. Thus, whilst the Comité Flamand de France was still counting its membership in hundreds, the VVF's reached (according to the prosecution in the VVF trials in 1946) 4 000 by 1944, with a further 12 000 active sympathisers<sup>14</sup>. It must also be stressed that, whilst the VVF's support and perhaps its very existence, owed much to a conservative desire of some sections of the population of French Flanders to cling on to their sense of regional identity in the face of widespread and sweeping change, the VVF continued to maintain – publicly at least - a strictly a-political line. Clearly those with right wing views may well have found ideas they could sympathise with on the pages of *Le Lion de Flandre* or at the VVF's congresses but at this stage the VVF still enjoyed the support of the regional establishment and restricted its efforts to what it considered cultural affairs. That there was a degree of overlap, with regard to the teaching of Vlaemsch for example, was inevitable and unlike the Comité Flamand, the VVF did not seek to back away from the more awkward issues. It did not, however, seek to actively promote political ideas, preferring to see regional issues as taking precedence over party political doctrine. Indeed Gantois' article on Roger

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<sup>14</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 11/8/30, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p136

Salengro after the suicide of the socialist mayor of Lille and Interior Minister, in 1936, affirms that "tout ce qui est flamand est notre,"<sup>15</sup> irrespective of political affiliation.

#### **4.7 Relations between the VVF and other Regionalist Organisations.**

As the product of a fusion of a number of small circles, the VVF was assured of a wide range of contacts within French Flanders and very soon after its foundation, much of the regionalist activity in French Flanders came about under its auspices. Furthermore, as has been illustrated above, the VVF also enjoyed good relations with the Comité Flamand de France. However, its links to other regionalist groups were not limited to those inside French Flanders and had from the outset been active in the Fédération Regionaliste Française, participating in its study day on Bilingualism and cultural duality (20/3/29) in conjunction with the Comité Flamand de France (see above). Furthermore, contrary to allegations of the VVF's anti meridional sentiments made at the post war trials, Gantois had attended the celebrations to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Mistral's birth in 1930<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, the first day of the VVF's congress that year had been a "Hommage à l' Occitanie et à la Bretagne", with Charles-Brun of the Fédération Regionaliste Française, representing the "Amis de la Terre d' Oc" in attendance<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 17/10/30, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p137

<sup>16</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 17/10/30, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p137

<sup>17</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 17/10/30, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p137

However, within France, the VVF - in the shape principally of Gantois himself - sought to establish closer links with the Breton Movement and that of Alsace - Lorraine, to form what he saw as a "liaison tripartite" between the three<sup>18</sup>. It was, perhaps, inevitable that there should be some attempt at forging links between French Flanders and Alsace - Lorraine, as France's two Germanic minorities. These links were facilitated when, in 1927, Gantois was assigned to a parish in Lorraine. During this 18 month stay Gantois was able to make the acquaintance of various members of the regionalist movement there, including leading figures such as l'abbé Zemb, who wrote for the newspaper *Die Zukunft* and possibly l'abbé Dr Xavier Haegy, editor of the monthly, Catholic, regionalist review, *Die Heimat* (published from 1921 - 1939) and chairman of the management committee of the catholic publisher "Alsatia", about whom Gantois published an article in *La Libre Lorraine* on June 22, 1929<sup>19</sup>. Both during and after his time in Lorraine, Gantois contributed to this publication, with for example, articles on L'abbé Lemire and leading Breton regionalist, l'abbé Perrot. However, logical though such links between the two Germanic movements may have been, they may, with hindsight, be considered somewhat detrimental to the VVF in the long term, since Alsace in particular was the scene of regionalist / autonomist activity of such dimensions as to warrant the attentions of the President, Poincaré, himself. Indeed, when he came to Strasbourg in February 1928 to preach national unity to Alsatian mayors, the town was sealed by troops and police for the day. The election of a town council seen as "autonomiste" by central government and the Parisian press, in Hagenau, led to closer government attention to all regionalist groups, particularly those with contacts in

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<sup>18</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 17/10/30, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p137

<sup>19</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 17/10/30, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p137

Alsace - Lorraine. Even before this time official investigations had been carried out into the activities of regionalists in French, 3 in 1926 and 2 more 1927, at the behest (according to Gantois) of the Ministries of the Interior, Foreign Affairs and War <sup>20</sup>. After this time one notes in Gantois' letters to Breton leader Perrot increasing caution, although as early as July 1926 Gantois had urged him to burn his letters - "pour ma sécurité personnelle"<sup>21</sup>, a request he was to repeat subsequently <sup>22</sup>. Indeed the scale of the governments efforts led Gantois to denounce his persecutors as "fascistes" <sup>23</sup>, an ironic term to use given the charges later brought against Gantois and the VVF. Clearly Gantois realised that, rightly or wrongly, his activities were viewed with suspicion outside regionalist circles; what he could not know was how dangerous these suspicions - particularly regarding expressions of Germanic brotherhood with Alsace Lorraine - would become.

Equally important to Gantois' tripartite bond as Alsace - Lorraine was Brittany. He stated at the 15th Congress of the Breton organisation Bleun Brug (8 - 10 September 1925) that "l'âme bretonne" and "l'âme Flamande" were "deux âmes soeurs" and "nos deux peuples deux peuples frères" (Gantois, J-M., 1926(a), pp5-17). The foundations for links between the Breton movement and the VVF were actually laid before the latter was formed. As early as 1920 the Marquis de Estourbeillon, guest of honour at the VVF's 1930 conference, député for Vannes and a life-long activist in the Breton movement, had attended the Congrès de la Fédération régionaliste française du Nord at du Pas-de-Calais and Breton

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<sup>20</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 26/2/28, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p123

<sup>21</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 31/7/26, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p122

<sup>22</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 24/3/28, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p125 & 2/6/28, p129

<sup>23</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 26/2/28, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p123

regionalists had long moved in the same circles as those from the Comité Flamand (see chapter 3). Furthermore, Nicolas Bourgeois - a leading figure in the VVF who had first become involved in regionalist activities through contact with Charles-Brun, when a student at the Ecole Normale Supérieur - is mentioned by Gantois to Perrot as having a particular interest in Brittany and as being a friend of de Estourbeillon.

Once again, Gantois was most active in cultivating these links, maintaining correspondence with leading Breton activist l'abbé Perrot from 1925 until the latter's death in 1943, coming to refer to the Breton as "Mon cher "Parrain""<sup>24</sup>. This friendship seems to have developed after Gantois had attended the 15th congress of Perrot's organisation Bleun Brug at Guingamp in 1925. Gantois' speech at this congress was subsequently published in *Le Beffroi* (Gantois 1926(a), pp5-17) and a report on the congress, again written by Gantois, appeared in the *Bulletins* of the Comité Flamand de France (Gantois J-M., 1925, pp168-171). This set the scene for long term collaboration between the Breton Movement (principally Bleun Brug) and the VVF. This collaboration was largely in the form of an exchange of publications - Gantois had both *De Vlaemsche Stemme in Frankrijk* and *Le Beffroi* regularly sent to Perrot and in return received Bleun Brug's publication *Feiz ha Breiz* - articles about the other's activities (cf. for example Gantois' articles on the 1925 conference and his article in *La Libre Lorraine* on Perrot<sup>25</sup> and attending each other's congresses. Furthermore, Gantois was responsible for sending copies of the Alsatian regionalist publications *Die Heimat* and *La Libre Lorraine* to Perrot<sup>26</sup>. This co-operation is

<sup>24</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 31/7/26, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p120

<sup>25</sup> Gantois, unsigned article in *La libre Lorraine*, 24/3/28

<sup>26</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 24/3/28, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p125

perhaps indicative of a desire, if not a need, for regional movements to pull together in the face of increasing government hostility from the mid 1920s onwards; Alsatian autonomists (although Gantois is reluctant to use this word<sup>27</sup>) put on trial in May 1928, were, for example represented by Breton and Corsican lawyers<sup>28</sup>. In addition to Bleun Brug, Gantois was in contact with other leading figures in the Breton movement, such as l'abbé Madec and Olier Mordrel, the leader of the organisation Breiz Atao, with whom Gantois was later to work on the Breton nationalist publication *Stur*, from 1943 - 5. The connection between Nicolas Bourgeois and le Marquis de Estourbeillon has already been noted.

Clearly efforts were made to bring together the regionalist movements of France particularly those Gantois saw as forming the "liaison tripartite"<sup>29</sup> (French Flanders, Brittany, Alsace - Lorraine) and many of the efforts were orchestrated by Gantois himself. Indeed, by the time Gantois left Lorraine in April 1928, he considered that, "la fameuse liaison tripartite est devenue une réalité"<sup>30</sup>. However, the achievements of this "liaison" remained rather modest. As Gantois himself recognised, the situations in the 3 provinces in 1928 were so different as to render what he termed "action commune à résultats pratiques immédiats"<sup>31</sup> impossible - the development of the movement in Alsace - Lorraine far outstripped those of Brittany and French Flanders in terms of doctrine and organisation. At that time he was therefore forced to see this "liaison" as an intellectual and sentimental one. However, this tripartite collaboration did give

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<sup>27</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 2/4/28, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p126

<sup>28</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 2/4/28, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p128 & footnote, p128

<sup>29</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 26/2/28, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p124

<sup>30</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 26/2/28, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p124

<sup>31</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to l'abbé Perrot, 26/2/28, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p124

rise, in July 1936, to the publication *Bulletin des minorités nationales en France*, which in January 1937 became *Peuples et Frontières*. Although the initial impetus for this review came from the Breton group Breiz Atao, the VVF was an active collaborator and much of the publication was devoted to the 3 provinces of the "liaison tripartite".

However, whilst this collaboration may have brought only limited achievements in real terms, it did serve to incur the suspicion of central government. Reporting of the trials of the Alsatian nationalists in 1928 and the role played in the events by other regional groups helped give an impression of a nation-wide co-ordination of regionalist activity, which could easily be portrayed as a threat to national unity and which as such could ultimately prove detrimental to the VVF's efforts. Working in isolation, purely in French Flanders, the VVF would perhaps have been able to achieve more before central government would show signs of alarm.

The VVF's contacts with regionalist groups was not, however, limited to France. Indeed Gantois felt it might have been advantageous to establish links with Quebec as the French public was sensitive to that region's desire to maintain its language in the face of English domination, in the hope that they would then, in turn become more sensitive to the situation in French Flanders. These links, like those with the Boers of South Africa remained, however, theoretical (Gantois, J-M., 1926(b), p13). Concrete links did, however, exist between the VVF and the Belgian Flemish Movement, as had always been the case for the Comité Flamand. The extent of the links should not, however, be exaggerated. Gantois for one felt that French Flanders was separated from the rest of the netherlandophone world by a "mur de Chine" (Gantois, 1942, p58) and that

Holland and Belgian Flanders were in no way doing enough to help the Flemings of France, stating:

Je suis convaincu au contraire qu' il n'existe pas d'autres cas, dans l'histoire des pays Européens, d'un peuple qui, ayant le devoir de se soucier "d' une terra irredenta", s'en soit si peu préoccupé. (Gantois, 1942, p75).

Nevertheless, there was some contact between the VVF and organisations in both Holland and Belgium, although for the most part this contact meant members of the VVF attending conferences and congresses organised in those countries, such as the Vlaamsch Wetenschappelijk Congres held in Gent in April 1926, attended by 3 leading members of the VVF, Gantois, Antoine Lescroart and Marcel Janssen. Indeed Janssen was to have addressed the congress about linguistic regionalism in French Flanders, but was prevented from so doing due to the illness of his mother<sup>32</sup>. Gantois himself was also in contact with the Ruysbroekgenootschap, a Flemish Jesuit group in Belgium devoted to the study of mysticism in Flanders and Holland, whose work, notably their review *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, was the inspiration for a quarterly publication *Cahiers de la Mystique flamande*, which Gantois intended to publish in 1928, but which never progressed beyond the planning stage<sup>33</sup>. Furthermore, the Ruysbroekgenootschap was some way removed from the mainstream of the Flemish movement in Belgium.

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<sup>32</sup> Footnote to Gantois' letter 20/10/25, *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p119

<sup>33</sup> Gantois, J-M., letter to Perrot, 12/6/28, published in *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p130

A notable exception to this rule was the organisation Pro - Westlandia mentioned at 4.4, above, whose pre - war tours of French Flanders had helped inspire interest in the region's Flemish heritage. Antoine Lescroart, in particular, had become involved in the French Flemish movement as a result of the influence of this organisation, an influence consolidated by the time he spent in Belgian Flanders during World War I, which may well have been the case for other French Flemings. Whilst the activities of Pro - Westlandia undoubtedly contributed to the increased interest in Vlaemsch and Netherlandic culture which in turn resulted in the formation of the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk, they, do of course, predate the latter's formation. After the war no similar group replaced it until Zannekin in 1937, who continued to work with the VVF during World War 2. However, for most of the inter - war period the only external assistance for the Flemish movement in France came from the *Algemeen Nederlands Verbond*. In 1925 Gantois became this organisation's second representative in French Flanders, succeeding l'abbé Descamps. This organisation offered its support to a number of cultural events in French Flanders and served as a link to cultural developments in Holland and Belgian Flanders.

On a rather more informal level Gantois was keen to underline the work of Edmond Gijselinck "un simple employé de commerce," who, with a group of friends in Furnes and Courtrai, helped forge "le premier maillon de ce qui devait nous unir avec nos frères de l' autre côté de la "frontière" "Gantois, 1942, p59). That Gantois should consider this man, by no means an important figure in the Flemish movement as a whole and lacking any institutional backing as a major source of support from over the border, perhaps serves to highlight the paucity of the "official" support.

Other contacts tended to be sporadic. Gantois mentions in his *Hoe ik mijn Taal en mijn Volk terugvond* the support shown by the Vlaamse Toeristenbond, the Dutch newspaper *De Standaard* and the Belgian Flemish activist Joris van Severen (Gantois, 1942, p75).

Whilst in practical terms Gantois may have been justified in his scathing comments on the lack of encouragement the VVF and other Flemish organisations in French Flanders received from Holland and Belgium, the situation in Belgium and the reporting of it in the French press meant that any support, real or imagined, was viewed with suspicion. The Netherlandification of the University of Gent between 1920 and 1930, in particular, was widely reported in the French press, often based on information supplied by hostile, Francophone, Belgian journalists (Landry & de Verrwaere, 1982, p287). Indeed, France had long been sympathetic to the cause of the Francophone Belgians and comments such as van Severen's "la Belgique, qu'elle crève" (quoted in Deleu et al. (eds.), 1973, p309), were regarded with hostility. This hostility was then, to a degree, extended to the Flemish movement on France's own soil. Similarly, connections with van Severen, a fervent believer in the idea of a "Great Netherlands", encompassing French Flanders, were not calculated to allay suspicions.

#### **4.8 The Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk during World War 2.**

The activities of the VVF from 1940 - 1944 constitute the greatest controversy the Flemish movement in France has ever known. The outbreak of hostilities in 1939 saw the VVF's annual congress - due to deal with the nationality question -

cancelled and its other activities suspended for reasons of national security. Whilst given the VVF's avowed purely cultural intentions, this may seem rather harsh, governmental suspicion of the regionalist movements during the inter-war period - suspicion the VVF did little to avoid - the potential appeal of Nazi Pan-German philosophy to some elements within the Flemish Movement in both Belgium and France, combined with the strategic position of French Flanders, made it hardly surprising. However, after the French capitulation of 1940 and Gantois' return from military service, the VVF resumed its activities in January 1941. Publication of *De Torrewachter* and *Le Lion de Flandre* resumed, Gantois entitling his first post-armistice editorial in *Le Lion de Flandre* "La Flandre continue". In fact it did more than continue; it flourished. The circulation of *Le Lion de Flandre* increased from 1,200 copies in 1939 to 2,000 in 1944, whilst, as stated above, *de Torrewachter* had, by the same year reached 10,000 copies per month (Landry & de Verwaere, 1982, p289). So impressive were these figures that they were quoted as evidence against Gantois and other VVF leaders at the collaboration trials of 1946.

Not only did the VVF continue with its pre-war activities, it also expanded its operations. In April 1942 moved to new, more spacious accommodation in Lille. These new headquarters soon developed into a Flemish cultural centre. 1942 also saw the founding of the Zuid Vlaamsche Jeugd, with its own monthly publication, *Jeunes de Flandres*. This youth branch of the VVF, which had particular popularity around Lille was to some a form of regional scout group. To others the love of uniform, flags and parade suggested a copy of the Hitler Youth (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p289). Also founded in 1942 (November) in Lille was the Institut Flamand. The institute organised courses and lectures on regional art, history and traditions and numbered amongst its teachers Gantois,

Nicolas Bourgeois and other leading VVF figures. For the academic year 1942/3, 821 people enrolled in these different courses.

Equally successful, though independent - in theory at least - from the VVF was the new, regional publication, *La Vie du Nord*. Published weekly, *La Vie du Nord*, sought to blend historical and cultural features with articles dealing with the every day problems of living in occupied France, always foregrounding the interests of French Flanders. The publication was edited by André Cauvin - a member of the VVF who also taught at the Institut Flamand - and counted Gantois and other VVF activists amongst its contributors. By the the liberation *La Vie du Nord* was selling 50,000 copies per week (Landry & de Verwaere, 1982, p289).

Other activities included the establishment of a Compagnie de l'art Flamand, organising exhibitions of Flemish paintings and a circle for Flemish immigrants from Belgium.

Clearly World War 2 represented a high point in the achievements of the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk; it was, however, this very success which was to count against them after the liberation. The VVF continued with its activities after the German withdrawal until, on 6th September 1944 Gantois was arrested. In the days that followed a further 49 members of the VVF and the Zuid Vlaamsche Jeugd suffered a similar fate on various charges of collaboration. There then followed a campaign orchestrated by *La Voix du Nord*, seen by regionalists as a witch hunt, in which all manner of accusations under the broad heading of "au service de l'ennemi" were made against the leaders of the VVF. Other than the VVFs war-time support - how could any organisation flourish

during the occupation except with connivance of the Nazis? was the question generally asked - the chief evidence against the VVF, Gantois in particular, was a letter found by members of the resistance in Le Touquet, from Gantois to Hitler in December 1940.

In this letter Gantois asks Hitler to allow French Flanders to join with the Northern Netherlands to form a united "Dietschland", which would form the western march of the Reich. "Nous sommes des bas-Allemands et nous voulons faire retour au Reich" is his impassioned plea.

However, this seemingly damning piece of evidence is not free of controversy, controversy highlighted in works sympathetic to the regionalist cause, such as Landry and Verrewaere's *Histoire secrète de la Flandre et de l'Artois* (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p290) and ignored by those not, Wytteman's *Le Nord*, for example, which allocates 13 lines and one quotation to the VVF, purely to give examples of "une collaboration limitée" (Wytteman (ed.) 1988, p326). The controversy centres on the authenticity of the letter. Whilst the argument that the style of writing was not Gantois' may be somewhat tenuous, the fact that it was type written and unsigned and that 46 pages of the accompanying 57 page dissertation were missing, do raise serious doubts. Furthermore no adequate explanation of how the letter reached Le Touquet was given<sup>34</sup>. At the trial, which began on 9th December 1946, Gantois represented himself, maintaining that he was "ni coupable, ni repentant" (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p292). Whilst his performance won the further admiration of his supporters he was, on 29th

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<sup>34</sup> There is, reputedly, evidence which supports the authenticity of the "Hitler Letter" at the University of Cambrai. This evidence has not, as yet, been published. Cf. footnote to Gantois' letter of 15/12/40 to l'abbé Perrot, *Les Pays-Bas français*, op cit., p139.

December 1946, nevertheless found guilty. Gantois was sentenced to five years imprisonment, had half of his property confiscated and was not allowed to visit the departments in which the VVF had been active, as well as those in which other regionalist groups had operated in Alsace-Lorraine, Brittany, certain Occitan departments, French Catalonia, French Basque territories, with the exception of Corsica. Of the other defendants, Nicolas Bourgeois was acquitted, André Cauvin, sentenced to death in absentia but later pardoned by René Coty and the others found guilty and receiving sentences of between 2 years and 6 months imprisonment. The VVF was wound up and half of its property confiscated. In the event Gantois was released after serving just 1 year in prison.

The question of the guilt of Gantois and his fellow activists is of considerable importance to the French Flemish movement in the post World War 2 era. That there were elements within the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk who supported aspects of Nazi ideology is without doubt. The VVF's war-time press officer Dr Quesnoy even went to the extent of measuring the skulls of inhabitants of the Nord department to show they were of Germanic rather than French stock (Wytteman, (ed.), 1988, p327, quoted from *Rapport du Sous-préfet*, 4-5/9/42). Similarly pan-Netherlandic ideas were undeniably held by some members of the organisation. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that the VVF's activities did have the official authorisation of occupying forces but does that, in itself, prove active collaboration on the part of the organisation's members?

The VVF was not the only regionalist organisation to have suffered in the wake of the liberation; the Breton movement, with which Gantois and his associates had been eager to forge links, had also been victim to similar allegations and

trials. Indeed Gantois' friend, l'abbé Perrot, had been murdered in November 1943, perhaps by the communist resistance as a collaborator. Whilst Perrot's supporters refute this allegation, his name was adopted by the Breton section of the Nazi Sicherheitsdienst, Bezen Perrot. Similarly Joris van Severen, "ce grand néerlandais", as Gantois refers to him, was expelled from Belgium as a danger to national security after the German invasion in 1940 and was subsequently shot dead in Abbeville on 20th May 1940, by 'drunken French guards' (Deleu et al. (eds.), 1973, p309). In van Severen's case too, there is no evidence of collaboration - he was expelled from Belgium before the possibility arose - but Gantois and the VVF were undoubtedly contaminated by the suspicion surrounding both him and Perrot. The VVF was further compromised by the way certain elements of the Belgian Flemish Movement had embraced Nazism. Staf de Clerq, leader of the Vlaams Nationaal Verbond, had seen Belgium and not Germany as the true enemy of the Flemish people and trusted Hitler to do what was right (Deleu et al., (eds.), 1973, p309). Augustus Borms who had been active in Pro-Westlandia prior to World War I, was, amongst others, convicted of collaboration in April 1946. Many people may well have felt that the connections were simply too close, particularly in the light of the apparent co-operation amongst regional groups in France during the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, central government, uneasy about this co-operation at the time, was now presented with the perfect excuse to eradicate the problem.

In defence of Gantois and the majority of the VVF one may clearly argue that most of the evidence was circumstantial, a question of guilt by association and that Nazi sympathisers had worked their way into many organisations. Of Gantois, responsible for forming much of the VVF's philosophy, one may say that, whilst frequently critical of central government, nowhere - except possibly in

the Hitler letter - did he state his support for Nazism, Pan-Germanism or the Grootnederland, in a political sense<sup>35</sup>. Indeed in citing l'abbé Lemire - champion of the idea of the "petite patrie" as a part of the greater nation - as one of major formative influences as a Flemish activist, one might infer exactly the opposite. Even at the immediate aftermath of his trial, Gantois found support amongst the establishment of the department Nord. The President of the court of Lille, Paul Foucart, was sufficiently convinced of Gantois' innocence as to write a "Requête à Monsieur le Président de la République" in April 1947, in which he states:

Les raisons qui ont fait agir l'abbé Gantois [furent] le sort à ne pas perdre de vue de son régionalisme à travers et malgré l'état de guerre, le souci de maintenir en permanence malgré les événements.(Somers, M., 1978 p60)

This argument has subsequently been adopted by many sympathetic to the cause of the Flemish movement in France.

Modern French Flemish activists point to the sentences received by Gantois - in almost all cases light - as proof that even the government realised that it did not have a case. They suggest that the VVF's true crime in the eyes of the authorities was to have gone beyond the pale of what constituted acceptable regionalist activity, as established by organisation such as the Comité Flamand de France, principally by attaining popular support. Clearly any organisation seriously intending to arrest or reverse the decline of a language must have

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<sup>35</sup> At this stage: post World War Two he did express interest in the creation of the New Netherlands.

popular support. One might therefore surmise that only regional organisations incapable of attaining their goals were tolerated.

The question of motives and actions on both sides is clearly anything but straightforward. However, to all but the activists of the French Flemish movement, Gantois and the VVF's guilt was plain. Even today many of the older generation in the Nord / Pas-de-Calais speak with suspicion of their Flemish speaking neighbours, the "Boches du Nord", all of whom were fifth columnists and collaborators. In the minds of these people the length of sentence was immaterial, the French Flemish movement had been brought to trial and been found guilty. This verdict was to eradicate any progress the VVF may have made on behalf of Vlaemsch and Netherlandic culture in the 1920s and 30s. Indeed the stigma now attached to Vlaemsch was far worse than that of uneducated, peasant patois which the Ministry for Education had sought to promote.

#### 4.9 The Comité Flamand de France, 1921 - 1947

The scope and nature of the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk's activities take the focus of Flemish regionalism in France away from the Comité Flamand de France for much of the inter-war period. Whilst undoubtedly overshadowed by Gantois' organisation, the Comité did continue to meet regularly and to publish its *Bulletins* and *Annales*, although the period was one of relative inactivity (Somers, M., 1978, p60). Most of its efforts were concerned with the reconstruction of French Flanders after the devastation of World War One, as

Looten had set out in 1919 (cf. Ch4.3, above). Efforts on behalf of Vlaemsch subsequent to Looten's declarations at the 1920 regionalist conference were limited to the publication of two articles in the Comité's *Annales*, *La Question du Flamand* by Looten, published in 1921 and *Le Flamand et l'Ecole*, by Nicholas Bourgeois, also an important figure in the VVF, discussed above, published in 1926. Looten's article stressed the relative strength of Vlaemsch as a spoken language, "Aujourd'hui encore elle est parlée communément par tous les villageois" (Looten, C., 1921, p269), in contrast to the decline in literacy in the language, as a result of the various education reforms of the second half of the 19th century (Looten, C., 1921, pp270-1) and stressed the importance of acting to remedy the situation. Bourgeois' article picked up this theme, stating the case for the teaching of Vlaemsch in schools in much the same terms as Looten and Lemire had done before him. Well intentioned as both articles undoubtedly were, in comparison to the active, practical promotion of Vlaemsch favoured by the VVF, they do not represent a major effort.

The Comité Flamand's relative inactivity at a time which, it has been suggested above, was favourable to the development of regional movements, a suggestion the success of the VVF goes some way to confirm, may appear somewhat surprising. However, the very success of the VVF and the relationship between the two organisations may well go some way towards explaining this situation. It must be remembered that, whilst ideologically committed to the preservation of Vlaemsch in French Flanders, the Comité Flamand had only rarely made it a priority for action: faced with the considerable task of rebuilding the cultural, historical and architectural heritage of French Flanders, such activity was unlikely to become one now. Indeed the VVF's vigorous action on behalf of the language

reduced the necessity for the Comité Flamand to undertake such action itself - there would have been little point in duplicating each others' efforts.

One should not underestimate the closeness of the relationship that existed between the two organisations until the mid 1930s. Looten's encouragement and support for the VVF has already been highlighted, perhaps suggesting that he felt the VVF would engage in those - primarily linguistic - activities which the CFF had neither the resources nor the inclination to undertake, in short that the two groups could play complementary roles in the French Flemish movement. This notion may also be supported by the fact that a number of the Comité Flamand's members - Gantois, Bourgeois, Lescroart amongst them - were also active in the VVF. Indeed this very fact may well contribute to the inactivity of the CFF - it would be difficult to maintain the same degree of commitment to both movements. That those in this situation seem often to have reserved their greatest efforts for the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk may well have been the result of the respective vigour of the organisations' leaderships.

The importance of the role played by Gantois in the VVF was, undeniably, vital to its success. However, it should not be forgotten that Looten was just as dominant a figure in the CFF and whilst Gantois was wholeheartedly focused on the success of his organisation, Looten's attention was rather more divided. Not only was Looten involved in promoting the VVF but also in establishing a chair of Dutch at Lille's Catholic University, a goal he attained in July 1926 (Somers, M., 1978, p60, decree of 23/7/26).

However, the period of close collaboration between Looten and Gantois and the VVF came to an end towards 1935 as Looten became increasingly concerned

with Gantois' "extravagances" (*Bull. du CFF*, Oct., 1978 ), particularly what he saw as the exploitation of the linguistic movement by extremists (*Bull. du CFF*, Oct., 1978 & Somers, M., 1978, p62). By this time, however, Looten was 80 and had been President of the Comité Flamand for over 35 years and particularly in view of his other commitments, was perhaps not in the best position to resuscitate it.

Thus, when war came in 1939, whilst the Comité Flamand de France was still in existence, it had ceased to be the major influence in the Flemish movement in French Flanders. However, its conduct during the war, in contrast to that of the VVF, ensured its survival. In fact, during the occupation, the CFF suspended all activity "dans la volonté délibérée de ne pas se prêter sous l'occupation aux desseins de l'ennemi"(Hennart, R., 1948, p1) as Robert Hennart, the Comité's secretary, wrote in the *Bulletin* of 1946, with perhaps the implication that those who did continue their activity (ie the VVF) did play into the enemy's hands. Between 1940 and the "Réunion de reprise" of 27th July 1946, with the exception of the publication of two editions of the *Annales* (1942 and 1946) the Comité Flamand remained steadfast in its undertaking. These two *Annales* contained nothing remotely controversial or useful to the Germans or their propaganda. The first was principally published to commemorate the death in 1941 of Camille Looten, which the new president, Auguste Leman, saw, in part at least, as a result of the war (Leman, A., 1942, p16). In his *Avant Propos*, Leman also reaffirmed the Comité's commitment to remain "fidèle au programme tracé par Edmond De Coussemaker en 1853". The rest of the volume consisted in a history of the collège in Bailleul from its foundation until 1942. The 1944 *Annales* consisted entirely in the story of St Winoc, the patron saint of Bergues.

The period 1940-46 proved traumatic for the Comité Flamand for reasons other than the war itself. Not only was it robbed of the leadership of Camille Looten - a loss lamented by his successor, Canon Auguste Leman, in the 1942 *Annales* (Leman, A., 1942, p16) - but also that of Leman himself who died on 1st February 1945, after less than four years in office. He was in turn succeeded by the Comité's Vice-President, Paul Verschave, who whilst still Vice-President, organised the Comité's first post-war meeting on 27th June 1946. It was at this meeting that Verschave was confirmed President. Vlaemsch was Verschave's mother tongue, as Robert Hennart was to write in the 1948 *Bulletin* his "langue de préférence" (Hennart, R., 1948, p13) and he retained, again in Hennart's words, "fidelité à sa langue et à son terroir" (Hennart, R., 1948, p13). What his presidency would have meant for the Comité Flamand and its view of linguistic issues in light of this, one can but guess, since he too died on 18th December 1947, having presided over the meeting of 27th June and the tour of the war damaged towns of Steenvoorde, Les Moeres, Bergues and Cassel - echoing the outing organised by Looten after World War One - which marked the Comité's true post World War Two relaunch. Verschave was, in turn, succeeded by Monsignor Lucien Detrez at the meeting of 11th March 1948.

In addition to the war and the death of three presidents in the space of six years, the Comité Flamand had, at the same time, to contend with the loss of two other leading figures. Pre-war Treasurer Réné Giard died on 5th May 1940 and Leman's Vice-President, Pierre Turpin, on November 17 1944. Clearly such upheaval would have a detrimental effect on the Comité's efforts to resume its activities and this in a climate for the most part hostile to Flemish regionalism in France, in the wake of the VVF trials. Nevertheless, the Comité was forced to make more radical changes to its leadership than it would probably otherwise

have envisaged, in turn providing an opportunity for new ideas to come to the fore.

The Comité's new board, elected at the meeting of 11th March 1948, contained two men decorated by the state. Detrez held the Médaille Commémorative de la Guerre 1939 - 1944 and one of the four Vice - Presidents, Marcel Decroix, the Légion d'Honneur, a good indication that they were not tainted with allegations of collaboration, clearly a consideration of some importance for the post-war Flemish movement in France. Also amongst the Comité's officers, in the role of librarian/archivist was l'Abbé Lescroart and amongst its ordinary members, Jean-Marie Gantois<sup>36</sup>. The Comité's membership list, published subsequent to this meeting, reveals a total of 555 members (including the board of administrators, which numbered nine), which compares favourably to the figures of 1914 (340 members) and 1921 (551 members, including 12 honorary and 38 correspondent)<sup>37</sup>. Whilst it is true that the Comité Flamand was, once again, the sole Flemish organisation active in France and as such might have expected to have increased its membership, this was, of course, true in the two instances cited above. Furthermore any increase could be seen as an achievement at a time when Flemish regionalism had received a lot of bad publicity, thanks largely to the efforts of *La Voix du Nord*, and the other principal French Flemish organisation was banned. Whilst more militant regionalists, particularly language activists might continue to criticise what they have termed the "Comité Français du Flamand", the CFF's policy of keeping their heads down, avoiding controversy and particularly steering clear of potential accusations of collaboration, had

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<sup>36</sup> CFF membership list, published in *Annales du Comité Flamand de France*, 1948, ppl-XV

<sup>37</sup> CFF membership list, published in *Annales du Comité Flamand de France*, 1948, ppl-XV & *Annales*, 1921, ppl-XXIII

ensured that the French Flemish movement had survived into the post-war era. What form that movement would now take and what the implications for Vlaemsch in France were, remained to be seen.

## 5 The Flemish movement in French Flanders from 1948 to the present

### 5.1 The Flemish movement in France, 1948 - 1968.

When Jean-Marie Gantois was released from prison in October 1948, with still more than a year of his sentence left to serve, the entire regionalist movement in French Flanders - in common with those in many other regions of France - had been discredited. Even the Comité Flamand de France, criticised by other sections of the French Flemish movement for its moderation, had difficulty finding support (Castre, *La Flandre au Lion*, Editions Westhoek, 1977, p59). Although relatively few Flemish activists were actually brought to trial in 1946 - and even fewer actually convicted, the sense of shame that the VVF had brought upon the movement was such that:

...la majorité des membres du VVF disparurent à la libération sans laisser d'adresse, nombreux d'entre eux ne voulant plus entendre parler de régionalisme en général et du problème flamand en particulier. (Olivier Engelaere, *Le Mouvement flamand en France de la libération à la mort de Jean-Marie Gantois. 1945 - 1968*. Published in *Les Pays-Bas Français*, 1991, p84).

It was not really until after the upheavals of 1968, coincidentally also the year of Gantois' death, that a new Flemish movement started to make progress in French Flanders.

However, this is not to suggest that Flemish activists were completely idle during this period. The CFF started to meet again and to publish its *Annales* and *Bulletins*, focusing on historical and cultural matters, as it had after World War I. Although after the founding of the VVF it had ceased to be the focal point of the French Flemish movement with regard to linguistic and political

questions - if it ever truly had been such a focal point - the CFF once again, merely by its presence, helped ensure the survival of this movement in French Flanders.

Nor had his prison sentence dissuaded Gantois from his activities on behalf of the Flemish cause: less than a month after his release, Gantois, under the pseudonym of Henri Dumesnil published *Veut - on vraiment faire l'Europe?* which sought to place French Flanders in the context of future European developments, particularly in terms of federalism. However, still forbidden to set foot in the *départements* Nord and Pas-de-Calais,<sup>1</sup> his activities were limited to writing articles. Even this was difficult since his library had been confiscated and he no longer had the means to replace it. However, on 3rd December 1949 the courts decided that the *interdiction de séjour* should be replaced by a ten year *interdiction de résidence*, which at least meant he could visit French Flanders and meet fellow activists (or rather those fellow activists who still wanted to meet him). Now chaplain in a girls' orphanage in Brachay, Haute-Marne, Gantois had ample time to write. Having re-established his contacts in Belgium, most notably Vital Celen, Gantois was able to publish extensively in the netherlandophone Belgian reviews *De Vlaamse Linie*, *De Toerist* and most significantly, *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen*. The appearance of his work in a scholarly publication like *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen* helped restore a reputation tarnished by his wartime activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Ch4.8

### 5.1.1 The Komitee Voor Frans-Vlaanderen

While it is true that Gantois was becoming increasingly active again, questions must be asked about the impact these activities were having in French Flanders. It should not be forgotten that his articles were published in Belgium and although he ensured certain associates received copies (cf. Engelaere, 1991, p88) they were unlikely to spark a revival in the fortunes of the French Flemish movement. Of considerably greater significance was the founding of the Komitee Voor Frans-Vlaanderen, which Olivier Engelaere considers, "...l'événement capital pour la Flandre française et pour la continuité du Mouvement flamand en France."(1991, p91)

Created in 1947<sup>2</sup> by André Demedts and Luc Verbeke - respectively its first President and its first Secretary<sup>3</sup> - the KFV's aim was to raise awareness of French Flanders in the netherlandophone world and to help promote netherlandophone culture in French Flanders. Interestingly Gantois was not a supporter of this initiative as he saw it as an example of Franco-Flemish collaboration rather than of collaboration between Flemings (Castré, 1977, p64). Furthermore he was hostile to Demedts who had published an article in *De Vlaamse Linie* which had been critical of the VVF.

Having little contact with French Flemish activists, Demedts and Verbeke made contact with the Belgian Flemish community in France. Their most useful collaborator was Ward Corsmit, a Flemish priest based in Lille who had been active in the Flemish Movement in Belgium. Between them they set about finding French Flemings sympathetic to the KFV's goals, which

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<sup>2</sup> The date of 1947 is given in the organisations own information material; the *Encyclopédie van de Vlaamse Beweging* gives the date as 1948 (Deleu et al., 1973, p316) Olivier Engelaere gives the date of 9th August 1947 for the KFV first meeting and October 1947 for the second (Engelaere, 1991, p91)

<sup>3</sup> Luc Verbeke still held this position in 1993

Demedts stated in October 1947 as: establishing contacts between French and Belgian Flemings, the organisation of conferences in French Flanders and producing a publication of some description for French Flemings (Engelaere, 1991, p92)

Initially much of the KFV's work was undertaken by its founder members themselves but the organisation can now rely on a considerable number of unpaid volunteers in France, Belgium and the Netherlands to organise its activities. The KFV is based at Waregem in Belgium but has centres in Soest in the Netherlands and at the Centre de Culture Populaire Flamande "Het Blauwershof" (cf 5.5, 5.4 and 5.9, below) in Godewaersvelde in French Flanders.

The KFV seeks to promote links "...de nature amicale, artistique, culturelle, touristique et économique," (KFV information sheet, 1993, p[1]) between French Flanders, netherlandophone Belgium and the Netherlands. However, Flemish activists on both sides of the border have been at pains to refute any suggestions of pan-Netherlandic aspirations behind this organisation, Eric Vandewalle stating in *Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*,

Het Comité heeft angstvallig het terrein van alle getheoretiseer en van de partij- politiek vermeden, uitdrukkelijk het Franse staatsburgerschap van de Frans-Vlamingen erkend, en zijn activiteiten op onmiddellijke realisaties gericht. (Deleu, et al., 1973, p317)

Marc Castre claims that the "Noble but, but désintéressé [of the KFV]...n'est pas toujours compris ainsi et cela oblige le KFV à une oeuvre discrète mais efficace." (Castre, 1977, p63)

In 1948 the KFV organised the first annual "Journée Culturelle de la Flandre", in Waregem, Belgium. Prominent figures from the Flemish movement on both sides of the border, such as Emmanuel Looten, Maxime Deswarté and Eduard Amter, the Secretary General of the Davidsfonds were present at this inaugural event. Care was taken not to arouse the suspicions of the French authorities, with the French flag appearing alongside those of Belgium and Flanders and the Marseillaise being played, although Albert van Hoywegen, the Belgian former Vice-President of the VVF did attend. However, the tone gradually became more militant. In the second year Eduard Amter announced the establishment of a branch of the Davidsfonds in French Flanders. This in itself does not represent a particularly radical act but did potentially leave the Flemish Movement in both Belgium and France open to the separatist and pan-Netherlandic accusations they had been at pains to avoid the previous year. By the third year the French and Belgian flags had disappeared and the event was attended by representatives of the *Algemeen Nederlands Verbond*. Maxime Deswarté was so concerned by these developments that he did not attend that year, or indeed for the following eight. Jean-Marie Gantois, however, viewed such developments in a much more favourable light and attended for the first time in 1952 (Engelaere, 1991, p99)<sup>4</sup>.

The *Journée Culturelle* has taken place every year since 1948, one year in Waregem and the next in Bailleul. On other occasions the event has been held in Esquelbecq and Steenvoorde in French Flanders as well as in Hulst and Breda in the Netherlands. The CFF and the Cercle Michel de Swaen collaborate with the KFV in the organisation of these events. In similar vain

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<sup>4</sup> Gantois' more positive attitude did not last long, however. He attended for the last time in 1955 (cf. Ch5.1.3)

the KFV supports the *Volkstoneel* in French Flanders (since 1955) and since 1966 has organised Dutch language competitions for French Flemings.

The KFV sees the teaching of Dutch as being of vital importance in ensuring the survival of netherlandophone culture in French Flanders and has organised Dutch classes there since 1958. Indeed it is likely that, until the late 1980s, more people were learning standard Dutch through courses organised by the KFV than by any other organisation or institution - including the Ministry for Education - in French Flanders. In 1986 the Comité pour l'Enseignement de la Langue et Culture Néerlandaises (CELCN) (cf. Ch6.6.1) was formed within the Komitee Voor Frans-Vlaanderen in France expressly to co-ordinate the KFV's classes and to ensure that such classes were principally run by French Flemings. This latter desire is consistent with the KFV's long standing wish to see itself superceded by Flemish organisations from within French Flanders. Indeed Marc Castre claims,

Le seul but du Komitee voor Frans-Vlaanderen est simple: ne plus avoir besoin d'exister! Son unique et seul but: aider les Flamands de France à "sortir d'eux-mêmes" à leur faire prendre conscience de leur identité première. (Castre, 1977, p63)

This idea of making French Flemings more aware of their netherlandophone heritage<sup>5</sup> is also echoed by the KFV itself which states that it aims to contribute "au renforcement de la conscience historique et flamande par delà des frontières (KFV, 1993, p[1]). At the same time it wants French Flemings to be aware that it shares this heritage with netherlandophone Belgium and the Netherlands itself and endeavours to help forge stronger links between

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed the extract above would seem to suggest that French Flemings are Flemings first and French second. However, this is Castre's comment on the KFV and may well reflect his feelings about the identity of French Flemings more than those of the KFV.

French Flanders and the wider netherlandophone world. To this end the KFV organises annual excursions to Belgian Flanders and since 1986, has run "séminaires didactiques" for standard Dutch teachers in French Flanders in collaboration with the CELCN.

### **5.1.2 *Notre Flandre***

The KFV has also given both financial and technical support to a number of publications in French Flanders, such as *Notre Flandre* - the first post war review to be published in French Flanders - and its successor *La Nouvelle Flandre*, discussed at 6.2, below. The KFV itself publishes the review *KFV Mededelingen*, aimed principally at French Flanders and was instrumental in the creation of *Ons Erfdeel* (cf Ch 5.6.1).

As early as October 1947 Andre Demedts had stated the KFV's intention to collaborate on the publication of a review or newsletter for French Flanders. Little progress was made until Vital Celen decided to enlist the help of Jean-Marie Gantois, who was by this time sufficiently reconciled with the KFV to agree to participate. Gantois, however, discovered that many of his former associates were either unwilling or unable to help and was forced to turn to what Olivier Engelaere terms "le groupe de Lille"(Engelaere, 1991, p95). This group of young Flemish activists comprised Ward Corsmit, Jan Klaas, and Lode Hoex. Klaas, in particular was to play a prominent role in the Flemish movement in France for the next thirty years. When still a medical student he had attended the VVF trial in 1946 had been appalled that it seemed, "...le seul fait de se déclarer flamand constituait un délit." Gantois was thus brought into contact with a new generation of activists who had not been involved with the VVF.

When the review was officially launched on 16th December 1951 Gantois was still living in Brachay and had little direct input, indeed he was rarely even informed of what was being done. Gantois expressed his displeasure at this exclusion in an interview in *De Vlaamse Linie* in October 1951. His vision of *Notre Flandre* was rather different to that of Klaas, Corsmit and Hoex. Gantois wanted to base the review on the *Lion de Flandre* "...et devait essentiellement être utilisée pour redresser et dénoncer les injustices dont la Flandre Française était victime" (Engelaere, 1991, p95, whereas Klaas wanted to create,

...une publication destinée à éveiller l'intérêt des "Nordistes" pour le monde néerlandophone et à faire prendre conscience à ses lecteurs des liens les unissant à leurs voisins belges et néerlandophones.

(Engelaere, 1991, p95)

*Notre Flandre* was a quarterly cultural review written in both French - written by Klaas and Celen - and standard Dutch - written by Corsmit -, with French the dominant language. Early editions proved successful<sup>6</sup>, particularly in Belgium, thanks to the publicity efforts of the KVF. This success meant that, by the third edition, *Notre Flandre* could be properly printed rather than duplicated. Celen, however, was disappointed with the review's content, particularly the amount of space left for the Dutch section and suggested to Klaas and Corsmit that Gantois should be more involved<sup>7</sup>. Accordingly, the

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<sup>6</sup> Marc Castre, however, states that the review had only a small readership, mostly made up of ex members of the VVF (Castre 1977, p60). It is possible that Castre is referring only to the readership in French Flanders, as Engelaere also admits this was far smaller than in Belgian Flanders. The notion of popularity and success is, of course, both relative and subjective.

<sup>7</sup> cf Olivier Engelaere, 1991, p96. However, Engelaere also states: "Ce numéro se présentait principalement de la manière dont Klaas et Celen l'avaient voulu."(ibid p96). One wonders therefore, why Celen was dissatisfied and furthermore why he felt that the necessary changes could not be made by the existing editorial team. Did he, like Gantois feel ill at ease with the

second number of *Notre Flandre* contained an article by Gantois and he then produced all the material for the third edition. From then on Gantois' role in the production of the review steadily grew. By 1954 he had taken effective control of it, "...du fait du non-intéressement des jeunes à la question," according to Marc Castre (Castre, 1977, p60). The following year Gantois was responsible for 60% of articles in *Notre Flandre*, with much of the rest supplied by Corsmit and former members of the VVF.

With Gantois in control, the character of the review changed. It was no longer representative of the new generation of the Flemish movement in France but of the old. *Notre Flandre* started to criticise the CFF for its moderation in much the same way as *Lion de Flandre* had before and during World War Two. Relations between Gantois and the KFV were, despite the best efforts of Vital Celen, not easy. After Celen's death in 1956 and with *Notre Flandre* well established and therefore not so reliant on KFV support, Gantois became more critical. One target for his criticism was the large number of clerics involved in the KFV. This was a long standing concern of Gantois'; he had always taken care to ensure that the clergy should not dominate the VVF (cf Ch 4). As a result of these criticisms, Gantois was not invited to the Waregem *Journée Culturelle* after 1956 and the KFV made less effort to promote *Notre Flandre*, in particular after the launch of *Ons Erfdeel* (cf Ch. 5.6.1) in 1957. Gantois considered this publication a direct competitor for his review (Engelaere, 1991, p99).

Gantois' stance not only alienated the KFV but also the younger members of the French Flemish movement. Just as the development of Gantois' ideas had led to his estrangement from Camille Looten (cf. Ch4), so the younger

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new generation of French Flemish activists?(cf p149, below) Or did he simply wish Gantois, an old friend, to be more involved?

generation of French Flemish activists rejected his idea of the creation of a "New Netherlands" –recalling the pan-Netherlandic union<sup>8</sup> popular among some members of the VVF before World War Two - in favour of "la construction d'une Europe fédérale" (Castre, 1977, p60), seen as a more realistic goal. Jan Klaas gradually distanced himself from the publication and after Gantois' death in 1968 preferred to launch a new review *La Nouvelle Flandre* (cf 5.2.2), rather than take over the reins of *Notre Flandre*. Corsmit too left the review and went to work on *Ons Erfdeel* and became the leading figure in forging links between the KFV and the CFF. Thanks to his efforts and a new, bolder CFF President, Mgr. Dupont, Maxime Deswarde and Robert Hennart, the then Secretary of the CFF, were persuaded to attend the 1959 *Journée Culturelle*. The two organisations started to work more closely, so much so that the 1962 *Journée Culturelle* was a joint venture, held in Esquelbecq, the first time that it had taken place on French soil.

Gantois' reaction to his increasing isolation was to found a new French Flemish organisation, *De Vlaamse Vrienden in Frankrijk*, in October 1958. This cultural group was very much in the mould of the *Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk*, with which it - presumably intentionally - shared its initials. One of this group's first actions was to attack the speech made by Robert Hennart at the 1958 *Journée Culturelle* for being too pessimistic about the fate of *Vlaemsch* in French Flanders. However, the *Vlaamse Vrienden* never became a major force in the in the Flemish movement in French Flanders, indicative of Gantois' waning influence inside the movement. Although Gantois publicly claimed the organisation had some forty members, in private he admitted the real figure was six (Engelaere, 1991, p91). Nor were the *Vlaamse Vrienden* particularly active. Their activities were limited to publishing articles in *Notre Flandre* as well as a book of traditional Flemish

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<sup>8</sup> An idea which Gantois had previously supposedly rejected (cf Ch 3)

stories entitled *Uit Tisje Tasjes Korf* and some (fruitless) lobbying for the teaching of standard Dutch in French Flanders.

1962 saw Gantois honoured for his contribution to netherlandophone culture, being elected a member of the Dutch Academy in Leiden and became the third French Fleming to do so, after his former mentor, Camille Looten, and René Despicht. In 1964 Zannekin and De Vlaamse Vrienden in Frankrijk organised a large ceremony to celebrate Gantois' 60th birthday, attended by members of many other regional organisations, both inside France and beyond. It was in this year as well that Gantois published an anthology of his work entitled *De Zuidelijkste Nederlanden* which was to prove influential among the those French Flemish activists who came to prominence during and after May 1968.

These tributes cannot disguise the fact that, at the time of his death, Gantois was no longer the central figure he had once been in the Flemish movement of French Flanders. Gantois, *Notre Flandre* and De Vlaamse Vrienden in Frankrijk were vestiges of this movement as it had been before World War Two and were no longer relevant to French Flanders in the late 1960s and which died with him in May 1968<sup>9</sup>. His influence, however, lives on in some sections of the contemporary French Flemish movement. *Notre Flandre* continued to be published until 1969 when it was replaced by *La Nouvelle Flandre* with Jan Klaas as its editor.

Clearly Gantois was the dominant figure in the French Flemish movement from the early 1920s until the late 1960s. However, his activities on its behalf

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<sup>9</sup> Gantois drowned after falling into the Aa Canal; Landry & de Verrewaere suggest, however, this may not have been the case, stating, "...il mourut dans des conditions qui sont encore restées obscures." (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p295) They do not elaborate on this suggestion of foul play. Such suggestions can but add to the Gantois myth within the French Flemish movement.

have, on occasion, done it more harm than good. At beginning of the period 1948 - 1968, the French Flemish movement was still very much in disgrace as a result of the allegations of collaboration levelled against Gantois' VVF. The founding of the KFV provided French Flemings with a new start.

The KFV has played an active role in supporting and furthering the Flemish movement of French Flanders, most notably in the field of standard Dutch teaching. While one may question whether some of its initiatives - the Dutch language competitions, for example - have the potential to influence the mass of French Flemings, its contribution to the modern Flemish movement of French Flanders should not be underestimated. The significance of organising the Journées Culturelles de la Flandre Française in 1948, for example, cannot simply be evaluated in terms of the number of people attending; it represented a public affirmation that the netherlandophone heritage of French Flanders should and could still be valued and celebrated and thus that the Flemish movement still had a future in French Flanders. Indeed many of the KFV's efforts are not aimed specifically at attracting individual members to it but rather to incite French Flemings to act themselves to preserve their Flemish culture, as for example with the creation of the Comité pour l'Enseignement de la Langue et Culture Néerlandaises (cf.Ch6.6.1). However, in addition to this symbolic and philosophical support, the practical, organisational and financial support which the KFV has given - and continues to give - to Flemish organisations and publication in France, should not be forgotten. That much of this support was given during the period 1948 - 1968, when the Flemish movement in France was at one of its lowest ebbs, is of particular significance.

In comparison Jean-Marie Gantois' contribution to the French Flemish movement during the same period is rather less impressive. His philosophical

and personal differences with the KFV leadership caused him to divide and thus further weaken the movement. All he could offer by way of an alternative was an outdated vision rooted in the ideas of the VVF of whose disgrace it could not fail to be a reminder and which, consequently, was doomed to failure. Indeed, one is forced to agree with Marc Castre's conclusion that, without the KFV, "Beaucoup de choses concernant la Flandre Française seraient aujourd'hui abandonnées à jamais" (Castre 1977, p64).

## **5.2 The birth of the modern Flemish movement in French Flanders.**

The period 1948 - 1968 may be seen as a transitional period in the Flemish movement of French Flanders as the VVF and the allegations of collaboration associated with it were finally laid to rest. In its place grew the beginnings of a new style movement, founded largely on the work of the KFV. It was, however, the events of May 1968 which allowed the new Flemish movement to really take off.

The month of May 1968 must figure amongst the most dramatic in the history of the French nation. Many aspects of French society previously taken for granted were called into question. Chief amongst these was the very nature of the French state and its organisation. Suddenly, from being the concern of a few committed activists, regionalism was on the political agenda. De Gaulle proposed regional reform in the 1969 referendum and Pompidou actually carried it out four years later.

Much of the pressure for such reform and indeed the leadership of the events of May 1968 came from the young, in particular from university students. A parallel may perhaps be drawn between the role played by students in France in the rebirth of regionalism in May 1968 and that played by students in the

birth of nationalism in the early nineteenth century. In each case there was a dissatisfaction with the prevailing state organisation amongst the educated young and in each case they believed it was up to them to change the status quo. Elie Kedourie's comments on the significance of youth to nationalist movements are surprisingly echoed by many ideas prevalent in the 1960s. He states that, for the nationalist:

To be eternally young, as the term goes, becomes desirable and praiseworthy. Politics, in particular, becomes the eminently the province of the young. For politics is not the conciliation of interests, not the safeguard of social institutions; had it been only these, then old men, whom passions have ceased to tempt, whose resolution is cold and deliberate, might be preferred to youth. But since politics is an infinite quest, a ceaseless striving, gerontocracy must be rejected, and paedocracy instituted." (Kedourie, 1993, p83)

As a result of the Second World War radical nationalism had become synonymous with Nazism and fascism and therefore completely discredited and the French nation state had become one of the institutions to be safeguarded and from which the students felt alienated. Regionalism - which, one might argue, is often for many regionalists merely a form of nationalism - was, however, perfectly in tune with many political ideas fashionable at the time; the deconstruction of the soulless capitalist state, anti fascism and anti nationalism and the beginnings of the ecology movement, to name but a few. How regionalism could be seen to accommodate such ideas is well illustrated by Jean-Paul Sepieter - a leading figure in the *Mouvement des Etudiants Fédéralistes Lillois* - in his book *Vlaemsch Leeren* (cf. Ch4.7, Ch6.7).

### 5.2.1 The Mouvement des Etudiants Fédéralistes Lillois (MEFL)

The focus of the student regionalist movement in French Flanders was, not surprisingly, its largest university town, Lille, with its state and Catholic universities, the latter having the oldest chair of Dutch in France, established in 1926 by Camille Looten (cf Ch4). In 1968 it was the larger, state university - where a Dutch department had been established in 1947 - which took the lead. A group of students with regionalist ideas contacted Jan Klaas, who at that time was preparing the new review *La Nouvelle Flandre*. This contact helped their ideas take on a more concrete form with the founding in late 1969 of the Mouvement des Etudiants Fédéralistes Lillois. The MEFL contributed extensively to Klaas' review in their own section *La Voix des Etudiants*, which accounted for six pages out of thirty five in the second number (*La Nouvelle Flandre*, No. 2, 1969).

The MEFL sought to promote the decentralisation of the French state as a precondition to entry into a federal Europe,

L'Europe que nous appelons de nos voeux et pour laquelle nous oeuvrons ne saurait être l'Etat-Nation Européen, mais au contraire une organisation réellement fédérale des états actuels. (Sanders, in *La Nouvelle Flandre*, No. 2, 1969, p21).

At the same time the MEFL was critical of what they saw as French insincerity regarding European construction. They claimed that France was unwilling to cede, "...la moindre parcelle d'autorité à une organisation "supra-nationale" ou tout simplement extérieur à elle-même."(Sanders, 1969, p21)

Within this federal Europe they considered that the *département* Nord (not just French Flanders) should be an autonomous region. As such it would be in a better position to forge links with Northern Europe, in particular Belgium and the Netherlands. This, it was felt, would better serve the region's economic development than the prevailing situation, where it was always obliged to service the needs of Paris. However, when in 1973 regionalisation was proposed, the MEFL was critical of the form it was to take, failing to create regions according to historical precedent (*Courrier Lillois* No.29, 7/73, p9). In the case of its own region, Nord / Pas-de-Calais, the MEFL opposed the choice of a name lacking in any historical or cultural significance and organised an unsuccessful campaign to rename the region Les Pays-Bas Français.

As part of this greater regional autonomy, the MEFL called for,

un programme progressif de construction d'une Université lilloise autonome, gérée par un conseil souverain dans lequel représentants du professorat et élus étudiants siégeraient en parité avec la participation de représentants élus de la région. (Sanders, 1969, p19)

In particular they wanted the university to be able to draw up its own budget, which it felt would help break out of the French higher education hierarchy which placed all provincial universities below the Paris universities of the Sorbonne and Vincennes. Furthermore the MEFL believed that the university had an important role to play in promoting regional culture in the community and wished to establish close links between the university and "...les maisons de la culture, foyers culturels, clubs artistiques et autres formes d'expression de la culture régionale".(Sanders, 1969, p20)

The teaching of standard Dutch - which Eric Sanders terms, "la forme écrite du Flamand" was perceived as being vital to the promotion of regional culture, providing "une enrichissement indispensable à qui veut saisir la mentalité du Nord"(Sanders, 1969, p20). In addition to purely cultural considerations, the teaching of standard Dutch - as well as English and German - was vital to the MEFL's aim of forging closer economic links between the Nord and its nearest neighbours.

The MEFL also took an interest in environmental issues. In the *Courrier Lillois* July 1973 they call for the suspension of the construction of the Gravelines nuclear power station, until safety and environmental issues have been addressed. In the same issue they are critical of the urbanisation of the coast around Dunkirk, complaining about,

...les haies arrachées, les dunes nivelées, les kilomètres de HLM, les milliers d'immigrés africains transplantés dans un monde où ils ne pourront pas s'adapter. (*Courrier Lillois*, July 1973, No. 29, p6).

The apparent reference to African immigrants as an environmental problem is noteworthy; this would be neither the first nor the last time that elements of the Flemish movement of French Flanders has been guilty of racism (cf Ch4 and Ch5.7). The MEFL's attitude, however, is rather more ambiguous; they later refer to these same immigrants as "...les victimes d'une démesure industrielle qui se moque de l'envers de la médaille économique."(*Courrier Lillois*, July 1973, No.29, p6)

The MEFL's views were expressed principally via *La Nouvelle Flandre* and the organisation's own newsletter, *Le Courier Lillois*<sup>10</sup>, of which some twenty nine editions were published from September 1970 to July 1973. Many of those who contributed to this publication - Gérard Landry, Eric Sanders (both one time editors), Jean-Paul Sepieter, Eric Vanneufville, Pascal de Leersnijder and Jacques Fermaut, to name but a few - were to go on to play prominent roles in the Flemish movement in French Flanders. The *Courrier Lillois* was well distributed amongst students and local government figures - Landry and de Verrewaere even suggest it caused questions to be raised in the *Assemblée Nationale* (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p299). The content of the newsletter reflects the MEFL's ideological preoccupations, with sections focusing on events within the *Pays Bas Français* and on national policy regarding regionalisation and European integration. A clear attempt is made to place the MEFL within the wider context of a European regionalist movement. The section *L'Europe des Régions* begins with a summary of recent developments with regional movements elsewhere in France before progressing to the wider European scene, the issue of July 1973, for example, carrying pieces on the Spanish Basque territories, the significance of devolution in Great Britain and the new Yugoslavian constitution. The book and press review in this same issue lists books about Alsace and Brittany - in particular a long review of *Breiz Atao* by the controversial Breton nationalist Olier Mordrel (cf Ch 4), which is said to be "Indispensable dans la bibliothèque d'un régionaliste" (*Courrier Lillois*, No.29, July 1973 p13) - in addition to those dealing with French Flanders and the *Pays Bas Français*, as well as discussing a Catalan publisher based in Barcelona.

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<sup>10</sup> Printed on flimsy paper and stapled together, few copies of the *Courrier Lillois* appear to have survived, even fewer in public collections. In this analysis comments will be based on issue 29, published in July 1973, as this is the only copy I have managed to find. However, reference to Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p299, suggests that this is a fairly typical issue. The comments made by Landry and de Verrewaere about the *Courrier Lillois* are particularly significant as Landry is a former editor of the publication.

One regional movement with which relations appear rather less amicable is the Belgian Rassemblement Wallon. In the section *Pays-Bas Français, Flandre Belge et Wallonie* this Walloon group is criticised for its reaction to the occupation of the Belgian Consulate in Lille by the Belgian Taal-Aktie Komitee on the 12th of July 1972. This group had chosen the Flemish national day to protest about the language situation in Belgium and to call for a federal European constitution<sup>11</sup>. Rassemblement Wallon, however, described the Taal-Aktie Komitee as "des extrémistes Flamands" and accused the Belgian Flemish of expansionist intentions with regard to Brussels and French Flanders, as well as of coming to the aid of "...des groupuscules qui prêchent le nationalisme séparatiste flamand dans le Nord de la France" (both comments quoted by Marc Wattiez in *Courrier Lillois*, No.29, July 1973, p14). The Walloon group also goes on to express its friendship for "les Lillois et tous ceux qui dans le Nord, pensent et parlent en Picards" (quoted in *Courrier Lillois*, No.29, July 1973, p14). Marc Wattiez's<sup>12</sup> response to these comments on behalf of the MEFL is scathing,

Il est déplorable de constater encore une fois le médiocre niveau du régionalisme wallon, plus porté à calomnier (sic) ses voisins qu'à chercher un terrain d'entente avec eux pour faire progresser l'Europe des Régions. (*Courrier Lillois*, No.29, July 1973, p14)

With regard to the Rassemblement Wallon's intimation that the French Flemish movement was anti Picard, it is interesting to note that André Lévéque, a leading figure in the Picard movement, was a regular contributor

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<sup>11</sup> This incident appears rather curious on two counts. Firstly, the Flemish national day is 11<sup>th</sup> July and secondly a protest in Belgium itself would appear more appropriate, especially if made by a Belgian group. The *Courrier Lillois* is the only source of evidence for this incident.

<sup>12</sup> Marc Wattiez, a pseudonym of Alain Walenne, was the last editor of the *Courrier Lillois*

to the *Courrier Lillois*. Issue 29 of the magazine included an article on the Picard organisation Eklitra, in its *Pays-Bas Français* section, which actively promoted the group's activities. Clearly the MEFL recognised the role the Picard language and culture had to play in the region. It should be noted that the MEFL preferred to refer to *Les Pays-Bas Français* rather than to *La Flandre Française*. Their points of reference in establishing the limits of the *Pays-Bas Français* were administrative (the *Départements* Nord and Pas-de-Calais, created by Paris), historical and economic, not linguistic. It is true that the MEFL sought to promote standard Dutch partly because of the language's potential economic significance to the *Pays-Bas Français* but also because it was part of the regional culture. Clearly this latter point is equally valid for Picard.

In fact questions of language do not appear to have been uppermost in the minds of the MEFL. Although recognising the significance of Flemish / standard Dutch to regional identity and consequently campaigning for standard Dutch to be taught in the schools of Northern France, the MEFL achieved little in concrete terms to promote the standard or the regional form of the language. The *Courrier Lillois* was written exclusively in French and the publication placed far more emphasis on the creation of a Europe of the Regions, as well as on other social and political issues, than on promoting either standard Dutch or regional Vlaemsch.

Despite the efforts of the MEFL, the wave of enthusiasm for regionalism at the University of Lille apparent in 1968/9 did not last for long. As those involved in the organisation gradually left the university new students did not come forward to take their place. Consequently the MEFL ceased to exist at the end of the 1972/3 academic year, publication of the *Courier Lillois* ending with it. In terms of its stated aims the MEFL had not really achieved very

much. Nevertheless, it had served the Flemish movement of French Flanders well, acting as "une véritable pépinière d'une nouvelle génération au service de la région." (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p300). The first act of this new generation was to assure the succession. This they did in 1971, when the majority of the members of the MEFL, plus Jan Klaas and Jacques Fermaut founded the Cercle Michel De Swaen. (Cf. Ch 5.3, below)

### **5.2.2 La Nouvelle Flandre.**

The demise of *Notre Flandre* cleared the way for Jan Klaas to create a new review more in tune with the regionalist thought of the late 1960s. The first edition of the quarterly review *La Nouvelle Flandre* appeared at the end of 1969. Largely thanks to the financial and technical support of the KFV, the quality of production of *La Nouvelle Flandre* was considerably superior to that of *Le Courier Lillois*, with which Klaas' review in other ways had much in common.

*La Nouvelle Flandre* dealt with both cultural and political issues. Of the latter, as with the *Courrier Lillois*, questions of regionalisation and federalism were paramount. The editorial of the first edition was entitled *Priorité à la Régionalisation* and that of the second called for "Le régionalisme total" (*La Nouvelle Flandre*, No.2, February 1970, p1). The importance of co-operation with other regional movements in France to achieve this goal is reflected in the inclusion of a regular feature entitled, *La Voix des autres Régions*. In this section As well as giving publicity to the activities of these organisations and contact addresses for them, *La Nouvelle Flandre* stresses that they are working towards a common goal,

Comme nous, l'Alsace-Lorraine a tout à gagner de la création d'une Europe Fédérale, permettant une large autonomie aux différentes régions.

and

Son [the Centre d'Etudes régionales Corses] orientation fédéraliste, européenne rejoint la nôtre; l'un des objectifs du CERC est de tisser des liens toujours plus étroits avec ses amis Occitans, Basques, Catalans, Bretons, Alsaciens...<sup>13</sup>(*La Nouvelle Flandre*, No.2, Feb. 1970, pp12 & 13)

Other regular features were *La Vie de la Région*, focusing on current cultural, political and economic issues in the Nord / Pas-de-Calais and *La Voix des Etudiants*. This latter section was written by the MEFL and is indicative of the importance of the student movement to the Flemish movement in French Flanders at the time. The similarity in content of *Le Courier Lillois* and *La Nouvelle Flandre*, plus the sizeable contribution made by the MEFL to Klaas' review - six pages out of thirty five in issue two - illustrate the degree of collaboration between Klaas and the student movement.

There were, however, some differences. Whereas *Le Courier Lillois* focused primarily - though not exclusively - on socio-political issues, *La Nouvelle Flandre* also included cultural, historical articles which would not have been out of place in *Lion de Flandre*, *Notre Flandre* or even the *Annales* of the CFF. As if to emphasise its place in this tradition Jan Klaas begins an article on Erasmus with quotations from Jules Lemire and Emmanuel Looten (Jan Klaas, *La Nouvelle Flandre*, No.2, Feb. 1970, p25). Nevertheless, even in a "cultural" article such as this federalist sentiments are apparent. Erasmus is "notre compatriote" (Klaas, 1970, p28), stressing not only the cultural - and

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<sup>13</sup>The omission of *Flamands* is not commented upon.

historical - unity of the Northern and Southern Netherlands, including French Flanders, but also Erasmus' status as "citoyen d'Europe"(Klaas, Feb. 1970, p28). There is also criticism of the three hundred year "bilan guerrier"(Klaas, 1970, p30) which had lead to the incorporation of French Flanders into France. Furthermore, Klaas wonders whether being part of the French state is actually good for French Flanders, "Si Erasme revenait, nous ne serions plus cette fois ces compatriotes, mais serions-nous spécialement fiers de notre nouvelle nationalité?(Klaas 1970, p30)

*La Nouvelle Flandre* also contained a Dutch language section *Zuid-Vlaams Heem*, which was introduced with the statement,

Dit gedeelte van het tijdschrift, gewijd aan de Dietse kultuur, zal in de allereerste plaats aandacht besteden aan de verdediging en het herstel van de Nederlandse taal in Zuid-Vlaanderen. (*La Nouvelle Flandre*, No.2, p33).

This would seem to suggest that Klaas' review gave a higher profile to the language question than *Le Courier Lillois*. However, the vast majority of the articles in *La Nouvelle Flandre* were written in French. Issue two, for example, contained one eleven line article written by the Vlaamse Vrienden in Frankrijk, about the conference of the Federalistische Unie der Europese Volksgroepen, to which the Vlaamse Vrienden had been invited and a fourteen line poem by Michiel de Swaen. A French translation of the poem was given on the opposite page as well as a six line commentary on it in Dutch. Nevertheless, however small this section was, *La Nouvelle Flandre* was at least showing a commitment to Dutch in French Flanders. This commitment was further born out by its desire to see standard Dutch taught in French Flanders:

Tant pour des raisons culturelles que pour des raisons pratiques, le proche avenir nous impose la mise en pratique du bilinguisme scolaire dans le territoire néerlandophone de France. (*La Nouvelle Flandre*, No.2, Feb. 1972, p9)

The "raisons pratiques" referred to are ones cited by many French Flemish activists both before and since; to facilitate the forging of stronger economic links with the Netherlands and netherlandophone Belgium and as preparation for learning other Germanic languages of economic significance for French Flanders, notably English and German.

While recognising the importance of Dutch / Vlaemsch to both the cultural identity and economy of French Flanders, *La Nouvelle Flandre* did not consider its safeguarding its top priority,

La question de la langue régionale n'est évidemment qu'un détail dans l'ensemble du problème de l'autonomie culturelle. (*La Nouvelle Flandre*, No.2, p9)

This view resembles that of the MEFL. Again like the MEFL, the autonomous region which *La Nouvelle Flandre* wanted to see established in Northern France was not limited to the traditionally netherlandophone areas but encompassed all of *Les Pays-Bas Français*. Klaas himself was born in Calais and practised in St Omer, both of which are Francophone towns outside French Flanders but included in *Les Pays-Bas Français*. For *La Nouvelle Flandre* it was this "synthèse originale de deux cultures" (*La Nouvelle Flandre*, No.2, Feb. 1970, p9) which defined the region's cultural identity which

"l'impérialisme culturel français" (*La Nouvelle Flandre*, No.2, Feb. 1970, p9) had destroyed.

*La Nouvelle Flandre* only survived for five issues, appearing for the last time in the autumn of 1971, but despite this brief life it played a significant part in the regeneration of the French Flemish movement. Whereas the MEFL appealed purely to students, Klaas' review expressed similar ideas to a wider (in theory at least) audience. It also allowed the MEFL to appeal directly to this audience and helped this organisation formulate and articulate its regionalist philosophy. *La Nouvelle Flandre* filled the space left by *Notre Flandre* and offered the latter's readers a new perspective of the regionalist question and thus served as a link between the activists from the days of the VVF, the post war federalists and the 1960s student movement. It was this synthesis which was to result in the founding of the Cercle Michel de Swaen, an organisation which has been much more active regarding Dutch language issues than either *La Nouvelle Flandre* or the MEFL.

### 5.3 Le Cercle Michel de Swaen / Michiel de Swaenkring

Founded in September 1971 at a meeting in Cassel and taking its name from the seventeenth century Dunkirk poet, the Cercle Michel de Swaen was a fusion of many different elements of the French Flemish movement. The first membership list, dated 15th July 1972, shows a high proportion of MEFL members and ex members in key positions, notably Erik Sanders as Vice President, Pascal de Leersnijder<sup>14</sup> as General Secretary, along with Erik Vanneufville, Gérard Landry and Alain Walenne as members of the Comité

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<sup>14</sup> Pascal de Leersnijder's name on this membership list is spelt Leersnyder, in the Flemish style. I have adopted the -ij- spelling, as this appears on most subsequent documents.

de Patronage. Other members of this committee included Nicolas Bourgeois (cf. Ch4, 5, 6), also the group's honorary president, Jan Klaas and Camille Tacconen. Jacques Fermaut, a Dutch teacher who had first learnt Dutch with Maxime Deswarte and later studied under Walter Thijs at the University of Lille, was Deputy General Secretary. Fermaut had been active in the Flemish movement of French Flanders since the 1960s when he had attended the Frans-Vlaamse Cultuurdagen. He had subsequently contributed to the review *Ons Erfdeel* (cf Ch5.6.1), becoming a member of its editorial team in 1965 and had written *Nous, les Flamands de France* with J.Tillie, appealing for the teaching of Dutch in French Flanders. Fermaut has been one of the most influential figures in the Flemish movement in France in the last twenty years and the driving force behind a great number of its initiatives. (cf.Ch5 & 6).

Geographically, the vast majority (79%)<sup>15</sup> of the original sixty six members came from the departments Nord and Pas-de-Calais (Nord 71%, Pas-de-Calais 8%). Not surprisingly the two largest population centres of French Flanders, the Lille and Dunkirk conurbations, provided the most members, 21% each. One might also surmise that French Flemings living in these large, Francophone conurbations were those who felt the most cut off from their netherlandophone roots and were consequently more acutely aware of the threat posed to their regional heritage. The concept of *enracinement* (discussed below) which was to become an essential element in the association's philosophy is also a reflection on the urban background of a large proportion of the Cercle Michel de Swaen's membership. 24% of members came from remaining netherlandophone areas.

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<sup>15</sup> All statistical information given on the Cercle Michel de Swaen's membership in 1972 is based on the membership list dated 15th July 1972.

From the little socio-professional information available for these original members (the occupations of only fifteen out sixty six members are given), one can see a complete lack of working class support. Also apparent is the high proportion of members who have experience of higher education - some 83% of those for whom some professional details are given.<sup>16</sup> This is doubtless in part a result of the key role played in the formation of the Cercle by the MEFL. Bearing in mind the limitations of the information available, one may characterise the original membership of the Cercle Michel de Swaen as largely middle class, urban and well educated.

The original membership of sixty six increased greatly in the following two years, increasing to eighty by the end of 1972, 179 in 1973 and 375 (273 *membres titulaires* and 102 *membres sympathisants*)(*Bulletin d'information du Cercle Michel de Swaen*, No.8, December 1973 - February 1974, p[1].)

During this period the Cercle received a good deal of positive press coverage. The *Bulletin d'information* for December 1973 - February 1974 boasts of seventeen articles dealing with the Cercle's activities during 1973 (*Bulletin d'information* No.8, p[1]) and goes on to mention that its second annual general meeting on 24th November 1973 was covered by *La Voix du Nord* and ORTF. Between October 1975 and January 1976 *La Voix du Nord* ran a series of articles about the Dutch classes organised by the Cercle, including details of how to join both the class and the association. Such a positive attitude on the part of this newspaper - the most popular in the North of France - may seem somewhat surprising given its anti regionalist stance at the time of the VVF trials. One can only assume that *La Voix du Nord* was reflecting a change in public opinion; after thirty years regionalism, or at least

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<sup>16</sup> Details of occupation are only given for members of the *Bureau Directeur* and the *Comité de Patronage*, who, in July 1972, represented 33% (22 out of 66) of members. Of these twenty two members, no professional details at all are given for one member and higher education qualifications alone are listed for a further eight.

the cultural regionalism offered by the Cercle Michel de Swaen, had finally been rehabilitated in the popular imagination. When, in 1975, the Cercle launched a campaign in favour of the teaching of Dutch, a number of prominent local politicians supported the initiative, among them the President of the *Conseil général du Nord*, Mr Denvers, the *Ministre du Commerce extérieur*, Norbert Ségard and Pierre Mauroy, deputy mayor of Lille and President of the *Conseil Régional* at that time. In response to this campaign, Mauroy wrote to the Cercle stating:

La Flandre et le flamand font partie de l'histoire de cette région Nord - Pas-de-Calais, ils y ont forgé des hommes, fait vivre une culture et développé des arts...Rendre au Nord - Pas-de-Calais sa diversité et de promouvoir, ce sera maintenir une certaine richesse de notre région. (Quoted in *La Voix du Nord*, 17th January, 1976)

By the mid 1970s, the Cercle Michel de Swaen was enjoying a degree of support and acceptance which many of predecessors - particularly in the post war period - would have envied. This popularity was based on a programme of purely cultural action, which made the promotion of the regional language one of its primary goals. The very first point of its manifesto stated:

Le Cercle Michel de Swaen s'assigne comme but la défense et la promotion de la personnalité et de la culture de la Flandre Française, et en particulier, de sa langue. (*Manifeste du Cercle Michel de Swaen*, July 1972)

The language that the Cercle Michel De Swaen sought to promote was standard Dutch, "forme culturel du Flamand" (de Leersnijder, Fermaut, Taccoen, *Petition en faveur du bilinguisme*, 1972). The chief means of doing

so was through the teaching of the language. A *Pétition en faveur du bilinguisme* was attached to the Cercle's manifesto, in which Pascal de Leersnijder, Jacques Fermaut and Camille Taccoen, on behalf of the Cercle Michel de Swaen, requested, "l'enseignement du Néerlandais dans toutes les écoles communales de la région" (*Pétition en faveur du bilinguisme*, de Leersnijder, Fermaut, Taccoen, 1972, p[1]). The Cercle was at pains to stress that such a move should in no way be seen as threatening by central government, stating, "Le bilinguisme franco-néerlandais ne peut être préjudiciable aux intérêts nationaux français" (*Pétition*, de Leersnijder, Fermaut, Taccoen, 1972, p[1]). In fact, for commercial and educational reasons - very similar to those put forward by Lemire almost seventy years earlier - such a programme could not fail to be of benefit to France as a whole. This teaching was to begin as soon as children started school, with stories, songs and rhymes (comptines) being taught in Vlaemsch by native speakers, either from French Flanders or Belgian West Flanders (*Manifeste du Cercle Michel de Swaen*, 1972, p[1]). Once a child started primary school, standard Dutch was to be made a compulsory subject, with at least three hours of teaching per week. For those who had already left school the Cercle, with the help of the KFV, organised its own, independant Dutch classes. By January 1976 some 191 people were learning Dutch in this way (*La Voix du Nord*, 17/1/76). These classes have since come under the umbrella of the CELCN (cf Ch 6.6.1).

The pre-eminence of the role of education in the maintenance of Vlaemsch / Dutch in French Flanders is common in the modern French Flemish movement (cf. Ch 6) and may be attributed - in this case at least - to the socio - educational background of many of the Cercle Michel de Swaen's members. Given that, as stated above, a high proportion of these members had enjoyed considerable academic success and could, as a result, reasonably be

expected to enjoy similar professional success, it is not surprising that they should have faith in the power of education. Furthermore many of them had their first real - or at least first real positive - contact with Netherlandic culture and the concept of regionalism in an educational environment. It was, perhaps, natural that they should see such an environment as ideal for the pursuance of their goals.

The promotion of the standard and / or regional Dutch was, however, only one of the Cercle's five areas of activity, each of which being the responsibility of a different *groupe de travail*. The other four *groupes de travail* were; traditional and popular culture, architecture and restoration, regional history and physical and human environment (Castre, 1977, p66). These groups organised conferences, cultural and historical tours of French Flanders and in terms of popular culture, Flemish carnivals and fêtes, as well as evenings of traditional music and dance. The Cercle also produced a number of pamphlets and booklets, such as *Le Régionalisme*, relating to its areas of interest, in addition to its bi-monthly newsletter. This newsletter, written almost exclusively in French, evolved into a monthly review *Tyl*, which appeared for the first time in November 1976. This semi-autonomous publication was intended to be a regional review which would appeal to readers outside the French Flemish movement. The publication of *Tyl* coincides with an attempt by the Cercle in late 1976 to raise funds via a semi-commercial arm producing stickers and historical maps. 1976 also saw the opening of a cultural centre, again semi-autonomous from the Cercle itself but sharing premises with it in Dunkirk.

Political activity was expressly rejected by the Cercle in its manifesto, "Il [le Cercle Michel de Swaen] s'abstient de toute action politique et de toute considération idéologique ou religieuse." (*Manifeste du Cercle Michel de*

Swaen, 1972, p[1]). Nevertheless, as Marc Castre comments, "...le régionalisme culturel du Cercle abrite un régionalisme politique, car aucun régionalisme n'est apolitique."(Castre, 1977, p67) As has been suggested above (cf Ch4) the desire to promote a cultural identity different from the official state identity may be considered a political act. Within the Cercle's stated areas of activity both the language question, with its implications for educational policy changes and the environmental issues, potentially affecting both regional planning and regional economic development are inherently political. The organisation did try to avoid traditional political left-right divisions, rejecting both capitalism and Marxism. Capitalism is characterised as a "...système fondé sur les valeurs déracinées de la bourgeoisie internationale" (quoted in Castre 1977, p69), robbing the individual of his sense of identity to better serve economic ends. Marxism, on the other hand, is seen as attempting to take over regionalist organisations - a task facilitated by the hostility felt by many of these organisations towards the cultural uniformity promoted and demanded by capitalism - and using them to its own political ends. These ends were none other than the expansion of the Soviet Union "jusqu'à Brest"(Le *Régionalisme*, Cercle Michel de Swaen, quoted in Castre, 1977, p70). This rejection of both left and right in favour of purely cultural considerations echoes Jean-Marie Gantois' wish that VVF should be "ni à droite, ni à gauche mais en dehors et au-dessus."(cf. Ch4)

Instead of the usual left or right wing political solutions, the Cercle Michel de Swaen promoted, from the mid 1970s an ideology based on the concept of "enracinement". "Enracinement" is by no means unique to the Cercle Michel de Swaen, nor to the Flemish movement of French Flanders. According to this theory, there is a harmonious bond between the individual and his or her

native land and cultural specificities which define each group result from this bond,

L'homme connaît un état de dépendance écologique. Ainsi existe-t-il un lien entre le paysage et la personnalité. Les hommes sont liés à la terre qui les a vu naître et ne font plus qu'un avec elle; la terre est dépositaire des valeurs propres à ceux qui l'ont modelée. (*Le Régionalisme*, Cercle Michel de Swaen, quoted in Castre, 1977, p68.)

Such an ideology explains the interest shown by the Cercle Michel de Swaen and other groups from within the French Flemish movement for ecological concerns<sup>17</sup>. The bond between *the people* and *the land* is such that any change undergone by *the land* is passed on to *the people*. Consequently, the destruction of the specific habitat represented by *the land* would lead to the destruction of the cultural specificities of *the people*. One can see why such views should have been have been popular in French Flanders. Vlaemsch speaking had long been concentrated in a rural heartland which had shrunk at the same time as the industrial centres - principally Dunkirk and Lille - were expanding. Furthermore much of the membership of the Cercle Michel de Swaen came from just these industrial areas and could therefore be seen as "déraciné" themselves and therefore more preoccupied with this problem than native Vlaemsch speakers living, for the most part, in rural areas in supposed harmony with their environment.

The Cercle Michel de Swaen shares the federalist views of the MEFL and collaborates with other minority language and culture groups both nationally and internationally. By December 1973 the organisation was a member of

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<sup>17</sup> By 1977 the Cercle Michel de Swaen was affiliated to the environmental group Nord-Nature. (Castre, 1977, p65)

the Association Internationale de Défense des Langues et Cultures Menacées, the Union Fédéraliste des Communautés Ethniques Européennes and the group Défense et Promotion des Langues de France (*Bulletin d'Information* No.8, Cercle Michel de Swaen, December 1973). However, the Cercle only supported a federal Europe, in which the concept of *enracinement* was respected. The Common Market of the mid 1970s did not correspond to this vision as it was purely a capitalist, economic arrangement, which, by its very nature, would cause further *déracinement*. The Cercle was particularly concerned that this capitalist Europe was too eager to accept what it perceived as negative American influences,

Une Europe américanisée ne nous intéresse pas, avec ses films débiles, sa pornographie, sa drogue, sa violence, ses harnachements vestimentaires dessinés à New York, sa pop musique, ses mysticismes psychédéliques. Cette Europe-là est une Europe en mauvaise santé. (*Le Régionalisme*, Cercle Michel de Swaen, quoted in Castre 1977, p69)

America itself is termed a "champignon vénéneux" against which only Europe's "valeurs traditionnelles" serve as protection. The strength of the language used here is an early indication of ultra conservative tendencies within the Cercle; Jean-Paul Sepieter (cf 5.7) had left the organisation as early as 1974 due to his concerns about these same tendencies. It is easy to see how the idea of *enracinement* could appeal to and be manipulated by conservative factions with its insistence on tradition instead of progress, or at least progress as it manifested itself in French Flanders in the mid to late 1970s<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore, it is a concept which lends itself to racist / xenophobic

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<sup>18</sup> The Cercle insisted, however, that it was not against progress as such, but against, "la forme actuelle du progrès qui déracine" (*Le Régionalisme*, Cercle Michel de Swaen, quoted in

interpretations: it is one small step from the insistence that people are bound to their ancestral homeland to suggesting that those not bound to this land should not be there. An information sheet published by the Cercle in 1981 would seem to confirm this view:

La revanche de ces Peuples brimés a été partout la même, aussi bien en Algérie qu'en Europe centrale, en Flandre qu'en Pologne: ils ont répondu par une forte natalité de gens en bonne santé, et par une agilité à s'adapter aux circonstances et aux épreuves qui tranche avec l'apathie de colonisateurs. Ceux-ci, fonctionnaires, cadres ou migrants sans racine, s'assimilent au Peuple qui les accueille et adoptent sa culture, où bien refusent l'évolution de ce Peuple, et disparaissent des sols qui ne sont pas faits pour eux. Dans la répartition mondiale des Peuples, la Nature n'aime pas être contrariée, et reprend vite ses droits.

(Untitled information sheet, Cercle Michel de Swaen, 1981)

The use of "*Peuple*" has unfortunate - and perhaps unintentional - echoes of the "*Volk*" of Germanic nationalists in general and of the Nazis in particular. Such sentiments would appear to be at odds with the Cercle's European federalist vision. However, the two are reconciled according to ethnic / racial criteria:

...les ethnies en Europe ne sont qu'apparement différentes. Elles ont, en réalité un même fonds commun racial et culturel: c'est la notion d'indo-européanie. (*Le Régionalisme*, Cercle Michel de Swaen, quoted in Castre 1977, p71)

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Castre, 1977, p70), pointing out that Flemish culture had traditionally flourished - as one might reasonably expect - at times of regional economic growth.(cf Castre, 1977, p70)

In the light of such statements, one can easily see how, reporting on the scandal surrounding Philippe Bernard in November 1985, the Belgian newspaper *De Nieuwe* could come to qualify the Cercle Michel de Swaen as, "een extreem-rechtse club uit Frans-Vlaanderen" (a club for right wing extremists from French Flanders) (*De Nieuwe*, 17/11/85). Bernard was a Front National candidate in the *département* Nord and allegedly a member of the Cercle Michel de Swaen. In an open letter to Jean-Marie Le Pen, Guy Triquet, the Cercle's Vice-President at that time and also a leading figure in the Parti Fédéraliste Flamand (cf Ch 5.7) explicitly denied this allegation:

J'affirme sur l'honneur que ce Monsieur [ Philippe Bernard] est absolument inconnu au Cercle Michel de Swaen, et qu'il n'a jamais figuré dans nos fichiers. (Triquet, undated letter, p[1])<sup>19</sup>

Triquet also rejects the newspaper's claim that the PFF found M. Le Pen "sympathiek", qualifying it as "grossier" and stating, "Nos positions [that of the PFF and the FN] sont diamétralement opposés". (Triquet, undated letter, p[1]). Given Triquet's role of importance in the Cercle Michel de Swaen and the fact that this position is mentioned on the letter, would seem to suggest that Cercle too felt a similar aversion to the FN leader. However, the rejection was based on hostility to the FN's policy to strengthen the French state and French identity and does not necessarily that the Cercle's ideology did not contain potentially racist elements.

By the time of the Bernard affair the Cercle's support had waned considerably. In 1980 Landry and de Verrewaere described the Cercle, along with the review *Tyl* as being "en sommeil" (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982,

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<sup>19</sup> A copy of this open letter is held in the archives of the Comité Flamand de France in Hazebrouck.

p301). An information sheet published by the Cercle in 1981 calling on French Flemings to collect "...tous documents relatifs à notre patrimoine culturel (qu' il nous faudra bien un jour où l'autre reconstituer)" (Untitled Information Sheet, Cercle Michel de Swaen, 1981, p[2]) indicates rather more modest ambitions than those of just five years before. The supposedly a-political Cercle's perceived swing to the right, may well have been one of the reasons for this loss of support.

However, it should not be forgotten that, despite the expressions of support from local politicians, the favourable regional press coverage and the numbers of people mobilised in specific events, the Cercle Michel de Swaen, has only a small *active* membership. Much the same can be said for many other French Flemish groups, both before and since. Furthermore, many of those involved in the Cercle Michel de Swaen - Guy Triquet and Jacques Fermaut, to name but two - were also involved in other organisations / initiatives within the French Flemish movement. All were, of course, volunteers. As a result the fortunes of groups such as the Cercle will always tend to ebb and flow according to changes in personnel and to the commitment and enthusiasm of this active membership.

Falling membership also creates financial problems and such problems are indeed suggested by the 1981 information sheet, both by the modest nature of the action suggested and also by the inclusion of a request for financial assistance, "Malgré le bénévolat et la foi qui nous anime, nous ne savons pas nous passer d'argent."(Information sheet, Cercle Michel de Swaen, 1981p[2]). Difficulties of this nature are again common among French Flemish groups and among other minority culture organisations elsewhere in France. Of course, as a group's financial situation deteriorates so its scope for action becomes more limited and thereby less likely to attract new members, or

even retain those it already has, particularly if there are other more active groups. Certainly in French Flanders, new groups such as Menschen Lyk Wyder (cf Ch5.4) and Tegaere Toegaen (cf Ch 5.5) came to prominence as the Cercle Michel de Swaen went into decline. In some ways the Cercle was a victim of its own success. By the late 1970s there had been what Landry and de Verrewaere term, "une renaissance de la conscience culturelle flamande dans le Westhoek" (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p301) to which the Cercle had made a considerable contribution. The Flemish movement of French Flanders was more diverse than at any time in its history and it would seem that other groups within the movement were more dynamic and popular.

However, the Cercle Michel de Swaen emerged from this difficult period in January 1993 with the publication of a new, bi-monthly review entitled *Vlaanderen de Leeuw / La Flandre au Lion*<sup>20</sup>, founded by Jacques Fermanut and Michel Liven. The first edition of *La Flandre au Lion* was a modest affair - two typewritten pages, a hand written title - which served principally to explain the aims of the Cercle Michel de Swaen, "Notre but premier est la défense de notre identité régionale au-delà des querelles partisanes qui déchirent les nôtres," (Michel Lieven, *Avant Propos, La Flandre au Lion*, No.1, January - February 1993, p[1]).

Issue number six of the review, published at end of the same year, contained a new "Manifeste du Cercle Michel de Swaen" - printed in both French and standard Dutch - which differed markedly from the one written in 1972. The teaching of Dutch and Vlaemsch, the focal point of the 1972 version, was clearly no longer seen as such a great priority, meriting one cursory mention:

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<sup>20</sup> The first edition bore only the French title.

We bevestigen ons recht op...de bevordering van de Vlaamse streektaal en van dat Nederlands dat sinds altijd onze cultuurtaal is.<sup>21</sup>

We affirm our right to...promote the Flemish dialect and the standard Dutch which has always been our cultural language. (*Manifeste du Cercle Michel de Swaen, La Flandre au Lion*, No. 6, November / December 1993, p[12])

This change of emphasis can probably be attributed to the formation in 1986 of the CELCN (cf Ch6.6.1.), which had assumed organisational responsibility for the standard Dutch classes previously run by the Cercle. This is not to suggest that the Cercle no longer considered the teaching of standard Dutch and / or Vlaemsch to be important but rather that they were able to entrust these classes to a specialist organisation so that they themselves could concentrate on other issues. Co-operation with other Flemish groups was specifically mentioned in the 1993 manifesto and in the case of the CELCN was facilitated by the important role played by Jacques Fermaut in both organisations.

This new manifesto focuses on socio-political issues, although the Cercle once again sought to avoid the traditional left - right political division:

Aussi rejetons-nous, comme étrangères à notre nature, toutes les idéologies de droite comme de gauche qui prétendent les [les antagonismes] résoudre par une dictature des uns sur les autres.

(*Manifeste, La Flandre au Lion*, No.6, 1993, p[12])

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Dutch as the French version is obscured by a stamp. All the other quotations from the manifesto are in French.

Flemish culture and society are depicted as being based on the traditional values of the hardworking Fleming:

Le CERCLE entend tout particulièrement mettre l'accent sur la promotion des valeurs qui ont fait et feront la grandeur de la FLANDRE et de l'EUROPE...Nous, FLAMANDS, aimons le travail, l'esprit de service et l'initiative...Nous optons résolument pour une société qui rejette les poisons avilissants et débilitants du couple assistance-revendication. (*Manifeste du Cercle Michel de Swaen, La Flandre au Lion*, No.6, November-December, 1993, p[12]. Capitals appear in the original.)

This image of the Fleming somewhat echoes that given by Jean-Paul Sepieter sixteen years earlier in *Vlaemsch Leeren* (cf Ch 6.7).

European federalism once again features on the Cercle's agenda. The manifesto states:

Flamands et Européens, nous voulons abattre les murs de honte élevés dans les esprits par les propagandes étatiques, pour construire une EUROPE FEDERALE des libertés et des solidarités. (*Manifeste, La Flandre au Lion*, No. 6, 1993, p[12]

However, the concern that this federal Europe would merely be a vehicle for international capitalism and the cultural uniformity it is perceived as bringing with it, is still present, "...notre Europe n'est pas celle des 350 000 000 consommateurs mais celle des cent drapeaux."(Lieven, 1993, p[2]) In 1993 this concern was, if anything, greater than it had been in the 1970s. The Single European Market, which came into force in the same year, is indicative

of just the type of European development that the Cercle did not want. Furthermore, the collapse of the communist bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s was considered to have made liberalism an even greater threat (cf *Editorial*, V.Texlân, *La Flandre au Lion*, No.6, November / December 1993, p[1].)

Although the 1993 manifesto did indicate a degree of continuity in the Cercle's proposals, it also revealed an awareness of the need to distance this publication from the extreme right image which had tarnished the Cercle in the past. In particular Michel Lieven in his *Avant Propos* in the first edition of *La Flandre au Lion* was eager to point out that the Cercle's desire to promote the culture of French Flanders should not inspire any xenophobic or racist tendencies:

...nous nous attacherons à créer des liens avec les autres peuples. Bretons, Basques, Tyroliens, Lombards, saxons seront ici les bienvenus. Nous n' hésiterons pas à ouvrir ici nos colonnes afin qu'ils puissent mieux se faire connaître et mettre ainsi un terme [sic] à ces [sic] préjugés simplistes, sources de racisme. (Lieven, 1993, p[2])

Laudable though such a statement undoubtedly is, it should be noted that all of ethnic groups mentioned are European. Such a statement was therefore completely in accord with the notion of *Indo-Européanité* expressed in the Cercle's publications in the 1970s, discussed above. Interestingly no mention is made of non European ethnic groups.

The new manifesto also makes specific reference to the role of women in Flemish culture:

Conscients de la place éminente qui revient à la femme dans l'élaboration, le maintien et la propagation d'une culture et d'un art de vivre, nous appuierons tout ce qui favorisera son épanouissement, le respect de sa fémininité et son indispensable participation à tous les aspects de la vie sociale et spirituelle. (*Manifeste, La Flandre au Lion*, No.6, 1993, p[12])

Such a statement is significant inasmuch there have been few prominent women in the Flemish movement of French Flanders. This may be accounted for by the conservative tendencies, such as the Roman Catholic church, which have in the past dominated the movement and which have often been slow to acknowledge women's rights. Although the Cercle Michel de Swaen's stance may represent progress, the key positions in the organisation are, for the most part, still held by men. Of the sixteen strong editorial team of *La Flandre au Lion*, only one, Jocelyne Salomé, is a woman<sup>22</sup>. She is also the review's principal female contributor.

By the end of 1993 the quality of *La Flandre au Lion* had greatly improved. Technological progress, which for so long had worked against Vlaemsch in French Flanders - and against many other minority languages in other countries - could now be seen to be working in its favour, as desk top publishing software allowed a high quality review to be produced at relatively low cost. The main articles in *La Flandre au Lion* tend to be written in French but there are also some shorter articles in standard Dutch towards the end of the review. These standard Dutch articles are usually spread over the last two pages and amount to less than a quarter of the total content. There are occasionally small pieces in the Flemish dialect of French Flanders as in

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<sup>22</sup>List given on p16 of issue six, May / June 1997.

edition six (May - June 1997) which included the reproduction of a notice written in Dunkirk in 1782. (*La Flandre au Lion*, No. 6, May - June 1997, p15)

The review, for the most part, focuses on local history and culture. Regional language issues are raised and the review does not hesitate to criticise Parisian political attitudes when it sees fit, accusing, for example, in 1993 the then *Garde des Sceaux*, Pierre Méhaignerie of "intolérance" towards regional languages, a characteristic it considered, "largement répandu chez nos élus." (*La Flandre au Lion*, No.6, November - December 1993, p9). This same issue also includes an open letter to all mayors and councillors in French Flanders calling on them to follow the example of Bailleul by giving Flemish as well as French street and place names on official signs. Potentially more contentious is an article by Max Deswarte in the May - June 1997 issue in which he ponders the impact that the political union of Belgian Flanders and the Netherlands<sup>23</sup> would have on French Flanders, commenting enigmatically, "VDL est-il orangiste? Nul ne le sait..." (Deswarte, Max, *De la Réunification Flandre - Pays-Bas*, *La Flandre au Lion*, No.6, May - June 1997, p16)

The Cercle Michel de Swaen has played an important part in the regeneration of the Flemish movement in French Flanders. Born from the student regionalist movement of the late 1960s, the Cercle Michel de Swaen brought new blood and new vitality to the Flemish movement of French Flanders which was then able – at last - to put the legacy of the war years behind it. It is true that the Cercle was founded at a time when regionalist issues were enjoying widespread popularity in France and that consequently its campaign

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This article was prompted by comments made on Dutch television on 6th May 1997 by the Christian Democrat senator, Andries Postma, who claimed that the future integration of the Netherlands and Belfian Flanders was in the interest of both parties. Three days later Louis Tobback, Vice-President of the Flemish Socialist Party, was quoted in *De Standaard* as having said that he considered the 1830 revolution a mistake.

on behalf of Netherlandic culture met with a considerably more sympathetic response than it would have done in the immediate post-war period. The Cercle Michel de Swaen showed itself, however, to be very able in capitalising on this positive climate and in mobilising public opinion. Built on foundations laid by *La Nouvelle Flandre* and the MEFL, it achieved far greater popular support than the former and gave the new French Flemish movement a stability and longevity the latter could never realistically have attained. Its success in the 1970s was unparalleled in the French Flemish movement in the post-war era. It is, therefore, to a large extent thanks - both directly and indirectly - to the efforts of the Cercle Michel de Swaen that so many new Flemish initiatives - Radio Uylenspiegel, De Vlaamse Volkshogeschool, Menschen Lyk Wyder, for example - came into being. This diversity greatly strengthened the movement as a whole, to such an extent that, when the Cercle started to lose its way, the movement was able to carry on. Indeed for the first time in its history one can truly talk of a Flemish movement in French Flanders in the late 1970s, rather than of isolated organisations. Cultural regeneration of this kind was vital if standard Dutch and / or the regional Flemish dialect were to have any future in French Flanders.

The Cercle Michel de Swaen in 1998 is clearly not as strong as it was twenty years ago, with publication of *La Flandre au Lion* apparently its principal activity at the moment. Nevertheless, the organisation is still campaigning on behalf of Netherlandic culture in French Flanders more than twenty five years after its foundation and its contribution to the contemporary Flemish movement in French Flanders should not be dismissed.

#### **5.4 Menschen Lyk Wyder.**

In July 1977 the Comité Flamand de France, the Cercle Michel de Swaen and others sympathetic to the Flemish movement of French Flanders - including some local politicians (cf Landry and de Verrewaere, 1982, p303) - came together to organise the first Université Flamande d'Eté / Vlaamse Zomervolkshogeschool in Hazebrouck in what was later to become the Centre Culturel de la Flandre, housing the archives of the CFF. The Université d'Eté has since become an annual event. In 1977 it was divided into three *commissions de travail*, one examining the socio-economic dimension of the French Flemish movement, under the title of "Décider, vivre et travailler en Flandre", one looking at environmental issues, entitled "Habitat et cadre de vie" and the third - Personalité flamande - dealing with cultural matters. In addition to the *commissions de travail* there was a workshop on Flemish music. It was as a result of the work of the first of these groups that the organisation Menschen Lyk Wyder was formed in September 1977, adopting "Décider, vivre et travailler en Flandre" as its motto.

Menschen Lyk Wyder was unusual at the time in the French Flemish movement in that it never intended to be a purely cultural organisation. As one of its information sheets proclaimed in 1978:

C'est pour la première fois l'avènement d'une réflexion économique flamande et progressiste, liée étroitement aux réalités quotidiennes du peuple flamand. (Menschen Lyk Wyder, information sheet, 1978)

For Menschen Lyk Wyder cultural issues were inseparable from socio-economic ones. Netherlandophone culture would only flourish in French Flanders in the right socio-economic context. Menschen Lyk Wyder was not the first Flemish organisation to arrive at this conclusion - similar sentiments are apparent in the ideology of the Cercle Michel de Swaen. Where MLW

was innovative, however, was that it made this aspect of the regionalist movement its priority and in so doing complemented the purely cultural (in theory at least) activity of the Cercle Michel de Swaen. MLW shares a number of ideological principals - notably those of *enracinement*, *autogestion* and federalism - with the Cercle. In an undated<sup>24</sup> information sheet, MLW declares itself to be "Une Association Culturelle qui s'inscrit dans le cadre du régionalisme Flamand et du fédéralisme néerlandais et européen" and wishes French Flanders to be, "Une région naturelle autonome dans une Europe fédérée (both quotations, MLW, undated information sheet, p[1]). The precise extent of this autonomous region is unclear. Although referring principally to *la Flandre Française*, as defined in Chapter 1, MLW on other occasions state that their "champ d'intérêt" encompasses all of the *Pays-Bas Français* (MLW, undated information sheet, p[1]).

MLW have two principal spheres of activity; the promotion, firstly, of "notre langue de culture néerlandaise" (standard Dutch as opposed to Vlaemsch) which is considered as being "un Intérêt Régional Particulier"(MLW, undated information sheet, p[1]) and secondly, of "la cohésion de la Communauté Culturelle Flamande Néerlandaise en Europe."(MLW, undated information sheet, p[1]).

One of Menschen Lyk Wyder's main methods of promoting standard Dutch has been by organising classes in the language, an approach common to many Flemish groups in French Flanders (cf. Ch5 and Ch6). Since 1986 the running of these courses has been taken over by the CELCN, with which MLW have close links, Franck Allacker being the secretary of the former and the President of the latter, for example. Allacker devotes a great deal of effort

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<sup>24</sup> Although the sheet is undated it must have been written between 1986 and 1992, when it came into my possession, as it contains a reference to the CELCN which was founded in 1986.

to the promotion of CELCN courses and it is not always clear in which guise he does so, nor is it especially important, merely serving to underline how complementary the two organisations are. Despite the support they expressed for Vlaemsch in the *Manifeste des Flamands de France* (cf. Ch5.4.1), MLW has always seen the teaching of standard Dutch as having far more practical value. Franck Allacker describes the standard as "vendable" (Allacker, Franck, *La Flandre en France*, 1987, p[4]) in terms of employment prospects and thus social advancement, vital factors in language prestige and maintenance. In comparison, Vlaemsch is seen as having insufficient vocabulary resources to meet the needs of netherlandophone - or potentially netherlandophone - Flemings. MLW do concede, however, that the dialect does still have "un rôle non négligeable à jouer" (Allacker, 1987, p[4]) in terms of primary education in those areas where it is still spoken, but principally because it will help children learn standard Dutch later in their schooling. Given such an appraisal of the relative status and worth of the standard and the dialect from within the French Flemish movement, the outlook for regional Vlaemsch is bleek.

MLW do not, however, see any ideological difficulty in their stance. Firstly, because, as mentioned above, they see standard Dutch as the "langue de culture" of French Flemings and secondly because it is their intention to persuade as many people in Northern France as possible - irrespective of their interest in Flemish culture or ethnic origins - to learn standard Dutch. They believe - probably correctly - that this goal cannot realistically be attained through the promotion of Vlaemsch. MLW hope, therefore, that having persuaded people to learn standard Dutch purely for social advancement, the people will then, in the long term, rediscover the Netherlandic heritage of French Flanders. In some ways such an approach may be seen as innovative and attractive. Clearly more people are likely to

learn a second language if they feel it will enhance their employment prospects than out of interest in, for example, a long dead poet, particularly in a region with high unemployment. Similarly, by placing the promotion of standard Dutch in an economic, rather than an ethno-cultural, context one makes the learning of the language - in theory at least - more attractive to the immigrant population of French Flanders or the Nord / Pas - de - Calais as whole. It is unclear whether MLW had ever considered this possibility.

The danger inherent in MLW's plan is that, in promoting standard Dutch with little or no cultural references, Flemish identity in French Flanders would actually be further eroded. While the demythification of language learning - the stressing of communicative consideration rather than abstract, cultural ones - may be seen as positive, too great an emphasis could be seen as reductive. There is not necessarily any reason to assume that an inhabitant of French Flanders, unaware of any netherlandophones in his or her family or friends would feel any more Flemish for having acquired a working knowledge of standard Dutch for professional purposes. Furthermore, such a person is likely to use the standard in contact with *foreign*, albeit neighbouring colleagues or customers. Thus, if anything, it is the foreignness of the language which is likely to be reinforced for him / her.

This potential sense of alienation from indigenous Flemish culture would, necessarily, be even greater for dialect speaking French Flemings. As noted above, Menschen Lyk Wyder's do suggest that the dialect could be taught in primary schools<sup>25</sup> in netherlandophone areas as part of the study of standard Dutch. In theory this would reinforce the link between the standard and the dialect, but could equally result in children feeling that the dialect was in fact a

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<sup>25</sup>Menschen Lyk Wyder only mention Vlaemsch as being relevant in primary education (Allacker, 1987, pp[3-4]).

substandard form of standard Dutch, used by small children unable to speak "properly", as there is apparently little desire to see this study continued to a higher level. This danger is particularly great given the lack of prestige long accorded to Vlaemsch by the French education system - a lack of prestige seemingly endorsed by MLW. One can only imagine how confused future netherlandophone Westhoek children would be about their cultural and linguistic identity. Added to this comes the difficulty of choosing which language variety to use with whom. While code switching does occur quite naturally in many communities in which more than one language is used, it would doubtless be more problematic in what, for many children, would be essentially an artificially created language environment. The situation could but be made worse by the realisation that standard Dutch was used to communicate to foreigners. The degree of difference between the dialect and the standard is open to debate (cf Ch6). Nevertheless many dialect speakers consider standard Dutch a foreign language, as much as, if not more so than, French. This fact is therefore not likely to help the younger generation of French Flemings come to terms with these linguistic and cultural contradictions. Given that the majority of those using the dialect most readily come from an agricultural background and are nearing retirement, or are already retired (cf Ch2), they are less likely to be making the sort of new cross-border contacts<sup>26</sup> on which Menschen Lyk Wyder are basing their hopes for the future development of standard Dutch. Consequently they are not likely to come into contact with the standard and not likely to start to learn and use it. MLW, perhaps aware of these contradictions, state, "...l'idéal serait que le néerlandais s'implante également dès le primaire..."(Allacker,

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<sup>26</sup> This is not to say that agricultural workers do not have cross-border contacts. One might, of course, surmise that where such contacts do exist they could easily be with Belgian Flemings from a similar background and of a similar age who themselves are much more likely to be dialect speakers.

1987, p[4]). Clearly the only remaining role Vlaemsch is perceived to have is as a support to the teaching of the standard.

Menschen Lyk Wyder's plan is an ambitious one. In its favour one can cite the potential economic advantages, both to individuals and companies of what MLW quote Alain Delcaux<sup>27</sup> as calling "un bilinguisme de proximité" (undated information sheet, [2] MLW / CELCN<sup>28</sup>) and for that reason a degree of benevolence on the part of central and local government. This is, however, counterbalanced by the sheer scale of the task in question, in addition to the fact that there is no guarantee that successful promotion of standard Dutch teaching would bring about a resurgence of Flemish identity and culture.

As stated above, the other main thrust of Menschen Lyk Wyder's action is, "l'insistance sur la cohésion de la Communauté Culturelle Flamande, Néerlandaise d'Europe."(Undated information sheet [1], p[1]). To this end MLW seek to promote contact between French Flanders and the wider netherlandophone world, in particular netherlandophone Belgium. Clearly this is in part for geographical reasons - the proximity of netherlandophone communities in Belgium means that links are easier to forge and maintain, particularly as many exist already. Geography is not, however, the sole explanation. The role played in the contemporary French Flemish movement by Belgian organisations (the KFV, in particular) and individuals should not be forgotten and may be contrasted with the relative indifference (or ignorance) of the Netherlands. MLW would like to see contacts established on several different levels, from the official or semi-official (twinning, for example), to the

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<sup>27</sup> The then *Ministre de la Francophonie*

<sup>28</sup> This information sheet was distributed by both MLW and CELCN; it is unclear which organisation actually produced it. Those requiring more information are referred to the CELCN, quite logically as it is they who organise the classes. In view of the dates of the articles reproduced in this sheet and the depiction of the European Single Market as an important future event, it would appear to have been produced between April 1990 and the end of 1991.

individual, such as language courses. MLW itself organises excursions, conferences and meetings, designed to bring together the "Régions Flamandes..." (Undated information sheet [1], p[1])

In addition to these purely cultural contacts, MLW wish to further economic ones. Inspired by co-operation between Alsace and German industry, Menschen Lyk Wyder would like to see efforts made to persuade members of the Vlaams Ekonomisch Verbond (V.E.V.) to invest in French Flanders and wants a Maison Economique et Culturelle Flamande to be created to help raise the profile of French Flanders with potential investors. One can see how the promotion of both cultural and economic links fits in with MLW's language teaching strategy. Stronger economic links would increase the demand for knowledge of standard Dutch in the workplace, thus raising the prestige of the language, while cultural contacts could be used to emphasise French Flanders' own netherlandophone heritage, so that, in turn (MLW would hope), those learning the standard for purely professional reasons would cease to see it as a foreign language.

It is also to end the estrangement, if not alienation, between French Flemings and standard Dutch that MLW seek to promote popular Flemish culture, principally Flemish music, and organise and / or promote concerts and dances at Het Blauwershof, for example. This significance of popular Flemish culture in French Flanders is more fully discussed at Ch5.8, below. Suffice to say, MLW recognise the need to make Flemish culture attractive to a wide range of French Flemings - most particularly from outside the Flemish movement of French Flanders - and to bridge the gap which many French Flemings perceive to exist between French Flemish culture and standard Dutch. Popular culture is seen as providing one way of doing this (Undated information sheet [1], p[1]).

#### 5.4.1 Co-operation between MLW and other Flemish organisations

The Flemish movement of the late 1970s / early 1980s was more diverse than ever before. Where for over one hundred years it had been dominated by one or two organisations at any given time, in 1982 there were five, plus the KFV. This is a reflection of the increased interest – albeit often superficial - in regional culture in French Flanders (and elsewhere in France) and meant that a variety of perspectives on regional issues were being offered, consequently attracting a wider range of sympathisers than had previously been the case. The obvious danger was that ideological differences would weaken the movement. Although such differences do exist, Menschen Lyk Wyder realised that it was vital to collaborate with other groups, perhaps because it had been founded at the first Université Populaire Flamande, which was itself a prime example of co-operation between groups. Menschen Lyk Wyder continue to participate in this annual event and have also contributed to Cultuurdagen in Wareghem and Esquelbecq. In addition to the CELCN, whose close connections to MLW have already been noted, Menschen Lyk Wyder also have links with the Parti Fédéraliste Flamand / Vlaams Federal Partij, whose one time President, Guy Triquet<sup>29</sup> wrote *Réflexion sur l'évolution historique des Flandres* for them. It is quite likely that some of MLW's members would also have been members or sympathisers of the PFF, the French Flemish movement's principal political mouthpiece.

Even closer links exist between Menschen Lyk Wyder and the Flemish radio station Radio Uylenspiegel, which broadcasts from Cassel (cf Ch5.6).

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<sup>29</sup> G.M. Triquet is also known as Guido Triquet and Wido Triquet.

Although Radio Uylenspiegel was originally an independent venture, MLW, having failed along with Het Reuzekoor, CFF, and the Cercle Michel de Swaen to obtain any official radio or television air time, decided to give its support to the independent station. This support has been both financial and moral and resulted, in January 1981, in Régis Demol, the then President of Menschen Lyk Wyder, being arrested for making illegal broadcasts (*De Koekestuut*, No.1, p1, February 1981).

Symbolically, perhaps the most significant example of MLW's co-operation with other Flemish organisations was the writing in 1981 of the *Manifeste des Flamands de France*. From 1980 a liaison committee made up of members of MLW, the Comité Flamand de France, the Cercle Michel de Swaen, Het Reuzekoor and Tegaere Toegaen had been meeting to co-ordinate the activities of the different groups. As a result of these meetings, it was decided that a joint manifesto should be produced, "...parce qu'il était opportun de préciser avec force et clarté ce que veulent et ce que ne veulent pas les associations régionalistes de Flandre française." (*Le Manifeste des Flamands de France*, 1982, p5). This manifesto was presented at the fourth Université Populaire Flamande on 28th - 29th November and 19th December 1981. The manifesto was adopted on 19th December and proposals made regarding the annexes which were ratified by the liaison committee in January 1982. This document was intended to define, "...une politique culturelle aux dimensions de la Flandre française tout entière" and to serve as, "une plateforme pour tous les régionalistes flamands de France qui y trouveront de quoi alimenter leur action, individuelle ou collective, dans les années à venir." (*Manifeste*, 1982, p5)

In the manifesto the Flemish movement of French Flanders defined French Flanders as the *arrondissements* of Lille, Douai and Dunkirk, using this

definition on geographical criteria, "le Bas-Pays" and the historical "Comté de Flandre". They refused to limit the region purely to the remaining netherlandophone areas or to extend it to include all of the Nord / Pas-de-Calais, termed "Pays-Bas français". The manifesto demanded that this area should be recognised as intrinsically Flemish, by for example flying the Flemish flag from government buildings, alongside the tricolour (*Manifeste*, 1981, article 3, p6) and using traditional Flemish place names (article 4)<sup>30</sup>.

The need for the promotion of the regional language, considered an "élément important" in group identity (*Manifeste*, p14) is recognised. As has become typical of the Flemish movement in France, the education system is seen as the principal means of language promotion. Interestingly, in this document it is the teaching of regional Flemish, at least in primary education, which is stressed. The manifesto calls for Vlaemsch to no longer be considered a "langue allogène" and for this language to be used "...au sein d'une pédagogie globale et enseigné, avec le français, aux enfants afin que ceux-ci puissent s'épanouir dans la langue de leurs ancêtres." (*Manifeste*, article 10, p7) This grounding in the regional language, it is argued, will help them learn - "s'ils le désirent" – standard Dutch, "forme littéraire du flamand", during their secondary education. This emphasis on the regional variant rather than the standard is somewhat at odds with what the Cercle Michel de Swaen and Menschen Lyk Wyder have stated on other occasions, both before and since. One must assume that the other groups, Het Reuzekoor, Tegaere Toegaen and the Comité Flamand de France favoured the teaching of the regional dialect. In the early 1980s Vlaemsch was enjoying popularity in French Flanders and in the Flemish movement, particularly after the Savary circular<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> The annexes, the manifesto's "programme d'action", call for the use, in particular, of Flemish street names. This article formed the basis of a campaign by the Cercle Michel de Swaen in 1993 (cf Ch5.3). In some parts of French Flanders - Bailleul, Godewaeresvelde, for example - Flemish street names can now be found.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Ch5.2.2

allowed the dialect to be taught in schools. That popularity was to prove short-lived and there are now merely a handful of independent dialect classes - such as those organised by Het Reuzekoor - and only one school, the Collège St Exupéry in Steenvoorde, is still teaching Vlaemsch (cf Ch5.3). The teaching of standard Dutch, in contrast, continues to expand.

Article 11 of the manifesto also calls for "les dialectes picards pratiqués en Flandre française" to be recognised and taught in nursery and primary schools, "pour faire comprendre les cultures populaires traditionnelles des Flamands d'expression romane." (*Manifeste*, article 11, p7)

The manifesto also focuses on cultural and environmental issues, calling for the safeguarding of the "patrimoine culturel et naturel" of French Flanders, reiterating the link between ecology and regionalism in French Flanders (and elsewhere) apparent since the late 1960s and which is vital to the notion of *enracinement*. The Flemish movement wishes to raise awareness of this heritage, particularly amongst young people and would like regional history to be taught in schools, with emphasis placed on the role played by Flemings in scientific, technological and artistic development, (*Manifeste*, 1982, article 6, p6) thus, in turn, raising the prestige of the regional culture and by extension that of the regional language. However, the Flemish movement does not merely wish to preserve regional culture but also to help it grow. In addition to literature and theatre, there is a desire to further more popular forms of expression, such as music, dance and even traditional games and "les pouvoirs publics" are called upon to lend their support to such initiatives. The importance of the mass media, in diffusing cultural production is acknowledged and it is requested that, "toutes facilités légales, financières et techniques" (*Manifeste*, 1982, article 14, p7) be given - presumably by the authorities - to initiatives in this domain. The manifesto justifies these

requests with the argument that Flemish and Picard culture can serve as a link between French culture and those of Northern Europe, an argument frequently used by the French Flemish movement since the late nineteenth century. To this end the Flemish movement asks that French Flemings be allowed to reinforce their links with netherlandophone Belgium and the Netherlands, "sans que leur [les flamands de France] loyalisme soit suspecté."(*Manifeste*, article 12, p7.)

The *Manifeste de Flamands de France* is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it represents a unified statement of action by the Flemish movement of French Flanders. Secondly, it does not deal with language maintenance in isolation but sees this as just one aspect of a wider cultural struggle and in this context acknowledges the importance of cultural and language prestige. The manifesto is, however, a purely cultural document and does not tackle the socio-economic issues which are at the forefront of Menschen Lyk Wyder's action. Nor does it examine the role of Netherlandic language and culture within the official administration in any but the most superficial sense (place names, use of the Flemish flag, etc.). Unfortunately, few significant achievements have resulted from the manifesto, particularly in those spheres where progress was the most essential, namely education and the mass media. With regard to the former, it is now those elements of the Flemish movement which advocate the teaching of the standard - MLW, the Cercle Michel de Swaen and most significantly, the CELCN - which have the upper hand with the result that those learning the dialect are a minority even within the Flemish movement itself.

Menschen Lyk Wyder are currently rather less active than during the 1980s. One reason for this is undoubtedly the involvement of leading figures, such as Franck Allacker, in the CELCN. At the time of writing the Flemish movement

as a whole seems to be putting much of its faith in this organisation's ability to promote the teaching of standard Dutch. One can see, however, that MLW are attempting to promote a socio-economic context in which the CELCN's classes are of value. Menschen Lyk Wyder have, however, also suffered as a result of rumours of extreme right wing tendencies and of involvement with - or at least of harbouring sympathies for - the Belgian extreme right group, the Vlaams Blok. Such rumours seem largely unsubstantiated, although MLW's contacts with the Cercle Michel de Swaen and the Parti Fédéraliste Flamand have already been mentioned above. Both of these groups have, with varying degrees of justification, been accused of extreme right sympathies (cf Ch5.3 and Ch5.7). Whether such accusations are justified on the part of Menschen Lyk Wyder is unclear and in many ways irrelevant; the very fact that they exist damages MLW's image and having set itself up as a pressure group from the outset, MLW are unable to defend themselves by claiming to be a purely cultural - and therefore a-political - organisation.

## 5.5 Tegaere Toegaen

During 1980 a new Flemish organisation emerged in the Westhoek. Tegaere Toegaen - "forwards together" in Vlaemsch - considered itself to be "une autre association", "une nouvelle voix" (*De Koekestuut*, No.4, June 1981, p3). It differed from other Flemish regionalist groups in that the basis of all its activity was political and its ideology resolutely "de gauche" (*De Koekestuut*, No.4, June 1981, p3).

Although Tegare Toegaen considered its prime objective to be "la sauvegarde du patrimoine" (*De Koekestuut*, No.4, June 1981, p3) it did not see itself as a cultural organisation in the same way as, for example, the

Comité Flamand de France or the Cercle Michel de Swaen. For Tegaere Toegaen:

On ne peut concevoir la culture séparément de la société qui la sécrète...il n'y aura pas de réveil de la culture flamande sans un changement dans la société. (*De Koekestuut*, No.4, June 1981, p3)

Tegaere Toegaen was not the first Flemish group to arrive at this conclusion. Where it was original, however, was in the nature of the changes which it proposed. First of all it rejected any form of union with the Netherlands and / or netherlandophone Belgium:

Politiquement cette démarche est aventureuse et suspecte, économiquement elle est vouée à l'échec puisque ces pays connaissent la crise comme l'ensemble du système capitaliste. (*De Koekestuut*, No.6, undated, p[2])

This attitude may be contrasted with that of Menschen Lyk Wyder. Menschen Lyk Wyder, although sharing Tegaere Toegaen's conviction that cultural and linguistic issues cannot be divorced from social and economic ones, consider it to be in the best interests of French Flanders - both economically and culturally - to nurture closer economic, if not political, ties with the wider netherlandophone world (cf Ch5.4).

Nor did Tegaere Toegaen consider an autonomous French Flanders to be desirable since the region lacked both the infrastructures and the dynamic entrepreneurial class necessary to survive in the capitalist world (*De Koekestuut*, No. 6, undated, p[2]). What Tegaere Toegaen proposed instead was "L'autonomie régionale dans le cadre français" (*De Koekestuut*, No.4,

June 1981, p3), the vital element in which was *autogestion*, "parce que le régionalisme doit aussi signifier émancipation des travailleurs" which could, in turn, only be achieved if the working class were to participate directly in the management of industry (*De Koekestuut*, No.6, undated, p[2]). Tegaere Toegaen called on, "toutes les forces de gauche de notre région: syndicats, partis de gauche, mouvements de jeunesse, paysans-travailleurs, écologistes" - irrespective of their views on the regional language or culture - to unite in order to attain this goal. This would suggest that, for Tegaere Toegaen, it was its role within the regional left, rather than within the Flemish movement of French Flanders which was its defining feature. Thus, for this organisation, socio-political considerations took precedence over those of culture and language.

This is not to suggest that Tegaere Toegaen were indifferent to such issues. The organisation sought, in particular, to promote the Flemish dialect of French Flanders. Although not hostile towards standard Dutch, Tegaere Toegaen favoured the regional dialect as this was the authentic "language of the people" and therefore the vehicle of popular culture. Standard Dutch, on the other hand, was merely another tool of international capitalism and given that Tegaere Toegaen were not actively seeking to further economic or political links with netherlandophone Belgium or the Netherlands, there was no particular reason to promote the standard. Indeed standard Dutch, along with French, was held responsible for making Vlaemsch appear, "une sous-langue", a perception Tegaere Toegaen were anxious to change (*De Koekestuut*, No. 5, November 1981, p5). Unlike those organisations championing standard Dutch, Tegaere Toegaen believed that the dialect had a future beyond its symbolic, cultural significance, as a means of communication, maintaining that French Flemings were deeply attached to

their Vlaemsch and that support for the dialect was in fact growing (*De Koekestuut*, No. 5, November 1981, p5).

Tegaere Toegaen adopted a number of strategies to promote Vlaemsch, placing particular emphasis on the teaching of the regional form.<sup>32</sup> In addition to organising its own, independent classes, aimed principally at adults, Tegaere Toegaen also endeavoured to foster the teaching of Vlaemsch in schools. From the outset the organisation had considered the teaching of the regional form to children a priority - *De Koekestuut* (the organisation's mouthpiece) had discussed the creation of *Kreutschoole*, along the lines of the Breton *Diwan*, the Catalan *Calendretas* or the Basque *Ikastolak*, as early as 1981 (*De Koekestuut*, No. 4, June 1981, p3) but nothing ever came of this idea. Between 1983 and 1984 the group also produced two Vlaemsch text books aimed specifically at schools, *Vlamsch voor de Kreuten* and *Cours de Flamand en sixième*, in addition to reference works of use in the classroom and a book of traditional children's rhymes. This support may have contributed to the sudden appearance of Vlaemsch classes in six *collèges* in 1983, after the Savary circular had authorised - albeit indirectly - the teaching of Vlaemsch in the schools of French Flanders (cf Ch5.2.2, Ch6.5) - Given that a number of Tegaere Toegaen's members were teachers, the organisation's involvement may have been more direct, although there is no proof of this.

Of the reference works produced by Tegaere Toegaen, the Vlaemsch - French / French - Vlaemsch dictionary is particularly noteworthy. According to Joël Sansen, a leading figure in the organisation, this 16,000 entry dictionary was the first of its kind produced in French Flanders (Sansen,

<sup>32</sup> The emphasis placed on education as a means of language maintenance in French Flanders has already been noted and is discussed more fully in Chapter 6. In addition a significant number of Tegaere Toegaen's members were teachers.

ca.1982, p179) and as such represented the first serious attempt to standardise spelling in the regional form. This standardisation took into account what Sansen calls "l'orthographe historique" (Sansen ca.1982, p183), in other words by referring to widely accepted written Vlaemsch, for the most part - given the dearth of written Vlaemsch from the seventeenth century on - place names and surnames, contemporary pronunciation and etymology, as well as the spelling of standard Dutch cognates. Based on these elements, the dictionary's editors sought to establish a coherent system which, when combined with the Vlaemsch reference grammar which Tegaere Toegaen planned to produce<sup>33</sup>, could lead to the creation of a standard form of regional Flemish. This would enable Vlaemsch to gain greater acceptance as a language in its own right, rather than merely a non- (and for many sub-) standard form of a foreign language. Furthermore the acceptance of a standard would appear a pre-requisite to successfully establishing a concerted programme of Vlaemsch teaching across French Flanders. However, one might argue that, if Tegaere Toegaen recognised the need for a standard, it would have been far more useful to adopt the one which already existed, namely standard Dutch. This argument is particularly persuasive if one bears in mind the significant contribution made by Vlaemsch<sup>34</sup> to the standard(cf.Ch5.3). By refusing to do so, Tegaere Toegaen were affirming French Flanders' cultural and linguistic autonomy not only from France but also from the wider netherlandophone world.

Tegaere Toegaen also published - albeit briefly - its own review, *De Koekestuut*<sup>35</sup>, in association with Westhoek Editions (cf Ch5.6.1). *De*

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<sup>33</sup> Sansen describes it as being "en cours de réalisation" (Sansen ca.1982, p179) but it is unclear whether it was ever published. Certainly I have found no trace of it.

<sup>34</sup> The term Flemish is used here to refer to the language varieties spoken in both Belgian and French Flanders.

<sup>35</sup> Named after a cake produced in French Flanders

*Koekestuut* appeared for the first time in February 1981, with Joël Sansen as *Directeur de la Publication* and was initially intended to be a monthly publication. However, financial difficulties soon arose. Although an average of approximately 330 copies were sold per month representing (according to *De Koekstuut* itself) some 600 readers, (*De Koekstuut*, No.4, June 1981, p1) the review was still significantly short of its break even figure of 560 copies. The editorial staff blamed this shortfall above all on problems distributing and publicising the publication, claiming:

...il existe un public potentiel pour un tel journal...Ce nombre [of readers] pourrait certainement être très amélioré car nous sommes encore trop peu connus. (*De Koekstuut*, No.4, June 1981, p1).

As a result of these difficulties the fourth issue did not appear until June 1981 and the fifth was eventually published in November of that same year but number six, which also seems to have been the last, did not follow it for over three years.<sup>36</sup>

*De Koekstuut* was a bilingual (French / Vlaemsch) review which covered the all aspects of Tegaere Toegaen's interests. Issue two (March 1981), for example, carried articles on the future of the steel industry in Dunkirk, Dutch folk music, the natural environment and a feature on the traditional *Hofstee* (farmhouse) of French Flanders. In common with most supposedly bilingual reviews produced by the Flemish movement of French Flanders, the majority of the articles were in French. Nevertheless, those which were in Vlaemsch were given some prominence; both of the first two issues carried leaders in Vlaemsch on the front page. In addition to lead articles, there were also

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<sup>36</sup> Edition number six is undated but the *Dépôt légal* dates it as February 1985. It was a free issue published in response to the economic crisis in French Flanders.

poems, readers' letters<sup>37</sup> and even a cartoon strip, *Pierlala*, which *De Koekstuut* claimed to be, "la première bande dessinée flamande" (*De Koekstuut*, No.2, March 1981, p1), in the regional dialect.

However, despite its varied content and the promising readership of its early issues, *De Koekstuut* did not survive for long. *Tegaere Toegaen* itself did not fare much better, although it is difficult to date the organisation's demise with any great precision. The last edition of *De Koekstuut* in early 1985 would appear to have been its last major undertaking although it may well have continued to produce less substantial publications of which little trace remains<sup>38</sup>. Certainly Michel Staes of the CFF believed *Tegaere Toegaen* to still be active to some degree in 1990 (Staes, correspondance 1990) but even then the group did not respond at its official headquarters in Cassel. One may therefore deduce that it ceased to exist in the late 1980s. However, as has been noted with other Flemish organisations in French Flanders, levels of activity tend to ebb and flow - the Cercle Michel de Swaen was largely dormant for almost a decade - as they often depend on the commitment of a very small group of true activists. There are no signs, however, that *Tegaere Toegaen* is about to re-emerge.

This group's disappearance may be explained in several ways. With regard to the language question, the decision to support regional Flemish set *Tegaere Toegaen* apart from much of the rest of the Flemish movement of French Flanders, particularly as the only other group to do so exclusively, *Het Reuzekoor*, did not share *Tegaere Toegaen*'s socio-political preoccupations

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<sup>37</sup> Proof that Vlaemsch was still considered viable as a means of communication by some French Flemings.

<sup>38</sup> A number of *Tegaere Toegaen*'s publications may be found in the archives of the Comité Flamand de France in the Centre Culturel de Flandre in Hazebrouck but nothing after this final edition of *De Koekstuut*. If the organisation kept its own archives, they have either been lost or are simply not available for public consultation.

(cf.Ch4.5.1). Furthermore, support from netherlandophone Belgium which has been so important for the CELCN, amongst others, tends to be more forthcoming for initiatives promoting standard Dutch, as this is, of course the Belgian standard.

Despite having collaborated with other Flemish groups on the *Manifeste des Flamands de France*, it was, however, more than just the language issue which set Tegaere Toegaen apart from other Flemish groups in French Flanders. Their overtly political stance is a sharp contrast to the apolitical doctrine of groups such as the Cercle Michel de Swaen, even if the latter were rather less apolitical they liked to admit (cf Ch5.3). Tegaere Toegaen were even isolated among those groups which did not eschew political matters, since they were the only left wing organisation in the history of the Flemish movement of French Flanders. When attending the "Fête du Peuple Breton", organised by the Breton socialist organisation l'Union Démocratique Bretonne in October 1981, Tegaere Toegaen were at pains to distance themselves from the "éléments d'extrême droite" which had, they found, tainted the reputation of the Flemish movement of French Flanders among their Breton counterparts (*De Koekstuut*, No.5, November 1981, p5). No mention is made of who precisely these "éléments d'extrême droite" might be but as has been seen above, (Ch5.3, 5.4) such allegations have been levelled against both the Cercle Michel de Swaen and Menschen Lyk Wyder. It would, of course, be wrong to suggest that such elements represented the whole of the French Flemish movement. as Tegaere Toegaen themselves acknowledged. However, even centre right Flemish activists were likely to be uneasy about some of Tegaere Toegaen's more radically socialist proposals, such as *autogestion* and were likely to have been further alienated at being - even if only by association - branded right wing extremists.

### 5.5.1 Het Reuzekoor

Het Reuzekoor is the only Flemish group still actively promoting Vlaemsch in French Flanders. The group was founded in 1976 as a singing group - hence its name, "the Giant Choir" - largely as a result of the wave of interest at that time in folk music across France (cf Ch5.8). However, it very soon broadened its scope, developing what Claude Collache<sup>39</sup> terms, "sa démarche culturelle globale" (Collache in Marteel, 1992, p15). By the time it celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 1996, Het Reuzekoor was offering a programme featuring - in addition to its two singing groups - classes in traditional dance and courses in Vlaemsch, as well as producing its own bilingual (French - Vlaemsch) review *Platch'iou* and compact disks and cassettes of traditional Flemish music (Het Reuzekoor, publicity sheet, *Activités 1995/6*).

Nevertheless, the group's primary aim remains to promote Flemish culture and in particular traditional music and it is for this reason that Het Reuzekoor promotes regional Flemish rather than standard Dutch. Its Vlaemsch classes were originally organised to help singers understand and pronounce the songs they were singing, all of which were, of course written in Vlaemsch and not standard Dutch. These classes<sup>40</sup>, which now attract approximately thirty students each year, were initially taught by Jean-Paul Sepieter and Pierre Vandevoorde, with Jean-Louis Marteel taking over in 1980. It was as a result of these classes that Marteel produced the teaching material which was to become *Het Vlaams dan men oudders<sup>41</sup> klappen*, published in 1992 .

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<sup>39</sup> Member of Het Reukekoor and husband of its President Maryse Collache.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ch5.6

<sup>41</sup> *Oudders* is the Vlaemsch spelling of standard Dutch *ouders*

Although promoting Vlaemsch, Het Reuzekoor's views on the standard Dutch / Vlaemsch issue are rather less entrenched than those of many other elements of the Flemish movement of French Flanders. Marteel, himself a teacher of standard Dutch at the Université du Littoral in Dunkirk, considers Dutch and Vlaemsch to be two variants of the same language, the former being the modern, written form and the latter the local, spoken form, commenting that Vlaemsch is, "...la seule forme que des gens simples comme nos parents comprennent et utilisent quotidiennement." (Marteel, 1992, p19) Claude Collache, however, in the same work cautions against an unqualified acceptance of the standard:

Pouvait-on imposer de ce côté-ci de la frontière - comme de l'autre - ce néerlandais moderne (l'ABN) Pouvait-on le présenter aux Flamands de France comme *leur* langue littéraire, eux qui avaient leur histoire, leur culture - y compris la langue -, leur "destin" spécifique (flamando-français) depuis trois siècles? Rien n'est moins certain.  
(Collache in Marteel, 1992, pp14-15)

Nevertheless, his paramount concern is that French Flanders be encouraged to develop as a bilingual region, not whether this bilingualism should be French / Vlaemsch or French / standard Dutch, although he admits, "...l'avenir du flamand c'est le néerlandais bien sûr!"(Collache in Marteel, 1992, p15)

For Het Reuzekoor the maintenance of Flemish culture is a vital element in maintaining the Flemish regional identity, without which French Flanders would lose its "cohésion sociale" (Collache in Marteel, 1992, p17). Collache feels that French Flemings must affirm the cultural specificities of French Flanders but without breaking up the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region as a socio-political entity. Writing in 1992, against the backdrop of the break up of

Yugoslavia, he is, however, aware of the potential dangers of asserting identity along ethnic lines, admitting, "Il est vrai qu'ici, [in French Flanders] les dérapages existent, les extrémistes s'affichent" and in words echoing those of Tegaere Toegaen eleven years before, denounces any racist or xenophobic tendencies within the Flemish movement of French Flanders:

Même honte pour les comportements xénophobes ou racistes qu'ils soient flamands ou français, même opprobre pour les attitudes d'exclusion! (Collache in Marteel, 1992, p17)

Again in common with Tegaere Toegaen, Het Reuzekoor actively promotes the protection of the natural environment of French Flanders - the region's natural heritage - which it sees as being a vital part of Flemish identity:

Ainsi donc défense de l'environnement et défense du patrimoine apparaissent indissociables. Les dunes, le bocage, le *vlaemsch*: même combat. (Collache in Marteel, 1992, p17)

However, despite these similarities Het Reuzekoor and Tegaere Toegaen are / were two fundamentally different organisations. Whereas the latter believed that cultural issues could not be separated from social and economic ones and therefore strove to promote future economic social and economic change in the belief that this was the only true way to safeguard Flemish culture in France, Het Reuzekoor's goals are rather more modest. Het Reuzekoor's principal aim has always been to promote traditional Flemish music, which it has done with considerable success, participating in national folk festivals such as those in Brest and Saumur in 1996 (Het Reuzekoor, *Activités 1995/6*), winning the *Prix de l'Académie Charles Cros* in 1986 for the record *Dunkerque 1900* (Collache in Marteel, 1992, p15) and selling more than

15,000 copies of its compact disks by 1992 (Collache in Marteel, 1992, p15). It should not be forgotten that it was to support this primary objective that Het Reuzekoor started its Vlaemsch courses.

One might therefore see the group's attitude to Flemish culture and, in particular, Vlaemsch, as rather backward looking, more concerned with conservation than promotion, a common trait of the "folk" elements of many regionalist movements (cf Ch5.8). The title of Marteel's book, *Het Vlaams dan men oudders klappen (the Flemish my parents speak)* would seem to endorse this view. However, both Collache and Michel Delebarre<sup>42</sup>, writing in the preface to this book recognised the significance of its publication in 1992. Delbarre describes Marteel's work as:

...un signe extraordinairement positif d'une Europe qui se construit en se reconnaissant riche de ses diversités et d'une région Nord / Pas-de-Calais qui se trouve confortée par l'affirmation d'une partie de son identité. (Delebarre in Marteel 1992, p10)

Collache sees the "double culture" of French Flanders as being an advantage in future European development and the regional *vlaemsch*, as a "précieux facteur d'intégration européenne." (Collache in Marteel, 1992, p17)

Thus it is not that Het Reuzekoor's conception of Flemish culture is purely retrospective but rather that the organisation has set itself specific goals in keeping with its *raison d'être* and its size. Het Reuzekoor is a relatively small organisation even by the standards of the Flemish movement of French Flanders, counting some fifty members in 1992, (Collache in Marteel, 1992,

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<sup>42</sup> Then Mayor of Dunkirk and *Premier Vice-Président du Conseil Régional du Nord Pas-de-Calais*

p15) with approximately thirty students attending its Vlaemsch classes, the majority coming from Dunkirk and the surrounding area. The likelihood is that many - if not most - of the students are also counted within the group's fifty members. Clearly some members of Het Reuzekoor may also be members of other Flemish groups.

Similarly Het Reuzekoor's support for regional *Vlaemsch* is not the anachronism it might at first appear. This support is based on a recognition of the strengths of the dialect - its symbolic importance and the fact that it is the language of the existing local netherlandophone culture which, in the form of traditional music, Het Reuzekoor is endeavouring to promote, while at the same time acknowledging standard Dutch as the standard written form of the language. Indeed perhaps the true significance of the title *Het Vlaemsch dan men oudders klappen* is not to consign *Vlaemsch* to history but rather to emphasise the netherlandophone tradition in French Flanders, the future of which may well be standard Dutch.

## 5.6 Radio Uylenspiegel

The development of the mass media has become a key factor in the dissemination of specific language varieties, for the most part serving to reinforce the national language promoted by central government. Where "serious" broadcasts - the news, documentaries, for example - and particularly state broadcasting services are concerned, it is not only the national language which is promoted but also the national standard. In the case of BBC English, for example, the broadcasting language has become synonymous with the standard. In some ways the mass media have had an even greater impact on the fate of linguistic minorities than education policies

since first radio and then television have brought the national language - in both standard and non-standard form - directly into people's homes in a more accessible cultural context, by both informing and entertaining. In theory at least, radio and television offer minority languages the same advantages - providing they have access to the airwaves. For if broadcasts in the minority language offer an unprecedented opportunity to reach and unite the speakers of that language, their absence harms it even more.

French Flemings quickly realised the importance of winning space on the airwaves for their language and had tried to establish broadcasts in Vlaemsch even before the Second World War, but to no avail (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p304). During the war years Radio-Lille broadcast the Radio-Bruxelles Dutch language course but in the post-war period, as a result of the hostility to the French Flemish movement (cf Ch5.1), these were discontinued. For over thirty years Vlaemsch was absent from the airwaves of French Flanders but this absence only served to strengthen the resolve of certain elements of the French Flemish movement to win what it considered its legitimate right of expression. Such sentiments are expressed by Régis De Mol, the then President of Menschen Lyk Wyder in the preface to Pascal Vanbremersch's *Une Radio libre en Flandre: Radio Uylenspiegel*:

...comment rester Flamands un bâillon sur la bouche? Comment parler de la Flandre aux Flamands, comment faire entendre notre Vlaemsch sur les ondes malgré une presse écrite et parlée lèche-cul, ignare et chauvine? (De Mol in Vanbremersch, 1979, p7)

The origins of Radio Uylenspiegel are not, however, to be found entirely within the Flemish movement. The initial impetus for its creation came from the *Radios libres* movement of the 1970s, which, inspired - in the North of

France in particular - by the North Sea pirate stations such as Radio Caroline, and in the libertarian spirit of May 1968, was determined to challenge the state broadcasting monopoly in France. In the Nord / Pas-de-Calais *radios libres* were established at, amongst others, the University of Lille and the IUT in Béthune. Just as the May 1968 movement had given new life to many regionalist organisations, in French Flanders and elsewhere in France, so regionalist elements were to be found within the *radios libres* movement; in fact regionalist broadcasters constituted one of the interest groups united in this movement by the common goal of breaking the central government monopoly. Radio Uylenspiegel was by no means the only regionalist radio station to appear in the late 1970s or even the first; the Alsatian station Radio Verte Fessenheim, with its programmes in both French and Alsatian served as something of a model to Uylenspiegel's founder, Pascal Vanbremeersch.

Vanbremeersch had been involved in the campus radio station in Béthune and had inherited its broadcasting equipment. Inspired by the success of Radio Verte Fessenheim and spurred on by the unprecedented popularity enjoyed by the Flemish movement of French Flanders in the mid to late 1970s, Vanbremeersch decided to create the first Flemish radio station in French Flanders. Initially he attempted to enlist the help of Belgian Flemish organisations, long-time benefactors of the Flemish movement of French Flanders, in the hope of broadcasting from Belgium. In this way he would have been able to broadcast legally and avoid the countermeasures of the French Broadcasting authorities, the RTF, such as signal jamming, confiscation of equipment, even arrest. However, Vanbremeersch's request was met with little enthusiasm within the Belgian Flemish Movement, which, with hindsight he felt was actually fortunate, since it meant that his station could not be branded, "cette radio étrangère qui s'attaque à la France."(Vanbremeersch, 1979, p60)

Vanbremeersch was similarly unsuccessful in his attempt to enlist the help of the French Flemish movement which rejected his request to broadcast live from the first Zomervolkshoogeschool in Hazebrouck in early September 1977, fearing the intervention of the authorities. Although Jean-Paul Sepieter had included a call for a Flemish radio station in his electoral programme for the 1976 local elections and despite the "discussion abondante" which Vanbremeersch claims his project sparked off at the Zomervolkshoogeschool (Vanbremeersch 1979, p61), the French Flemish movement would still appear to have stopped some way short of a wholehearted endorsement of it.<sup>43</sup>

Despite this lack of support from both the Flemish associations in French Flanders and the Belgian Flemish Movement, Vanbremeersch helped by his wife and two associates, continued with his preparations and Radio Uylenspiegel made its first broadcast on January 1st 1978, from a church on top of Mont Cassel, the highest point in French Flanders, chosen principally to increase the range of the low power transmitting equipment. Despite this natural advantage, Radio Uylenspigel only had the capacity to reach a very limited audience, covering not even all of netherlandophone French Flanders. The station took its name from the legendary Flemish hero Tyl Uylenspiegel as a symbol of the region's resistance to oppression. This first programme was a relatively modest affair lasting just one hour. Symbolically the station's opening address was made in the *Vlaemsch* of French Flanders:

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<sup>43</sup> Vanbremeersch notes that no mention was made of these discussions in the *dossier de synthèse* published as a result of the Zomervolshoogeschool (Vanbremeersch 1979, p61)

Dit es Radio Uylenspiegel, e Vlaemsche radio voor Fransch-Vlaanderen. De Vlaemsche taele is nuuze moedertaele. Zoen'r Vlaemsch, geen Vlaeming meer.

This is Radio Uylenspiegel, the Flemish radio for French Flanders. The Flemish language is our mother tongue. Without Flemish, no more Flemings. (Vanbremeersch 1979, pp62/3)

The rest of the broadcast, however, was in French, as none of those involved in Radio Uylenspiegel at this stage were Vlaemsch speakers. The programme mixed Flemish folk music with discussion of topics such as the nuclear site at Gravelines and Apartheid. While the former subject was indicative of the importance of ecological issues to the modern Flemish movement of French Flanders, the latter was a clear demonstration of Radio Uylenspiegel's rejection of racism and in particular of racism from within the netherlandophone world.

Encouraged by a favourable public response and in spite of a summons (convocation) issued on Pascal Vanbremeersch for breaking broadcasting laws, a second programme was transmitted one week later. This time the Vlaemsch (not standard Dutch) input was increased, thanks to the participation of the French Flemish poet Keuntje. Whereas the first programme, benefiting from the element of surprise, had successfully avoided the RTF countermeasures, the second was jammed for almost all of its thirty minute duration. Vanbremeersch was in no doubt as to the reasons for this reaction:

En brouillant de façon intensive, les autorités ont fait tomber leur masque: elles montrent publiquement qu'elles attaquent le flamand.  
(Vanbremeersch, 1979, p68)

For the authorities, officially at least, there was no particular desire to deny French Flemings their right of expression, rather it was merely a question of upholding the law which ensured the government broadcasting monopoly. Although this may have been their overriding concern, particularly with the *Radios libres* movement at its height, there can be no doubt that one of the principal reasons behind the state control of radio and television was to ensure that these media depicted the state (ie government, nation and national institutions) in the way these vested interests wanted. Radio and television had thus been intended to play a part in the construction and reinforcing of the national identity. While by 1978 attempts to launch a Flemish radio station were unlikely to have been perceived as a threat to this identity, central government's determination to maintain its broadcasting monopoly inevitably meant maintaining its monopoly in this aspect of the construction of the national identity and thus served to alienate the Flemish movement still further.

Consequently Radio Uylenspiegel's resolve to continue was greater than ever and other elements of the Flemish movement of French Flanders started to lend their support, with Jean-Paul Sepieter participating in the third broadcast on January 15th 1978. When this programme led to the seizure of Radio Uylenspiegel's transmitter, support increased still further. Menschen Lyk Wyder, while not pledging support to Radio Uylenspiegel specifically, stated publicly, "Nous revendiquons la liberté d'expression sur les ondes, une radio bilingue flamand - français, et des programmes flamands à la télévision."(Quoted in Vanbremeersch, 1979, p72). Sepieter once again

participated in the next broadcast on 19th March and on 20th April 1978 a petition bearing seventy six signatures was published in the local press in favour of Uylenspiegel. Het Reuzekoor made a donation of 400F to help buy new equipment. Nevertheless, when Radio Uylenspiegel made its first public broadcast on 28th May 1978 it received more support from the *Radios Libres* movement than from other Flemish groups.

At the same time as support was gradually growing for Radio Uylenspiegel, central government attitudes were hardening towards the *Radios Libres*, culminating in the loi Lecat which came into force on 27th July 1978. According to this law anyone convicted of making illegal broadcasts could face from one month to one year in prison, as well as a fine of up to 10,000,000F. As a result a large number of the *Radios libres* - Radio Uylenspiegel among them - ceased broadcasting.

Despite this setback, the question of the presence of programmes in Vlaamsch and / or standard Dutch on radio and television was very much on the agenda at the second Zomervolkshoogeschool in September 1978. However, the French Flemish movement decided that this goal was best attained by lobbying Fr 3 in Lille, in the hope of persuading the regional state channel to broadcast such programmes. Consequently, when Vanbremeersch and several others who had been involved in Radio Uylenspiegel, including Jean-Paul Sepieter and folk musician Christian Declerck, wrote to the Comité Flamand de France, the Cercle Michel de Swaen, Het Reuzekoor and Menschen Lyk Wyder asking for support in their request for a special dispensation<sup>44</sup> to create, "une radio locale à but

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<sup>44</sup> Article one of loi 72-553 of 3/7/72 states that a special dispensation may be granted to establish a radio station provided that, "Les programmes...s'adressent à un public déterminé, limité et identifiable et répondent aux besoins et aspirations de ce public."(Vanbremeersch, 1979, p81) Those involved in Radio Uylenspiegel felt that, in broadcasting to

linguistique et culturel" (Vanbremeersch, 1979, p81), the other Flemish groups refused to give this support, fearing that to do so would jeopardise their approach to Fr 3. These organisations did, however, agree to support Radio Uylenspiegel's initiative should Fr 3 reject their own proposals.

In January 1979 Fr 3 did reject these proposals, its regional director for Nord - Picardie claiming, "...le plan-cadre des programmes radio, et le budget affecté à cet objectif, ne permettent pas de prévoir ce genre d'émission nouvelle."(P. Roubaud, letter dated 23/1/79, reproduced in Vanbremeersch, 1979, p86). In so doing Fr 3 inadvertently succeeded - somewhat belatedly - to unite the majority of the Flemish movement of French Flanders behind Radio Uylenspiegel. Fr 3, despite its regionalist vocation, was now seen as merely the regional outpost of the Paris based broadcasting authorities, its response as another example Parisian contempt and repression. Furthermore, the Flemish organisations were left with little practical alternative if Vlaemsch was to obtain what they considered its rightful place on the airwaves. Het Reuzekoor, Menschen Lyk Wyder and the Cercle Michel de Swaen all agreed to participate in the production of programmes which were to have:

...un but culturel de défense et de promotion de l'identité (sic) flamande, c'est-à-dire correspondront exactement à l'action passée et présente des associations, chacune avec sa sensibilité particulière.  
(Vanbremeersch, 1979, p87)

Only the Comité Flamand refused to participate in the initiative, which it considered too vague, "notamment au niveau du contenu des programmes et du financement de la station."(Vanbremeersch, 1979, p87)

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netherlandophone French Flemings, their station fell into this category, in particular as the state broadcasting service did not cater for this group.

However, even this additional support from the other Flemish groups was not sufficient and the request was denied. As a result of this latest setback, Menschen Lyk Wyder, with its greater resources in terms of supporters and money, took over direct control of the station and decided to go on air in 1980, once again as a pirate station. This action led to the arrest of Pascal Vanbremersch as well as that of Régis Demol, the then president of Menschen Lyk Wyder, who was considered to have aided and abetted the illegal broadcasts. As had been the case two years before, the action taken against Radio Uylenspiegel was perceived as an attack on the Flemishness of French Flanders and once again served to unite the French Flemish movement, with the newly founded Tegaere Toegaen declaring, "Qu'elle continue son combat, malgré des débuts si difficiles contre la colonisation culturelle des ondes gouvernementales."(De Koekestuut, No.2, 3/81, p8)

However, before the cases could come to court François Mitterrand was elected President. Given that the new president had very different views on the *radios libres* and regional culture than his predecessor, it is perhaps not surprising that, at the preliminary hearing<sup>45</sup> the trial date was postponed until 1st December 1981. Furthermore, by 1981 Radio Uylenspiegel could count not only on the support of the French Flemish movement but also on that of prominent local politicians, such as the mayors of Hazebrouck and Bailleul.

As a result of this change in political attitudes, Radio Uylenspiegel was duly legalised later in 1981 (Bernard Sepieter, *L'explosion des Styles*, in *Pays du Nord*, No.22, March / April 1998, p43). From being very much on the fringes

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<sup>45</sup> Although the hearing is discussed at some length in De Koekestuut (No.4, June 1981, p1) no date is given for it. However, as the article appears in the June 1981 issue of De Koekestuut and the presidential elections were on 10th May 1981 one may assume that the hearing took place between 10th May and the beginning of June 1981.

of the French Flemish movement, Radio Uylenspiegel has now become one of its most active and successful elements. It broadcasts from Cassel from 7:00am until 11:00pm with programmes in both French and Vlaemsch and has proved an important showcase for the Flemish folk musicians of French Flanders, with for example a weekly show *En Direct de Breughelland* presented by the prominent Flemish bard Ghislain Gouwy (cf Ch5.8). In addition to the French and Vlaemsch content, the station regularly repeats its standard Dutch course based on *Le Néerlandais pour tous* (cf Ch5.7), thus indicating an openness towards the standard form not always apparent in those groups which have championed the regional Vlaemsch. Clearly Radio Uylenspiegel has an important role to play in the maintainance of Vlaemsch in France. This it does both directly, through its programmes in Vlaemsch and its standard Dutch course and indirectly by promoting netherlandophone culture, notably Flemish folk music. The importance of the latter should not be underestimated since a healthy cultural scene is vital to the prestige of a minority language, ensuring that it remains healthy, etc... Nevertheless, Radio Uylenspiegel remains a minority interest station. The key breakthrough in the field of audio-visual media, namely the presence of programmes in Vlaemsch on a major radio channel or on regional television (Fr3), although still a goal of the French Flemish movement, appears as far away as ever.

### **5.6.1 Press and Publications**

If Vlaemsch has suffered from underexposure in the audio visual media, it has fared rather better in written publications. As already discussed, the majority of Flemish groups have, from the earliest days of the Flemish movement in

French Flanders, created their own publications. Their reasons for doing so are clear; to report on and publicise their activities and to promote Flemish culture and language. Some publications, *La Nouvelle Flandre* and *le Courier Lillois*, for example, although independent of any one Flemish group nevertheless existed to promote the aims of the movement as whole. One may also see these publications as the product of an essentially middle-class, educated membership which had great faith in the power of the written word and recalls the emphasis placed by the Flemish movement of French Flanders on the promotion of Vlaemsch through education. However, despite the significance *Le Lion des Flandres*, *De Koekestuut* et al may have had for the groups which produced them or within the French Flemish movement as a whole, they remained very much specialist publications, reaching relatively few readers, most of whom were already converted to the movement's cause. Furthermore, the mainstream, mass circulation press has frequently been hostile to the regionalist movement; one recalls in particular the prominent role played by *La Voix du Nord* in the campaign against the VVF in 1946 (cf Ch2). Today, however, the attitude of the regional press is much more positive towards Flemish culture and Flemish organisations, as illustrated by the favourable coverage the Cercle Michel de Swaen received in the mid 1970s (cf Ch5.3, above). Nevertheless, coverage is, for the most part, limited and no mass circulation newspaper carries articles in other standard Dutch or Vlaemsch.<sup>46</sup>

It would, however, be incorrect to portray all publications promoting the netherlandophone culture of French Flanders as small scale, little read affairs. Of particular note are the publications of the Stichting Ons Erfdeel, *Ons Erfdeel* itself, *Septentrion*, *Les Pays-Bas français / De Franse Nederlanden*

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<sup>46</sup> However, Sepieter states that both the *Journal des Flandres* (Bergues) and *L'Indicateur* (Hazebruck) did so in 1980. (Sepieter, 1980, p145)

and various other brochures. *Ons Erfdeel*, the first of the reviews to be published, was founded in Belgium in 1957 by Jozef Deleu at the suggestion of André Demedts, the then President of the KFV, with the express aim of promoting netherlandophone culture in French Flanders and may be seen as natural extension of the work of the KFV. The first twenty page edition, published in August 1957, bore the bilingual title *Ons Erfdeel - Notre Patrimoine* met with immediate success. By 1959 the print run had been increased from 150 to 500 copies and the number of issues per year from two to four (Durnez in Lanno, 1973, p1134). *Ons Erfdeel* continued to gain in popularity throughout the 1960s to such an extent that the *Stichting Ons Erfdeel* (*Ons Erfdeel* Foundation) was created to manage the publication's finances and to plan new publications, an initiative which resulted in, amongst others *Septentrion* and *Les Pays-Bas français*. In 1972 *Ons Erfdeel* became a bi-monthly publication, each issue comprising some 160 pages and by 1974 its circulation had reached 11,000 (Durnez in Lanno, 1973, p1134), with the current figure approximately 10,000 copies (Deleu, 1995, p14). This reduction in the number of readers should not, however, necessarily be interpreted as a drop in popularity but rather may be attributed to the arrival of *Septentrion* and *Les Pays-Bas français*, which have taken over specific aspects of *Ons Erfdeel*'s role and both of which have sizeable readerships (see below).

Initially, French Flanders featured significantly in the pages of *Ons Erfdeel*. Issue One of 1966, for example contained no fewer than seven articles dealing with this region and its culture, representing thirty six pages of a total of 205<sup>47</sup>. In addition, this edition carried a ten page article on Alsace-Lorraine, testifying to the publication's interest in wider regional issues in

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<sup>47</sup> This figure includes four pages of short items devoted to French Flanders and its culture, which are not included in the total of seven major articles.

France. Contributors to this issue include both prominent figures from the Flemish movement of French Flanders and the KFV, such as Jacques Fermaut (a member of the editorial team), Walter Thys, André Demedts and Luc Verbeke<sup>48</sup>. However, as the publication grew, its focus moved away from French Flanders, now seeking rather to promote Netherlandic culture worldwide and to further the cultural integration of the netherlandophone areas. Consequently, the amount of coverage devoted to French Flanders has decreased considerably, usually amounting to no more than two pages in the regular feature *Actualiteiten*. This is not, however, to suggest that the Stichting Ons Erfdeel no longer takes an interest in French Flanders, in fact quite the opposite is true as, in 1976, the foundation created a publication dealing with this region alone, *Les Pays-Bas Français / De Franse Nederlanden*. It was, therefore, no longer necessary to devote so much of *Ons Erfdeel* to French Flanders, although the region does continue to feature regularly as part of the publication's desire to promote the whole spectrum of netherlandophone culture.

In 1972 the Stichting Ons Erfdeel started publishing a new quarterly review, *Septentrion*, written in French and intended to promote netherlandophone culture amongst Francophones. The editorial staff was essentially the same as that of *Ons Erfdeel*, with, once again Jozef Deleu as the Editor in Chief. *Septentrion* has enjoyed the support of eminent French scholars such as André Malraux and Prof. Pierre Brachin<sup>49</sup> and like its predecessor, has proved successful, with some 7,000 copies printed each year, more than half of which are distributed in France (Deleu, 1995, p16). Clearly the review has been successful in raising the profile of netherlandophone culture in France and has, by enhancing its prestige, one might suggest, also benefited the

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Ch4.1.2

<sup>49</sup> Emeritus Professor of Dutch Language and Literature at the Sorbonne and author of *La langue néerlandaise*, referred to extensively in Ch6.

Flemish movement of French Flanders. However, *Septentrion*'s focus has been (logically) much more the major centres of netherlandophone cultural production, namely the Netherlands and Belgium. There is, potentially, the danger that netherlandophone culture is promoted as entirely foreign or that French Flanders is culturally irrelevant to the netherlandophone world. Stichting Ons Erfdeel ensured that this was not the message they were giving by publishing, from 1976, a review entirely devoted to French Flanders, *De Franse Nederlanden / Les Pays-Bas Français*.

Deleu describes *Les Pays-Bas Français* as:

...une publication scientifique, bilingue<sup>50</sup>, paraissant sous la forme d'annales et consacrée au Nord de la France et aux rapports entretenus par cette région avec la Flandre et les Pays-Bas sur le plan social, culturel, artistique et politique. (Deleu, 1995, p16)

In terms of its contents, he states, "...cette publication s'inscrit dans la lignée de la review *Ons Erfdeel*, telle que celle-ci apparaissait à ses débuts, focalisant son attention sur les Pays-Bas Français et accordant à celui-ci une place centrale dans ses colonnes."(Deleu, 1995, p16) At the same time he acknowledges the change of direction which *Ons Erfdeel* has taken and which had made the *Les Pays-Bas français* necessary.

Like its predecessors, *Les Pays-Bas français* is a high quality publication, both in terms of content and format. It draws many of its contributors from the universities of the Nord / Pas-de-Calais and netherlandophone Belgium, such as G.Van de Louw, from the University of Lille III. Jacques Feraut remains

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<sup>50</sup> French – standard Dutch. Each article in *Les Pays-Bas français* is published in the language in which it was written and a summary of it is given in the other language.

on the editorial team. Although in terms of readership the smallest of the Stichting Ons Erfdeel's three regular publications, *Les Pays-Bas Français* is still probably the most widely read publication dealing with French Flanders, its language and culture, with approximately 2,500 copies sold each year (Deleu, 1995, p16). However, whilst the academic nature of the content of *Les Pays-Bas Français* lends netherlandophone culture in French Flanders - and by extension the movement promoting this culture - credibility and prestige, it also limits the publication's popular impact.

In addition to the publications discussed above, the Stichting Ons Erfdeel has also produced five "brochures multilingues", dealing with the culture, language and history of the netherlandophone lands. To date the most successful of these is *Le néerlandais, langue de 20 millions de Néerlandais et de Flamands* by O.Vandepitte and Jacques Fermaut, which has been translated into nineteen languages. Total sales of these brochures amount to some 300,000 copies.

Clearly the Stichting Ons Erfdeel has made an important contribution to the promotion of netherlandophone culture in France. However, despite the undoubted success of publications such as *Ons Erfdeel*, *Septentrion* and *Les Pays-Bas Français*, their academic nature reduces their accessibility and thus their influence. Furthermore, they can still appear as foreign publications promoting foreign culture and thus a foreign language.

Such criticisms could not, however, be levelled at the publications of Westhoek editions, which described itself as, "Le spécialiste de l'Edition régionale" (Sepieter, 1980, p[152]). Many of its publications - particularly in

the early years<sup>51</sup> - such as Marc Castre's *La Flandre au Lion* and Jean-Paul Sepieter's *Vlaemsch Leeren* had a more militant tone than those of the Stichting Ons Erfdeel and from March 1981 February 1985 Westhoek Editions worked together with Tegaere Toegaen to produce *De Koekestuut* (cf Ch5.5 & Ch5.6.1). In addition to such *engagé* works, Westhoek-Editions also published a series of local history books called "Collection "Mémoire Collective" which included *La vie légendaire et vérifique de Tisje Tasje* by Nicolas Bourgeois and Albert Deveyer's *La Flandre d'autrefois*. This latter work is a good example of the series, since, rather than being an objective historical account, it is a highly personal recreation of "La Flandre profonde" (Deveyer, 1985, back cover) of the author's youth. Deveyer particularly stresses the agricultural tradition of French Flanders, its influence on popular culture and the role played within that culture by the regional Vlaemsch. In so doing he emphasises the popular essence of Flemishness and reinforces the feeling of group identity through reference to tradition, as the series title suggests. Clearly this sense of group identity is vital to the maintenance of netherlandophone culture in France and this series may be seen to compliment the more linguistically and politically militant works of Castre and Sepieter and are certainly more accessible to those not already involved in the Flemish movement of French Flanders. Westhoek-Editions were always very aware of the need to appeal to as wide a public as possible. Consequently, in addition to the range of works they published, they also ran a shop at their base in Dunkirk where one could find, "...tous les livres, disques, autocollants, drapeaux et autres objets concernant la Flandre."(undated advert)

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<sup>51</sup> The exact date that Westhoek-Editions was founded is difficult to pinpoint. However, Marc Castre's *La Flandre au Lion* is the earliest of its publications which I have found and dates from 1977.

By the late 1980s Westhoek-Editions had published at least twenty books, most of which were readily available in the majority of bookshops in the Nord / Pas-de-Calais. However, while this would suggest that these publications had achieved a reasonable level of popularity, Westhoek-Editions ceased publishing in the early 1990s after just two (out of five) volumes of its ambitious *Histoire des Provinces du Nord de la Francemamam* had appeared. The reasons for its disappearance are unclear although one might easily surmise similar problems to those encountered by various Flemish organisations - lack of funds<sup>52</sup>, too few people actively involved, for example. Some of Westhoek-Editions' publications are still available, notably those from the *Mémoire Collective* series, somewhat ironically now published by *La Voix du Nord*. However, their demise has undoubtedly been a blow to the promotion of regional culture and history, not just in French Flanders but also in Artois and Picardie. Such publishers, operating independently from any Flemish cultural organisations do, however, still exist, the Editions du Houtland based in Steenvoorde is one example, the Franco-Belgian Werkgroep de Nederlanden, based in Godewaersvelde and Poperinge, another. However, judging by the style and quality of their publications, both are much more modest operations than Westhoek-Editions. Furthermore their material - collections of poems in Vlaemsch, for example - does not have the mass appeal of many of Westhoek-Editions' publications. Consequently they have not enjoyed the same degree of penetration.

However, it is not merely works published by French Flemish publishers which have been significant to the Flemish movement in France in the period after 1968. The early 1970s saw the publication of several works on the history of French Flanders, most notable amongst which were Luc Verbeke's

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<sup>52</sup> One might recall that publication of *De Koekestuut* had ceased because of financial difficulties.

*Vlaanderen in Frankrijk* and Emile Coornaert's *La Flandre Française de langue flamande*, both published in 1970.<sup>53</sup> The latter was reviewed in glowing terms in *De Koekestuut*, where it was described as, "...le meilleur livre qui ait été publié en langue française." (Gayer in *De Koekestuut*, No. 3, April 1981, p7) and served as an inspiration to many Flemish activists in the 1970s and 80s. The significance of history and consequently of history books to regionalist movements should not be underestimated<sup>54</sup>. Such works often serve to create regional / national myths around golden ages when the region was independent and battles fought in the attempt to maintain this independence, which, of course ended in noble failure. Not only do such works help to establish a common historical heritage for a region's heritage but also often help to define that region's boundaries, boundaries which may have become obscured as a result of annexation, internal political / administrative reorganisation, population shift or change in linguistic practices, for example. Regionalists therefore often rely on historical precedent in order to establish frontiers to legitimise their action<sup>55</sup>. In the case in French Flanders, for instance, it was an historical work, Louis Trénard's *Histoire des Pays- Bas français*, published in 1972, which is widely accredited with having popularised the term of the Pays-Bas français. This name was to receive even greater acceptance after being adopted by the Stichting Ons Erfdeel as the title of their new bilingual review *Les Pays-Bas français / De Franse Nederlanden* in 1976.

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<sup>53</sup>Of the major works published about the history and culture of French Flanders which appeared in the 1970s, only the Belgian Fleming Verbeke's is written in standard Dutch; none are written in the Vlaamsch of French Flanders.

<sup>54</sup>In this context one might also mention historical associations, which, although not part of the Flemish movement in French Flanders as such, do undoubtedly play a part in preserving aspects of the region's cultural heritage and identity.

<sup>55</sup>However, these boundaries are themselves often highly debatable, particularly as they are frequently based evidence dating from a time when borders were not perceived as being as permanent and hermetic as they are today. Those chosen by one author or organisation may not coincide with those chosen by another.

Gérard Landry and Georges de Verrewaere's *Histoire secrète de la Flandre et de l'Artois* is a good example of this process. This work was part of the *Histoire Secrète des Provinces françaises* series published by Albin Michel, which also included works on other regions with regional movements, such as Brittany, Corsica, the Pays Basque, Alsace and Lorraine, as well as Lyon and Paris. Its authors had both been involved in the Flemish movement in French Flanders; Landry was a former editor of the *Courrier Lillois* and de Verrewaere is described in the book's jacket portrait as, "...bien connu des milieux culturels flamands." While not a militant work in the style of Sepieter's *Vlaemsch Leeren* is most definitely *engagé*. Landry and de Verrewaere portray the inhabitants of French Flanders and Artois as having lost their identity and consequently their dynamism (as a result of domination from Paris). It is the authors' hope that *Histoire secrète de la Flandre et de l'Artois*, will help them rediscover both:

...il [notre peuple] possède encore en lui toutes les vertus pour se bâtir un avenir, son avenir. Pour avoir un destin, il ne lui suffit pas d'obtenir des subventions gouvernementales ou d'utiliser des recettes de marketing américain. Pour re-naître et prendre toute sa place, il lui faut, comme tous les peuples du monde, retrouver toute son âme.  
(Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p14)

This quotation reveals several characteristics typical of the creation of national identity<sup>56</sup>. Firstly, an ethnic *we*-group, "notre peuple", is established<sup>57</sup>. This group has certain innate characteristics ("toutes les vertus"). Secondly, there is the sense of natural eternity about the group; its origins are not mentioned, it merely exists, has existed and will exist ("son

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<sup>56</sup>cf Wicker, 1997, pp1-37

<sup>57</sup>"tous les peuples du monde" constitute the *they*-group

avenir"). Thirdly, the use of religious / mystical vocabulary - "re-naître", "destin", "âme" - is typical of much nationalist rhetoric<sup>58</sup>. Also noteworthy is the authors' disdain for central government and American culture, a disdain shared by regionalist groups in French Flanders - Tegaere Toegaen and Menschen Lyk Wyder, for example - and elsewhere in France.

Despite the references to "notre peuple", the authors stress the hybrid nature of the region's culture and identity.

Habitants de la Flandre, de l'Artois, du Hainaut, notre région fut longtemps une entité de la Somme jusqu'à la Frise. Une entité généreuse, pétie de culture germanique et en même temps toujours ouverte et accueillante à la romanité. (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p13)

In so doing they echo the sentiments of Lemire and others since, who have seen French Flanders as potentially providing France with a valuable gateway to Northern Europe, particularly with regard to trade (cf Ch2.6.4 & Ch5). It is therefore this blend of the Germanic with the French which gives the region - in the broader definition, French Flanders and Artois or Pays-Bas Français - in its unique character. In order to preserve this balance, Flemish culture and with it the regional language, must be preserved. Landry and de Verrewaere's work participates in this process itself, not least through its discussion of the contemporary Flemish movement in French Flanders, thus raising its profile and highlighting its activities. Hence the significance of works such as *Histoire secrète de la Flandre et de l'Artois* and Coornaert's *la*

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<sup>58</sup>In many cases - in Europe at least - the rise of the cult of the nation has coincided with a loss of religious belief (cf Anderson, 1991, pp12-19). The former has taken over many of the functions and language of the latter. In France during the Third Republic this process became institutionalised (cf Weber, 1976)

*Flandre française de Langue flamande*: they reach much further, than, for example, collections of poetry in Vlaemsch which, although promoting the regional language in a much more direct manner, are likely to be bought by those already converted to the cause. Books like Landry and de Verrewaere's or Coornaert's might actually win new converts.

April 1995 saw the publication of *Pays du Nord*, "Le magazine du patrimoine, de l'histoire et de l'art de vivre", as it calls itself. This high production quality bi-monthly magazine<sup>59</sup> is written and published in Lille but is one of a national series published by Editions Freeway based in Clermont-Ferrand. Geographically its area of interest is wider than merely French Flanders, or even the Pays-Bas Français, encompassing in addition Picardie and Belgian Flanders. It is designed to appeal to a wide audience, carrying articles on local history, cultural events and activity in the region, traditions, tourism and regional gastronomic specialities. Consequently, one might be tempted to dismiss it as irrelevant to the Flemish cause. However, the magazine has, on occasion, covered aspects of Flemish culture, such as the article on folk music, referred to above and at 5.8, below and has served to publicise various Flemish cultural organisations and centres, such as Het Blauwershof, Het Reuzekoor and Radio Uylenspiegel (No.22, March / April 1998, pp40-51). Het Blauwershof, in particular has featured in several articles. Clearly these Flemish activists looked upon the publication favourably enough to wish to be included in it, presumably valuing the opportunity for publicity in a magazine widely read beyond Flemish circles. If such was their reasoning, then a letter written by a reader in response to an article discussing the Blauwershof would suggest that it was sound, as this reader requests, "...pourriez-vous me faire parvenir l'adresse exacte du Blauwershof...car son patron, Christian

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<sup>59</sup> From April 1995 to January 1996 it was a monthly publication

Mercier<sup>60</sup>, me fascine par son engagement dans la défense de la culture flamande."(Pays du Nord, No.4, July 1995, p94) Given that this letter was written by a "Nordiste exilé pour des raisons professionnelles, dans la banlieue nord de Paris", one can see how a publication like *Pays du Nord*, allows the Flemish movement of French Flanders to increase its influence outside its usual area of activity. Furthermore, although *Pays du Nord* is written exclusively in French, it has pledged (fing the doot) to carry articles about them (Vlaemsch and Picard) (*Pays du Nord*, No.2, May 1995, p92). To date there has, however, been little evidence of this.

Less positively, one might criticise *Pays du Nord* for trivialising the regional culture, reducing it to recipes and a list of recommended restaurants. However, it should not be forgotten that the magazine is not intended to be a serious academic work nor is it a product of the Flemish movement; it is of use to the Flemish movement exactly because it steps outside of these constraints. Furthermore, Sepieter's *Vlaemsch Leeren* also contains traditional Flemish recipes, partly perhaps to attract a wider readership but also as a manifestation of the popular culture which is at the heart of the author's regionalism. The danger for *Pays du Nord*, however, is that this populist approach combined with high production standard can, on occasion, give the impression of a tourist brochure. Consequently the culture discussed in the magazine may appear artificial, created solely for the benefit of the tourist or may alienate many of the region's inhabitants from their own cultural heritage as they too would look upon it with the eyes of a tourist. Nevertheless, within its limitations, *Pays du Nord* is useful to the Flemish movement in French Flanders as an awareness raising device.

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<sup>60</sup> Although referred to as Christian Mercier in *Pays du Nord*, he usually signs himself Kris in the articles he has written for the Parti Fédéraliste Flamand (cf.Ch5.7.1) and Menschen Lyk Wyder (cf.Ch5.4)

However, if French Flanders can boast a fair number of publications dealing with regional history and culture - albeit the majority in French - literary works in the regional language are rather more scarce. At the present time, literary production in Vlaemsch would appear to be limited to independently produced collections of poetry by poets such as Keuntje - described by Jean-Paul Sepieter as, "jeune poète-paysan romantique, volksdichter de Steenvoorde" (Sepieter, 1980, p43) - one of whose poems appeared in Sepieter's *Vlaemsch Leeren* (Sepieter, 1980, p43) or those published by Werkgroep de Nederlanden. Furthermore, such works are usually only available from specialist bookshops and often within a relatively restricted area, or direct from the publisher, as is the case with those produced by Werkgroep de Nederlanden. This dearth is unsurprising, given that Vlaemsch largely ceased to be a written language from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.

Some regional novels - written in French - such as those of Jacqueline Quef-Allemant, allude to the netherlandophone cultural heritage of French Flanders and as such may be considered as contributing to raising public awareness of this heritage in much the same way as *Pays du Nord* does, in particular as such works are more readily available (and - for the majority of the inhabitants of French Flanders - more comprehensible) than those written in Vlaemsch or standard Dutch. Quef-Allemant's novel *Madame De Ryck* does actually contain some Vlaemsch, both in some of its dialogue and in the reproduction of several traditional folk songs, one of which, *Het Afzyn*, is taken from De Coussemaeker's *Receuil des Chants Populaires des Flamands de France*<sup>61</sup>. However, the fact that many such works are historical novels, while furthering recognition of French Flanders' netherlandophone cultural heritage, fail to

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<sup>61</sup>Which was itself republished by Westhoek Editions

emphasise that this culture is still alive; in fact, quite the opposite may be the case.

Thus Flemish culture is represented in print in a variety of ways. On the one hand are the publications of Flemish organisations and the militant works produced by Flemish activists independently of such organisations; on the other are works, often written by sympathisers of the Flemish movement dealing with French Flanders from an historical and / or cultural perspective. The former include far more works in Vlaemsch and standard Dutch and which actively and vigourously promote Flemish culture. Since the disappearance of Westhoek Editions, such works have tended to be small scale and only available from certain, specialist outlets, usually restricted to the heart of netherlandophone French Flanders. Consequently they will mostly be in circulation amongst those who know where to find them, in other words, for the most part, those connected to the Flemish movement. The latter, promote Flemish culture and language in what one might term a passive way, in that they are likely to contain little, if anything written in Vlaemsch but discuss it and the culture associated with it and - on occasion - the organisations actively involved in its promotion. These publications tend to look beyond netherlandophone areas and deal with French Flanders as a whole, if not all of the Pays-Bas Français. Consequently, they reach a far wider public and thus have the potential to attract new sympathisers to the movement. Clearly such an effect is almost impossible to measure but it is equally clear that any minority movement needs as much publicity as possible and preferably in a prestigious format. In this way what might, at first sight, appear somewhat peripheral publications in a Flemish context, may well complement the efforts of the militants.

## 5.7 Political organisations

Since the founding of the Comité Flamand de France, most organisations and individuals within the Flemish movement of French Flanders have been at pains to stress the strictly apolitical nature of their activities. However, as has been suggested on several occasions above, the struggle to maintain a minority culture / language in the face of central government hostility is, in itself, a political act. Be that as it may, the intention here is not to discuss the political aspects of the actions of the "cultural" organisations - these have already examined above - but rather to focus on those individuals and organisations for whom political action was the first priority.

The first manifestation of this purely political action is Jean-Paul Sepieter's campaign - standing as an independent regionalist - in the cantonal elections of March 7th, 1976. Sepieter had left the Cercle Michel de Swaen in 1974, reputedly concerned about its elitism and its developing right wing tendencies<sup>62</sup> and had formed the purely cultural organisation Hekkerschreuwen (cf Ch5.8, below) in March 1974. His regionalist philosophy has clear links with that of Robert Lafont<sup>63</sup> and is founded around what Marc Castre terms, "un socialisme créativiste" (Castre, 1977, p80). This philosophy is explored at some length in *Vlaemsch Leeren*, Sepieter's home study Vlaemsch course published (in serial form) in 1977 (cf 6.7).

According to Sepieter, French Flanders, its economy, environment, culture and language were all being destroyed by Parisian centralisation policies - "l'hypernombrilisme parisien" (Sepieter, 1980, p69) - which were, in turn, driven by capitalist economic necessity,

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<sup>62</sup> Castre terms him "Dissident du Cercle Michel de Swaen" (Castre, 1977, p73) but points out that the Cercle Michel de Swaen rejected this suggestion (Castre, 1977, p90).

<sup>63</sup> cf Lafont, R., 1967 & 1976.

La lente dilution du sentiment flamand allait de pair avec le blocage de l'économie flamande et sa "spécialisation" décidée par le pouvoir central, dans la production de matières premières agricoles et industrielles destinées à la région parisienne. (Sepieter, 1980, p27)

Not surprisingly particular mention is made of education policies, designed, according to Sepieter, to produce a uniform, national workforce to serve the national - Paris centred - economy,

La Révolution industrielle, l'expansion coloniale en Afrique, Asie exigent soudain une main d'oeuvre désormais instruite, compétente, qualifiée...instruite mais aussi déplaçable au gré des besoins, donc parfaitement assimilée, nivélée, dépourvue de conscience régionale, téléguidé depuis Paris. (Sepieter, 1980, p27)

Not only does Sepieter see regional identities as being threatened by central - principally economic - policy but also considers their maintenance to be the principal weapon in the combat against the uniform anonymity which he perceives to be the inevitable result of such policies. Indeed Sepieter now considers French itself to be under threat in the same way as Vlaemsch, the threat being posed on this occasion by English and suggests that it is only by supporting cultural diversity within France - and thus regional languages - that French identity and culture can resist this "homogénéisation linguistique et culturelle" (Sepieter, 1980, p26).

It is not only culture and language which Sepieter describes as suffering as a result of the dehumanising Paris economic machine but also the French Flemings themselves; indeed, for him, language, culture, the people and the

environment in which they live, are all inextricably linked - hence his insistence on "langue populaire" and "culture populaire". His portrayal of the French Fleming is almost romanticised in its earthiness, for example in the passages on Flemish humour and obscene vocabulary and makes of their close affinity to the rural environment in which many of them live, with a whole unit *Boer zyn* devoted to Flemish agricultural workers and their problems. The sentences for translation in this unit stress his statement that: "Les Flamandophones du Westhoek appartiennent majoritairement aux catégories sociales les plus défavorisées." (Sepieter, 1980, p14). The first selection emphasises the rural nature of the Westhoek and the strength of Vlaemsch in these rural areas, "In 'n Westhoek, 't zyn veele boeren. Jansschoonvaeder is boer in Arneke. Hy klapt assan Vlaemsch me z'n joens," progressing to what one might suppose to be typical complaints of the Westhoek *boer*,

Wae' gaen d' an'eren toen? Ze gaen nu werken in de fabrieken lyk de boerwerkmenschen over tien jaeren. De steefisters gelooven dat al de boeren ryk zyn. Ze peizen da me liegen a me zen dat het d' eeremoe is. (Sepieter, 1980, p85).

This depiction is indicative of a conscious attempt to create both a sociological and an ethnic stereotype for the French Fleming. Ethnic difference is emphasised in the *Aspects du Westhoek* section ironically entitled, "Nuze voorouders de Sakschen." However, Sepieter's comments on the Flemish personality and ancestry are inseparable from those made on "typical" Flemish social status and in particular the desire to portray the French Fleming as an exploited underclass:

...nos ancêtres qui n'étaient sans doute pas des comtes, des généraux ou des banquiers mais des paysans, des artisans ou

commerçants, des tisserands impliqués dans des luttes permanentes (Révolution démocratique de Zannekin...dix ans de conflits entre le peuple flamand les noblesses coalisées...résistance populaire à l'occupation espagnole...) (Sepieter, 1980, pp92-3).

It is interesting to note the implied solidarity of the "peuple flamand" against both the foreign aggressor - "l'occupation espagnole" - and the class aggressor - "les noblesses coalisées" - who, although defined in terms of class, are, by implication not Flemish (or, at the very least, not purely Flemish). One might therefore deduce that the "peuple flamand" was largely homogenous, both in terms of ethnicity and class.

Given the importance of the natural environment - both in economic and symbolic terms - to Sepieter's stereotypical French Fleming, it is not surprising that the protection of this environment should also have a place in the author's regionalist philosophy. Sepieter expresses particular concern about the threat posed to the coastal environment of French Flanders by "l'industrialisation sauvage" and "le poison nucléaire" (Sepieter, 1980, p98). However, this is not a purely practical concern about levels of pollution but also springs from a desire to maintain the "natural", traditional landscape of French Flanders in rather the same way that he seeks to maintain the "natural", traditional language. Furthermore, a correlation is seen between environmental and social decay, "La dégradation contemporaine de notre environnement physique et (sic) symptomatique de troubles collectifs de dépersonnalisation" (Sepieter, 1980, p98) and it is Sepieter's oppressed Fleming who suffers most from this decay:

L'impératif d'économie constraint les Flamands les plus défavorisés à l'adoption du préfabriqué, des parpaings et de la tôle ondulée...Chez

les nouveaux riches, la "frime" incite à construire ostensiblement d'énormes bâtisses inexpressives et du plus mauvais goût: un double danger qui menace le "cadre de vie" quotidien et surtout l'âme flamande. (Sepieter, 1980, p98)

It is also interesting to note that in this quotation that the "nouveaux riches" are not concerned with maintaining the traditional environment and are therefore contributing to the destruction of Flemish identity. Furthermore these affluent inhabitants of French Flanders are not even described as "Flamands". The suggestion would once again appear to be a true Fleming one must be "défavorisé"; to embrace capitalism is to embrace Parisian values and to lose one's Flemish identity.

In the light of this philosophy, Sepieter put forward an ambitious and wide ranging programme for the 1976 cantonal elections which included reform of the democratic process itself. He proposed that local inhabitants should have the opportunity to express their opinions directly, via " la pratique démocratique du référendum cantonal ou communal dans toutes les circonstances importantes" (Sepieter, quoted in Castre 1977, p86). This, he believed, was necessary as, at the time, too much local power was held by, "une majorité conservatrice excluant la participation et l'information contradictoire" (Sepieter, quoted in Castre, 1977, p86). Linked to these proposals, Sepieter wanted greater transparency in the workings of local government, through public debate and press conferences after meetings. He also advocated the creation of "une radio cantonale WESTHOEK...ouverte à toutes les opinions" (Castre, 1977, p86, capitals appear in the original). This would not only serve the democratic purpose of informing the local population of local government debate and would also

break the central government domination of the media, which Sepieter saw as leading to the corruption of the democratic process.

In addition to these democratic reforms, Sepieter also proposed a range of economic measures designed to encourage investment in French Flanders. This he considered vital in order to put an end to what he saw as the colonial style exploitation of French Flanders to serve the Paris centred economy. These measures included the creation of "banques populaires flamandes" and the introduction of ""taxes décolonisatrices" sur l'exil de l'électricité, des matières premières agricoles, et industrielles."(Sepieter, quoted in Castre 1977, p87). Sepieter pledged to defend local agriculture, which he considered to play an important part in the Flemish identity, in particular "la petite exploitation familiale qui a fait la Flandre" and to create co-operatives to help farmers.

Administratively, Sepieter supported the creation of a Westhoek *département*, which would stretch from Bailleul to Dunkirk. The very name of this *département* would have created a precedent, since none bears a name in a regional language. This *département* would enjoy bilingual status (French-Vlaemsch) in all government offices, most notably in schools, where both French and Vlaemsch would be taught from nursery level. In addition pupils would learn about Flemish history and culture. Financially, Sepieter proposed that the budget of the *commune* should correspond to 80% of taxes paid, as was the case in the Netherlands. In 1977 this figure stood at 11%.(Castre, 1977, p87)

Environmental protection measures also featured in Sepieter's programme which would be funded through the creation of a "fonds d'aide cantonal"(Castre, 1977, p88). Culturally, the promotion of popular culture was

made a priority, in order to develop, "l'esprit communautaire et la communication sociale."(Castre, 1977, p88)

All of these proposals were to be achieved "dans le cadre de la légalité républicaine française:" at no time did Sepieter advocate separatism or unification with Belgian Flanders. In fact, quite the opposite was true:

Le Westhoek...n'est pas et ne sera jamais l'appendice de la Flandre Belge. La France n'est pas en danger, elle est seulement en question dans sa nature autoritaire et centralisatrice. (Sepieter, quoted in Castre, 1977, p81)

Nevertheless, opponents attacked his programme as "dangereux" and claimed it would condemn French Flanders to, "le sort de la Bretagne et de la Corse."(Quoted in Castre, 1977, p81)

However, Sepieter never had the opportunity to implement any of his programme. Handicapped by a lack of campaign funds and enforced absence from Steenvoorde during the election period, he polled just 6% of the vote, with a peak of 11% in his home *commune* of Boeschèpe, nevertheless beating the PCF candidate by 2%. Nevertheless some of his proposals have subsequently become a reality. The early years of the Mitterrand administration saw a degree of decentralisation and the (albeit shortlived) introduction of Vlaemsch into the schools of French Flanders. The ending of the state broadcasting monopoly gave Radio Uylenspiegel, founded the year after Sepieter's election campaign , a legal footing. Ecological issues have become part of mainstream politics, with the Nord / Pas-de-Calais becoming the first French region to have an ecologist President. However, this is not to suggest that Jean-Paul Sepieter's programme

influenced all of these developments, rather that it reflected a new form of regionalist thought which gained credence in the years after 1968. Sepieter's achievement was putting it all together in a coherent - if overambitious - programme and bringing it into the arena of political debate. As Marc Castre says:

Jean-Paul Sepieter aura eu, au moins, le mérite incontesté de poser clairement la revendication flamande dans une nouvelle perspective et de faire "sauter" les barrières traditionnelles où l'idée flamande était bel et bien enfermée. (Castre 1977, p90)

In his introduction to *Vlaemsch Leeren* it is not surprising that Eric Vanneufville considers that, despite being of undoubted interest to the linguist, the historian and the geographer, it is the philosopher who will appreciate Sepieter's work the most. One can fully understand why; the entire book is infused with the author's particular regionalist philosophy. According to this philosophy the French Fleming, his language and his environment are all naturally linked to their environment. This environment is under threat from national and international capitalism which is best served by a uniformly anonymous, replaceable - and inherently alienated - workforce. Sepieter feels that this process should be combated by maintaining regional - in this instance Flemish - culture. Regional Flemish must therefore be maintained as a vital part of this culture but remains only one element in the struggle against the ravages of capitalism.

### **5.7.1 Parti Fédéraliste Flamand / Vlaemsche Federalistische Partij**

Jean-Paul Sepieter's 1976 campaign was, essentially, a one-man affair and it was not until 1984 that first regionalist political organisation appeared in

French Flanders, with the founding of the Parti Fédéraliste Flamand / Vlaemsche Federalistische Partij. Much of its early membership came from those already active within the Flemish movement of French Flanders, in particular in Menschen Lyk Wyder (cf Ch 5.4) and the Cercle Michel de Swaen (cf Ch5.3). The party was divided geographically into three groups (*Kern*), based in Lille, Roubaix and Dunkirk, headed in 1991 by Jacques Fermaut (cf. Ch5 and Ch6). In addition, specialist working parties (*commissie*) dealing with language issues, also headed in 1991 by Jacques Fermaut, and the media, headed in by Kris Mercier<sup>64</sup> and Jean-Paul Lobert (cf. *Geel en Zwart*, Nov / Dec, 1991).

The PFF had its own publication *Geel en Zwart*, which appeared bi-monthly from 1989 to 1991 and then quarterly from Summer 1992<sup>65</sup>. *Geel en Zwart* was a bilingual publication (French – standard Dutch) which had much in common with the publications of Flemish cultural groups (*La Flandre au Lion*, *De Koekestuut*). In addition to promoting the PFF's policies, it contained features on culture, language, the environment and traditional Flemish cooking. The amount of Dutch contained varied considerably according to the issue; the November / December 1990 issue, reporting on the party's annual congress was precisely 50% standard Dutch, whereas the following issue, January / February 1991 just one article in standard Dutch in the section *Het Vlaemsch Hoekje*. Contributors to the publication have included Franck Allacker of Menschen Lyk Wyder (cf 5.4) and the CELCN (cf. Ch6.6.1) and Alain Wallenne, former Editor of the *Courrier des Pays-Bas* (cf Ch5.2). Despite its general interest articles, *Geel en Zwart* existed primarily to promote the ideology, policies and actions of the PFF. Its readership was,

<sup>64</sup> Owner of *Het Blauwershof* (cf Ch 5.8), member of Menschen Lyk Wyder

<sup>65</sup> It is unclear how long publication of *Geel en Zwart* continued. The move to quarterly publication coincided with a marked change in format and personnel; I have found no copies post Autumn 1991.

therefore, more specialised, largely limited to members of the party and other Flemish activists. As a result it could not be considered as a vehicle for the promotion of netherlandophone culture and language amongst a wider audience.

Despite its name, the PFF did not seek to limit its activities to netherlandophone French Flanders, nor yet merely to French Flanders but rather extended to the whole of the region Nord-Pas-de-Calais, which it advocated renaming as the Pays-Bas Français. This former term was considered "dévalorisant" for the region, an artificial name imposed by Paris and lacking the historical and cultural connotations of the "Pays-Bas Français".

The programme proposed by the PFF bears, superficially at least, certain similarities with that adopted by Jean-Paul Sepieter in 1976. The PFF, like Sepieter, believed that the regional economy should be reorganised to be of greater benefit to its inhabitants:

...le produit du travail des installations commerciales et bancaires dans la région doivent profiter prioritairement aux Flamands, Artésiens, Hennuyers. (*Geel en Zwart* , January / February, 1991, inside cover).

Furthermore, this economic power was held to be a prerequisite for any degree of political autonomy in French Flanders:

Toute décentralisation administrative sans réel pouvoir Régional (sic) économique n'est qu'une sinistre comédie. (PFF, *Résumé de la plateforme autonomiste*, ca. 1990).

The PFF also shared Sepieter's concern for the environment:

Il ne s'agit pas seulement de protéger notre environnement, mais de mettre en oeuvre les moyens très diversifiés de réparer en partie les maux. La situation s'est tellement dégradée sur tous les fronts qu'elle exige de nous un combat de pointe. (PFF, *Résumé de la plateforme autonomiste*, ca. 1990)

The promotion of regional languages constituted vital element in the PFF's cultural policy, "A la pointe du combat pour le renouveau culturel, se trouve la réhabilitation des langues régionales" (PFF, *Résumé de la plateforme autonomiste*, ca. 1990), since they were seen as being at the heart of regional identity, "Il n'y a pas de Pays-Bas Français sans langues flamandes et picardes." (PFF, *ibid.*) In common with many other Flemish groups<sup>66</sup>, the PFF saw the teaching of Vlaemsch and standard Dutch, "au niveau des collèges, lycées et universités", (PFF, *Démocratie flamande vers l'Europe fédérale, Geel en Zwart*, Jan-Feb 1991, inside cover) as the key to promoting the regional language<sup>67</sup>. However, the PFF was not merely calling for Vlaemsch classes to be set up – this had been possible and had indeed been happening for a number of years. Such classes were seen as part of a wider educational strategy, intended to make the children of the Pays-Bas français aware of their regional culture. Consequently, the PFF believed the curriculum in the region's schools should be modified, so as to take into consideration, "l'histoire, l'environnement économique et social de la région".

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<sup>66</sup> Given the PFF's links with other Flemish groups, this similarity is not surprising.

<sup>67</sup> The PFF's documentation states that both language varieties should be taught but offers no further explanation. As Jacques Fermaut was in charge of the language working party, one might reasonably assume a strategy similar to that he had proposed with the Cercle Michel de Swaen was intended. Although the PFF claimed to represent the Pays-Bas français in its entirety, no mention is made of the teaching of Picard.

(PFF, *Démocratie flamande vers l'Europe fédérale*, *Geel en Zwart*, Jan-Feb 1991, inside cover)

Like (amongst others) Sepieter, the PFF felt that the Pays-Bas français were poorly served by the Paris (and American) dominated mass media. The party called for greater European collaboration in this domain in order to combat, "...le cancer culturel nord-américain qui mine nos enfants. L' american way of live (sic) n'est pas un paradis." (Mercier, K. & Lobert, J-P., in *Geel en Zwart*, Nov. 1990, p28) In particular the PFF wanted the E.C. to provide financial support for regions, "à moindre capacité de production ou à aire linguistique restreinte" (Mercier, K. & Lobert, J-P, *ibid*, p29), so that they too could participate in audio-visual cultural production. Radio Uylenspiegel was a rare Flemish foothold in this domain. The PFF wanted to build on Radio Uylenspiegel's succes and saw the creation of programmes in Vlaemsch or standard Dutch on regional television as the vital next step:

Il est indéniable que ces émissions en dialecte flamand ou en néerlandais auraient un succès comparable à celles réalisées par radio Uylenspiegel. Elles pourraient devenir l'élément moteur d'une reconquête du dialecte ancestral. (Mercier, K. & Lobert, J-P, in *Geel en Zwart*, Nov. 1990, p26)

It is unclear whether Mercier and Lobert consider television programmes in standard Dutch to be just as beneficial to the promotion of the regional dialect as those in that dialect or rather that, for them (and by association the PFF) both regional Vlaemsch and standard Dutch are the regional dialect.

Thus, with regard to the economy, education and culture, Sepieter's 1976 electoral programme and the PFF's "plateforme autonomiste" do share some

common goals. However, these goals have been those of many Flemish groups since the origins of the Flemish movement in French Flanders in the 1850s and one can see them mirrored by other regionalist groups, both in France and beyond. In many other respects the PFF's ideas are fundamentally opposed to those of Jean-Paul Sepieter. Where Sepieter sought greater autonomy for French Flanders within the existing French state, the PFF believed that central government's attitude precluded any such arrangement, "...le pouvoir parisien est coercif, dominateur et n'admet pas le dialogue et le partage de l'autorité."(PFF, *Geel en Zwart*, Nov. 1990, pp4/5). Furthermore, the party was highly sceptical of concessions made to France's regional minorities, calling the Comité des minorités de l'hexagone, on which French Flanders was represented, "un machin, du vent" (PFF, *ibid*, p6) and stating:

Le pouvoir parisien, narcissique et tartuffe cherche à faire croire à l'extérieur qu'il envisage timidement de reconnaître les droits des minorités. (PFF, *ibid*, p6)

The PFF therefore believed that the only way for the Pays-Bas français to achieve any degree of autonomy was within the framework of a federal Europe:

Nous sommes tous maintenant axés sur l'Europe. Pourquoi? Eh bien parce (sic) c'est notre avenir et notre espoir. Nous ne pouvons rien attendre du pouvoir parisien qui ne nous reconnaîtra que contraint et forcé. (PFF, *ibid*, p4)

Thus federalism was seen as the defining feature of the PFF's ideology, hence its inclusion in the party's name. However, the PFF's vision of this

federal Europe was not necessarily in accordance with that which it perceived as guiding E.C. policy:

Notre parti s'est fixé pour tâche principale, d'éviter la réalisation d'une Europe centralisée et bureaucratique, en offrant pour alternative une Europe Fédérale, assurant l'autonomie interne à l'ensemble de ses Peuples et Pays, c'est-à-dire la mise en œuvre politique et économique de décider leur libération. (Lobert, B. in *Geel en Zwart*, July-Aug, 1991, p15)

In order to realise this federalist vision, the PFF sought to collaborate with other regional movements, both inside France and beyond:

...nous devons...faire preuve de solidarité avec nos amis de Flandre du Nord, nos amis de Bretagne, de Corse, de Savoie, de Catalogne, du Pays Basque, d'Alsace. (Lobert, B., in *Geel en Zwart* , Nov. 1990, p8.

It was on these grounds that the PFF demonstrated in support of the Baltic states in their attempt to break free from the Soviet Union. (Lobert, B., in *Geel en Zwart*, July-Aug. 1991, p15) However, such expressions of solidarity aside, there is no evidence of any significant collaboration with any other regionalist groups from outside French Flanders.

For the PFF European federalism is founded on the notion of the "l'Europe des Peuples", "une fédération de communautés humaines, non d'états".(Serres in *Geel en Zwart*, Nov. 1990, p37). These "communautés humaines" would appear to be based on ethnicity, "...een Vlaming blijft een Vlaming als hij in zich zelf kruipt. En van en (sic) Fransman kan je ook nooit

maar een Fransman maken."(sic) (Fermaut, J., in *Geel en Zwart*, Nov. 1990, p39). However, an ethnic definition of the Pays-Bas français, even more than of French Flanders, presents a number of difficulties. Firstly, even according to the PFF, the population of the Pays-Bas français is made up of two separate, indigenous ethnic groups, the Flemings and the Picards. Even without taking into consideration the difficulties of deciding what, in the context of the Pays-Bas français, constituted a Fleming and a Picard, it is difficult to see how the Pays-Bas français could fit into this Europe des Peuples as a homogenous unit. Secondly, any ethnically based definition of the region poses awkward questions about the status of its sizeable immigrant communities. Even if one chooses to focus on French Flanders, rather than the larger Pays-Bas français, both problems persist. The PFF's answer was to base the region's unity on a sense of shared identity, "de l'ingénieur, au manœuvre, du médecin à l'artisan sans distinction de classe" (De Lepeleire, A. *Minderheid*, in *Geel en Zwart*, Nov. 1990, p30), which was based on a shared history and culture<sup>68</sup>. In this way, immigrant communities would not automatically be excluded, although their assimilation into regional culture would appear to be a prerequisite for inclusion.

Any attempt to define the Pays-Bas français in either ethnic or cultural terms, within a Europe in which contemporary nation states have ceased to exist, inevitably raises the question of the relationship between this community and other communities with which it might be seen to have ethnic and / or cultural ties, in particular those of netherlandophone Belgium and the Netherlands. The PFF is quite clear in its policy regarding this matter, claiming that, "...une réunification [of the greater Netherlands] au sein de l'Europe serait une chose logique". (Wattelaere, J.Y., in *Geel en Zwart*, Nov 1990, p24) Indeed,

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<sup>68</sup> On this occasion the definition of culture is seen to be independent from questions of language, yet on others they are portrayed as inseparable.

according to Wattelaere, the only reason such a reunification has not already taken place is the opposition of “des Etats aux frontières factices” (ibid., p24), presumably France and Belgium, the latter being dismissed as “un état artificiel.”(ibid., p24) Furthermore, Wattelaere claims that – thanks to a shared cultural heritage - francophone inhabitants of the Pays-Bas français would find union with their netherlandophone neighbours just as relevant as Vlaemsch speaking French Flemings. However, given that the PFF envisaged the future federal Europe being made up of ethno-culturally based communities, one might have thought there was a case for these Francophone inhabitants of the Pays-Bas français uniting with other Francophones – either from France or Belgium - to form a community. This possibility is never discussed by the PFF. In the light of such enthusiastic support for the cause of pan-Netherlandic union, one might be lead to believe that the PFF was espousing federalist views merely as a means to attain this goal. Furthermore, the PFF’s stance on the question of pan-Netherlandic union is diametrically opposed to that of Jean-Paul Sepieter; the latter, it will be recalled, saw no justification for such an act.

The question of political orientation is another which divides the PFF and Sepieter. Where the latter’s regionalism is underpinned by socialist principles, the former states:

Il y a des sensibilités différentes dans notre parti, s'il fallait vraiment se situer sur l'échiquier politique parisien, cela irait de la droite à la gauche. Mais nous sommes soudés et formons un clan flamand dans le nord de la France, parfaitement homogène. (PPF in *Geel en Zwart*, Nov. 1990, p3)

This desire to be seen as neither to the left nor to the right of the political spectrum has been a feature of many Flemish groups in French Flanders since the VVF (cf. Ch4.5 & Ch.4.6). Indeed only Sepieter and Tegaere Toegaen with their resolutely socialist principles have gone against this trend. However, as had been discussed on numerous occasions above, it has been suspected that this apolitical stance has, in fact, masked far right tendencies. Allegations of just such tendencies have been levelled at both the Cercle Michel de Swaen and Menschen Lyk Wyder whose members were instrumental in creating the PFF. During the affair regarding the Front National candidate Philippe Bernard and his links with the Cercle Michel de Swaen, (cf. Ch5.3) the PFF was itself termed "de rechtse Parti Fédéraliste Flamand" by the Belgian newspaper *De Nieuwe*, in its edition of November 17<sup>th</sup> 1985. The article went on to claim that the PFF found the Front National candidate "sympathiek", an allegation the PFF was at pains to deny. Guy Triquet, the then leader of the party's Dunkirk group wrote to Jean-Marie Le Pen, stating:

...nous trouvons grossier d'affirmer que le PARTI FEDERALISTE FLAMAND [original capitals] vous trouve sympathique. J'affirme le contraire. Nos positions sont diamétralement opposées...Vous êtes "Français d'abord." Nous sommes "Flamands d'abord".... (Triquet, G., undated letter<sup>69</sup>)

Furthermore, in 1991 the PFF took part in demonstrations against the Gulf War. In so doing it allied itself with, amongst others, the C.G.T. and the P.C.F. (Doye, P. in *Geel en Zwart*, Jan-Feb 1991, p5)

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<sup>69</sup> Cf.Ch5.3

Nevertheless, temporary alliances in specific campaigns and the PFF's hostility to Le Pen – understandable in view of his anti-federalist stance on Europe and his belief in national homogeneity within France – do not, in themselves, prove that the party did not have far right leanings. There is, in fact, evidence to the contrary.

An article in the January – February 1991 edition of *Geel en Zwart*, terms abortion genocide, thus aligning the PFF with conservative tendencies within the Roman Catholic church in France, traditional allies of the regionalist movement in French Flanders. Furthermore, the PFF's views on ethnicity as a basis for the construction of a federal Europe is, potentially, an open invitation for the discriminatory policies often associated with the extreme right. Indeed, the PFF's own policy on immigration may easily be seen in this light.

According to the PFF, the socio-economic problems of the Lille conurbation were, in part at least, the result of an unhealthy mixture of ethnic groups. The solution to this was, "Le libre choix de retour de chaque communauté dans son pays d'origine."(Perron, P., *Vivre et travailler au pays*, in *Geel en Zwart*, Oct. 1992) The PFF were careful to use positive, non-racist language when articulating their ideas in this matter, "Il faut les [les immigrés] aider à se décoloniser de la France et à rentrer chez eux, la tête haute pour participer au développement de leur propre pays.<sup>70</sup>"(Perron, P., *ibid*, p5) However, there is a clear inference that the Pays-Bas français is not and cannot be "leur pays". Such is the inherent danger of trying to divide a multicultural country

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<sup>70</sup> Rather less effort was made in a pamphlet produced by a group calling itself the Comité pour la justice populaire en Flandre, inviting Flemish activists to attend the trial of Guy Triquet on Tuesday November 15<sup>th</sup> 1994, in which the Préfet of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Lahcène Madhi, is referred to as, "nouveau préfet bougnole du Nord-Pas-de-Calais." The relationship between this organisation and the PFF is unclear. It should, however, be remembered that Triquet had been a prominent member of the party. Furthermore, it would appear that the party's membership was used in order to distribute the pamphlet.

into communities along ethnic lines. Despite the PFF's hostility towards the policies of the Front National, with regard to immigration the result is ultimately the same, merely the discrimination benefits – in the eyes of the PFF - a different group. In the words of Guy Triquet, "Flamands d'abord" rather than "Français d'abord."

Thus, despite their desire to remain aloof from conventional left – right political divisions, it can be seen that the PFF's ideology exhibits a number of typically far right tendencies. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why the PFF remained a marginal group. At the height of its popularity in the early 1990s it boasted no more than 400 – 500 members<sup>71</sup>. During its participation in the campaign against the Gulf War in 1991, it could, by its own admission muster no more than "10 à 12 braves" (Doye, P., in *Geel en Zwart*, Jan-Feb, 1991, p5) in a march numbering 8,000. Such support as the PFF had seems to have come from within existing Flemish organisations and - although the party claimed to seek to represent the whole of the Pays-Bas français – was concentrated in French Flanders. Although the party expressed its intention to participate in local and regional elections (Doye, P., in *Geel en Zwart*, Nov. 1990, p8), there is no record of it ever having done so. In concrete terms, its only real achievements would appear to be the publication of *Geel en Zwart* and the organisation of a few small-scale demonstrations and an annual pilgrimage to the grave of Jean-Marie Gantois. This event in itself serves to situate the party in any people's minds in the conservative Catholic tradition of the Flemish movement of French Flanders. Today the PFF appears inactive

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<sup>71</sup> This figure is based on the PFF's own estimate of the number of activists participating in a demonstration in Lille on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1990 which remains the party's greatest show of strength (Mercier, K, Lobert, J-P., in *Geel en Zwart*, Nov. 1990, p26). It is also corroborated by party membership numbers, although membership lists have never been available for public consultation.

and if it has made any lasting impression – which is by no means certain – then it can be only to have reinforced this popular perception.

## 5.8 Popular Culture

With the exception of the Parti Fédéraliste Flamand, all of the organisations which make up and have made up the Flemish movement of French Flanders have considered themselves cultural organisations. For some, notably the Comité Flamand de France, the promotion of Flemish culture has been principally focused on conserving the netherlandophone heritage of French Flanders. Other organisations - the CELCN or the Cercle Michel de Swaen, for example - have channelled their energies largely into spreading the teaching of Vlaemsch and or standard Dutch . However, although almost all the Flemish groups have recognised the worth of encouraging cultural production in French Flanders, in particular in the regional language, few have made this a priority in their activities, beyond the publishing of regionalist reviews which were largely destined for those within the Flemish movement. *Het Reuzekoor* (cf.Ch5.5.1) represents a notable exception in this respect. Where cultural production has been promoted, it has usually been popular culture which has benefited. This is for three main reasons. Firstly, after France's annexation of French Flanders, Vlaemsch gradually ceased to be written. Consequently, it was seen as a purely functional language not worthy and not capable of cultural expression. Secondly, high culture is inherently elitist and therefore unsuited to the task of attracting mass interest in the regional language and it is only through mass support that a struggling language can hope to be revived. Finally, the fundamentally populist nature of the concept of *enracinement*, which has had considerable influence within the Flemish movement of French Flanders since 1968,

favours the promotion of popular rather than high culture. Popular culture is seen as the product of the experience of the Flemish peasant, intimately linked to tradition and the land itself and expressed through Vlaemsch, the peasant / people's language. High culture, in contrast, is expressed in French and is therefore doubly alienating. Not only is it the product of the experience of an alien group but also it is essentially elitist and bourgeois.<sup>72</sup> Menschen Lyk Wyder, for example, call for the organisation of:

...journées de culture populaire, musicales notamment, démontrant l'enracinement des préoccupations présentes dans les traditions et valeurs flamandes: un peuple sans passé, inconscient, est un peuple qui n'a pas d'avenir (MLW, undated information sheet, p[1]).

As noted on numerous occasions above (particularly at 5.6 & 5.6.1) the presence of Flemish culture in the mass media is severely limited. As a result, post 1968 there have been three main focuses for popular culture in French Flanders: folk music, the *estaminets flamandes* and carnivals and *kermesses*, all of which are inter-linked.

Folk music represents the most flourishing aspect of Flemish culture today, although for many years this was not the case. In the nineteenth century in particular the popular music of French Flanders was seen as an example of the region's cultural poverty:

En Flandre l'annexion à la France est marquée par un mépris pour la culture et la langue locale; ainsi la cornemuse est identifiée aux

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<sup>72</sup> Some – admittedly a dwindling group - within the Flemish movement in French Flanders would level the same criticism at standard Dutch.

classes sociales misérables. (Sepieter, B., *L'explosion des styles* in *Pays du Nord*, Mar-Apr 1998, p41)

However, in the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a renewed interest in folk music in much of Europe and North America. In France the Breton musician, Alan Stivell, was a key figure in this revival. A number of groups were formed in French Flanders around 1974, the year in which Jean-Paul Sepieter founded the organisation Hekkerschreuwen. The aim of this short-lived organisation, based in Steenvoorde, was, "...la promotion de la culture populaire flamande ainsi que le développement communautaire."(Castre, 1977, p74) This it sought to achieve by organising folk music concerts at the Sint Sebastianshoff in Steenvoorde, which were to provide a forum for the recently formed groups. These concerts proved a considerable success – Castre terms them "soirées historiques" – regularly attracting audiences of 200 - 300 and helped launch a folk music revival in French Flanders.

For the musicians, Edmond De Coussemaker's nineteenth century collection of traditional Flemish songs *Chants populaires des Flamands de France* (cf. Ch3) was an invaluable source of material and was reprinted by Westhoek Editions in 1976. In *Vlaemsch Leeren*, however, Sepieter warns against relying on De Coussemaker's work as a sole point of reference:

De Coussemaker solidaire d'une vision sociale aristocratique n'a en réalité retenu qu'une "sélection" de chants flamands, passant sous silence ce que la mémoire populaire a partout le mieux conservé...Il est urgent de recenser systématiquement ces chefs d'œuvre de littérature flamande orale à deux pas de la tombe."(Sepieter, 1980, p36)

Sepieter's description of these songs as "chefs d'œuvre de littérature flamande orale" is indicative of their importance to a culture with little or no literary heritage. Sepieter, doubtless because of the concerns expressed above, was to publish his own collection of traditional Flemish songs from French Flanders, *La musique du peuple flamand*, published, like De Coussemaker's work, by Westhoek Editions.

However, the Flemish musicians and Flemish activists were not merely inspired by a desire to save this musical aspect of the cultural heritage of French Flanders. Folk songs were seen as an integral part of the French Fleming's identity since they had been inspired by the everyday experience of their authors. As one Flemish musician (and activist), Cédric Mercier of the group Rommelpot says:

La musique traditionnelle est le reflet d'une culture de tradition apprise oralement de génération en génération. Partie intégrante du patrimoine, au même titre que la langue, l'architecture. Elle est un moyen d'expression bouleversé de temps à autre par une guerre, une épidé, ou au contraire par un mariage heureux, une légende, une coutume. (Quoted in *Pays du Nord*, Mar-Apr. 1998, p47)

However, there are certain inherent disadvantages in relying on a repertoire of purely traditional songs, many composed over 150 years ago. The vitality of Flemish culture depends on production and not reproduction. Songs which reflected the experience of French Flemings in the nineteenth century no longer do so and have no more than heritage value. To rely on such works - whatever their intrinsic worth - is to suggest that contemporary Flemish musicians in French Flanders are essentially conservative and backward looking, either unwilling or incapable of original composition. For Flemish

music to be seen as more than a cultural artefact, there is a clear need for new composition within the genre. Fortunately, many musicians have realised this. Groups such as Klakkebusse blend traditional instruments with electric ones and use traditional melodies as the inspiration for their original compositions. The Dunkirk based duo, Roody Krampeut, follow in the true folk tradition and write songs about the concerns of French Flemings today, Mad Cow disease and the economic recession (Sepieter, B., 1998, in *Pays du Nord*, Mar-Apr 1998, p48). In terms of the exploitation of modern technology for the Flemish cause, Roody Krampeut and another Dunkirk based musical group, Het Reuzekoor<sup>73</sup> are at the forefront of the Flemish movement as, at the time of writing, they are only Flemish associations (in the broadest sense of the term) who have their own internet site.

What distinguishes the activities of the contemporary Flemish musicians from many of the Flemish organisations, is their popularity. Thanks, partly, to concerts throughout French Flanders and beyond – Ghislain Gouwy performed at the 1997 Festival interceltique in Lorient – and coverage by Radio Uylenspiegel (cf. Ch5.6) a number have been able to release albums and compact disks. The group Haeghedoorn released three albums in a career which stretched from 1974 to 1996 and is credited with having made the music of French Flanders known throughout France (Sepieter, B., 1998, in *Pays du Nord*, Mar-Apr 1998, p43). Such success is important in raising public awareness of Flemish culture in France – the mainstream publication *Pays du Nord* devoted a an eleven page feature to Flemish music in its March – April 1998 edition. Although the musicians themselves are often Flemish activists, their action promotes Flemish culture in a depoliticised, non-militant way. Thus it is more readily accessible to those outside the

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<sup>73</sup> As discussed at 5.5.1, Het Reuzekoor has widened the scope of its activity beyond the field of folk music.

movement or on its fringes than that of the militant organisations. There is, of course, no proof that attending a concert of traditional Flemish music will turn the audience into militant advocates of the Flemish cause. It should not be forgotten, however, that Het Reuzekoor, currently one of the most successful Flemish cultural organisations, started life as a musical group (cf. Ch5.5.1). Furthermore, the success enjoyed by these musicians can but increase the prestige of Flemish culture, prestige lacking for so many years.

The *estaminets* of French Flanders played an important role in the promotion of Flemish music, since they have been the venues for many concerts, starting in 1974 with the Sint Sebastiaenshoff in Steenvoorde, discussed on pxx, above. Since then the Vierpot in Boeschèpe and, most significantly, Het Blauwershof in Godewaeresvelde – both in the heart of netherlandophone French Flanders – have been particular centres of activity. Like the Flemish musicians themselves, the Vierpot and Het Blauwershof have been the subject of features in *Pays du Nord* (March – April 1997 and October – November 1998).

Het Blauwershof is run by the Flemish activist Kris Mercier (cf. Ch5.7.1)<sup>74</sup>. It is a flourishing *estaminet*, serving traditional Flemish dishes, locally brewed beers and locally produced soft drinks: the staff refuse to serve Coca Cola, considered a symbol of the American culture so despised by many Flemish organisations. The building's architecture is itself typical of a traditional, Flemish *estaminet*.

However, in addition to this primary function, Het Blauwershof also calls itself a "Centre de culture populaire flamande," promoting many aspects of Flemish culture, including traditional games, literature and music. Its links with

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<sup>74</sup> Father of Cédric Mercier, quoted at p253, above,

Flemish organisations are numerous: the PFF has held meetings there (as well as at the Vierpot), the CELCN holds standard Dutch classes here. Thanks to its positive coverage in the regional press, it has become well known as a rallying point for those interested in Flemish culture where they can buy a wide range of publications on this subject, in French, standard Dutch and Vlaemsch, as well as cassettes and compact disks of Flemish music. Indeed its stock field is considerably more extensive than those of most bookshops in French Flanders.

One might argue that the promotion of Flemish culture via an *estaminet*, traditional or not, effectively trivialises that culture and reduces it to the level of a tourist attraction. However, the staff of Het Blauwershof see the establishment as playing a key role in fostering the development of a sense of community among French Flemings, where they can experience the whole range of their popular heritage and not just those aspects of it considered to be "high" culture. They realise they will inevitably attract tourists, businessmen on their lunch hour and a host of others with no particular interest in or knowledge of Flemish culture but believe that it is impossible to leave Het Blauwershof unaware that this culture not only exists but also that it is alive and well. Furthermore, they are not the first Flemish activists to consider Flemish gastronomy as part of Flemish culture. Jean-Paul Sepieter included a section entitled *La cuisine du Westhoek* in *Vlaemsch Leeren* and *de Koekestuut* - itself named after a Flemish culinary speciality – also included recipes. Ideologically, there has been a clear desire to root Flemish culture in the experience of ordinary Flemings. This has the added practical advantage of helping the publications appeal to a wider public.

No discussion of the popular culture of French Flanders would be complete without mention of kermesses and carnivals, the importance of which has

been recognised by the entire Flemish movement in French Flanders since its earliest days. Jean-Paul Sepieter sees them as vital to the development of "l'esprit communautaire et la communication sociale" (Castré, 1977, p88). Furthermore, they represent the perfect forum for those actively engaged in netherlandophone cultural production - notably the folk musicians discussed above - as well as for Flemish organisations. Landry and de Verrewaere, for example, note the "participations actives aux fêtes traditionnelles" made by the Cercle Michel de Swaen (Landry, G. & de Verrewaere, G., 1982, p301). Indeed, for many people in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais - the vast majority of whom have no direct contact with the Flemish movement - events such as the Carnaval de Dunkerque with their carnival giants<sup>75</sup> are positive symbols of the region's Flemish cultural heritage. However, few necessarily know why that should be the case and have only a vague notion of what they actually mean by *Flemish*, a term which for many could easily be replaced by *nordiste* or *Chti*. Michel Liéven of the Cercle Michel de Swaen, for one, is unhappy with this reductive view of regional culture, asking:

Avons-nous définitivement renoncé à notre identité? Allons-nous nous contenter de quelques fêtes folkloriques, charmantes et certes bien agréables? La rénovation de quelques bâtiments suffit-elle pour satisfaire notre timide régionalisme? Avons-nous peur de nous affirmer Flamand, Artésien? Allons-nous toujours nous contenter d'être désignés sous le sobriquet de "Chti"? (Liéven, M., in *Vlaanderen de Leeuw*, Mar-Apr 1996, p1.)

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<sup>75</sup> An Association de la ronde des géants was established in French Flanders in the late 1970s. Menschen Lyk Wyder considered this group's contribution to the promotion of Flemish culture to be sufficiently significant as merit the donation of part of the proceeds of the folk festivals organised by the former in 1978 and 1979. The rest was given to the Association régionale des amis des moulins (A.R.A.M.), for their work in the preservation of this aspect of the region's architectural heritage.(Landry, G. & de Verrewaere, G., 1982, p303)

Furthermore, the actual Flemish input into some of these events, particularly the larger ones, is rather limited, to such an extent that Jean-Paul Sepieter was moved to talk of a "Crise de la Fête" (Castre, 1977, p85). For him, the reason for this crisis is that they are organised, "par des professionnels du spectacle ignorants de la sensibilité flamande et dont le seul souci est de soutirer notre argent."(ibid., p85) Viewed from this standpoint such festivals may actually do a disservice to the promotion of Flemish culture: if those who participate do so in ignorance, they rob the event of any true cultural significance. Thus the festival becomes little more than a tourist attraction, even for French Flemings themselves. The popularity of the kermesses and carnivals endows these events with great potential to promote Flemish culture. However, this potential will only be realised if they are organised with that objective at least partly in mind. Clearly the Flemish cultural associations have a role to play in this respect.

Popular culture undoubtedly has an important role to play in the maintenance of the netherlandophone heritage of French Flanders, since it attracts interest from beyond the limited community of Flemish activists, as is illustrated by the success currently enjoyed by Flemish musicians. This importance is all the greater as support for more militant forms of regional particularism seems, at present, to be on the wane. It is, perhaps, no coincidence that, although a good number of those involved in the aspects of popular culture discussed above are Flemish activists, most cultural production is the result of independent initiatives. The example of Het Reuzekoor (Ch5.5.1) illustrates how an interest in popular culture can lead to more active support of the regional language, either in its dialect or standard form.<sup>76</sup> However, if the Flemish movement of French Flanders is to capitalise on what has been

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<sup>76</sup> In the case of Het Reuzekoor it is regional Vlaemsch which is promoted. However, a group singing original compositions in standard Dutch is more likely to wish to promote standard Dutch.

achieved to date then greater access to the broadcasting media is essential. While Radio Uylenspiegel (Ch5.6) has undoubtedly been important in promoting Flemish culture, it remains a specialist station catering for a minority interest with, as a result of its equipment, only limited range. To make true progress Flemish culture requires a presence in mainstream broadcasting. This will afford it greater exposure and, in turn, greater popularity and prestige. While the consumption of Flemish popular culture in isolation from other cultural and linguistic activities is unlikely to have any lasting effect on the maintenance of netherlandophone language and culture in French Flanders.

## 6 The role of education in the maintenance of Vlaemsch

### 6.1 Introduction

Education is a domain which clearly merits particular attention in relation to questions of language transmission, maintenance and use. Edwards in *Multilingualism* sees the school system as "a powerful and visible instrument of the state" whose "officially sanctioned practices" are "reflected in curriculum and policies" (Edwards, 1995, p11). In the Flemish context in France the primary school was, even in the early 20th century, often a young netherlandophone French child's first point of contact with the state and the language, culture and identity which it sought to promote. Accordingly, the primary school in French Flanders, as elsewhere in France and in other countries, has been seen - both by central governments and minority groups - as a tool of linguistic engineering, promoting one language variety, and through it one national identity, at the expense of another. As Kedourie puts it, "to bend the will of the young to the will of the nation" (Kedourie, 1961, pp83-4, quoted in Edwards, 1995, p11). It is therefore not surprising that the question of the teaching of Vlaemsch in the schools, universities and other educational establishments of French Flanders, should have been a source of considerable concern for the Flemish movement in France from its earliest days. Indeed, the Comité Flamand de France was founded partly in response to the decree of the Conseil Académique du Département du Nord of 27th January 1853 banning the teaching of Vlaemsch in schools (cf. 3.1)

While the Ancien Régime had, since the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts of 1539, decided on the "King's French" as the official language of law and administration (as opposed to Latin and regional languages, cf. Chapter 2) (Lodge, 1993, pp126-7), the impact of this decree on the language use of the bulk of the population was limited to their contact with the administration.

Obviously there was no necessity for the Flemish peasantry, for example, to have a working knowledge of legal French but rather for administrators to be able to work in both the official French as well as any local varieties or other regional languages and to have a "universal" language for written administration documents. Without a concerted effort, through mass education, for example, any government attempt to promote the desired form of French beyond use in limited geographical, social and professional spheres was unlikely to meet with any significant success (one may, of course, make a similar claim for the use of educational language policy in isolation, as discussed below). As far as mass education was concerned, many in office did not consider this a desirable goal. Indeed the 1698 decree providing for the foundation of a primary school in every parish, principally as means to spread religious orthodoxy, did not meet with an enthusiastic response; by 1759 at least one intendant was seeking to abolish such schools, stating:

Il y a de certaines instructions qu'il ne convient pas de donner aux paysans...l'on se plaint dans presque tout mon département, qu'on ne trouve pas d'ouvriers pour travailler les fonds. Ce seul article demanderait qu'on empêchât les paysans d'apprendre à lire. (quoted in Lodge, 1993, p212)

Whilst in the wake of the Revolution and industrialisation such attitudes disappeared - in theory at least - mass education was not to come into being until the latter part of the 19th century. In the absence of any institution promoting the standard amongst the masses, language - spoken language, at least - continued to be learnt as it always had been, through interaction in the home and community. Thus regional languages and language varieties - in the case of the Vlaemsch speaking parts of French Flanders, Vlaemsch, the "moedertaal" - continued to perpetuate themselves. Where instruction was

given to the lower orders of French society, this would largely have been given by the clergy, who, after the Revolution in particular, had always been staunch supporters of Vlaemsch in France.

However, by the latter half of the 19th century the situation had changed. The concept of national identity and the part that language played in this was far more developed than it ever had been under the Ancien Régime. Industrialisation required that large numbers of people leave their rural homes for the large cities, consequently bringing them into contact with other language groups, in the case of French Flemings often their Francophone neighbours. Furthermore, industry would increasingly require greater literacy on the part of the workforce. With the development of national industries and a national economy, this literacy would be in French, thus conforming to, reinforcing and perhaps also helping to forge, the national ideology of identity. These economic, social and ideological changes in France were already bringing about linguistic change in French Flanders; coherent mass education policies would only serve to accelerate this change, whilst at the same time conforming to the Republican ideals of "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité". It is these policies and - more particularly - the French Flemish movement's reaction to them, which will be discussed in this chapter.

## **6.2 Government education policies: their effect on the teaching of Vlaemsch in French Flanders and the reactions of the French Flemish movement to them.**

While French was increasingly enforced in the classroom, measures to outlaw regional languages were vigorously championed. There has already been some discussion of government education policies regarding regional

languages, both in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 (cf. in particular 3.6.2), a brief overview of the situation is nevertheless useful as it allows the general trends to be discerned more easily. Government policy regarding the teaching of regional languages can broadly be divided into two phases. The first phase from 1833, date of the passing of the loi Guizot,<sup>1</sup> until 1951 and the passing of the loi Deixonne, is one of suppression; the second, from 1951 to the present, one of greater tolerance.

### 6.2.1 1833 - 1951

The policy of suppression was pursued in three ways. Firstly and most obviously, French was established as the sole language of education, initially by the loi Guizot and consolidated by the law of 15th March 1850. In the wake of this legislation and against a background of suspicion of potential Pan-Germanist sentiment (Looten, *Bulletin du CFF*, 1921, p270), the teaching of Vlaemsch was banned from the schools of French Flanders by the decree of the Conseil Académique de Département du Nord, as mentioned above, on 27th January 1853. This, however, - perhaps not surprisingly - failed to expunge all trace of Vlaemsch from the classroom and in 1860 further action was deemed necessary (Looten, *Bulletin du CFF*, 1921, p270). Henceforth Vlaemsch was to be tolerated only in the teaching of the catechism, when French / Vlaemsch dual texts could be used. However, even this last vestige of Vlaemsch in schools was to come under threat in 1866 from Education Minister Duruy, a move only defeated thanks to pressure from the clergy, notably the Archbishop of Cambrai (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p272).

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<sup>1</sup>An earlier date of 1793 could be given, when the Convention declared (3rd June), "Citoyens, qu'une sainte émulation vous anime pour bannir de toutes les contrées de France ces jargons qui sont encore des lambeaux de la féodalité et de l'esclavage", quoted in Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p271. As this policy declaration was principally limited to rhetoric, the date of the loi Guizot is preferred.

The second aspect of government education policy to have an adverse effect on the teaching of Vlaemsch in France were the laws intended to reduce the clergy's influence on education. Most notable amongst this legislation was the 1886 loi Goblet, officially secularising teaching staff. Direct action was taken against those clergy persisting in the use of Vlaemsch in an educational environment from 1896; transgressors were liable to be fined.

However, all the above measures were given far greater potency by the passing in 1882 of the reforms known as the loi Jules Ferry which made free education for all children aged 6 to 13 not only available to all but also compulsory. Clearly the eradication of regional languages was not the sole objective of this legislation - indeed it may not even have been the most important. However, the desire to bend "the will of the young", as Kedourie puts it (Kedourie, 1961, p83-4, quoted in Edwards 1995, p11), to the national ethos must have been one of the legislators considerations, alongside economic and - perhaps - philanthropic ones, given that regional languages and identities were seen as detrimental to this ethos. Similarly, while the secularisation of the school system was part of the broader issue of the secularisation of the French state, culminating in 1905 with the separation of Church and state, the 1896 action does indicate a hostility to the role the clergy were playing in the maintenance of regional languages. The teaching of these languages would have been seen as an example of the conservative, anti-Republican tendencies which the clergy was trying to instil into the young; the state clearly had the monopoly on bending the will of the young.

The French Flemish movement saw these measures as a threat to the survival of - at the very least - cultured, literary Vlaemsch in France (Looten in

*Bulletin du CFF*, 1921, pp270-1) and as a result felt the need to act to redress the balance (*ibid*, p274). The nature of this action was, however, to remain rather more problematic. While it is true that the ban imposed on Vlaemsch teaching by the Conseil Académique du Département du Nord provided the catalyst for the founding of the Comité Flamand de France, as was shown in Chapter 3, no substantial programme of Vlaemsch teaching was ever proposed by the Comité (*Annales du CFF*, 1853, pp3-11). Indeed their activity in this domain was limited to lobbying the Assemblée Nationale and publicising their arguments at events such as the 1920 Conseil Régionaliste and via articles such as Looten's *La Question du Flamand* (1921) (Looten, *Bulletin du CFF*, 1921, pp266-275) and Nicholas Bourgeois' *Le Flamand et l'école* (1926) (*Bulletin du CFF*, 1926, pp291-7), both published in the Comité's own *Bulletins*. The lobbying carried out, while persistent, was largely sporadic. After the Duc De Charency had first raised the issue in 1870, it was not until 1902 at the instigation of l'abbé Lemire that it would be discussed again. Lemire was to broach the subject again in 1910 and 1919 (cf. Ch3.6.4).

While this campaigning did not lead to any concessions, the arguments put forward by De Charency, Lemire and somewhat earlier, de Baecker (cf. Ch3.6.2) are worthy of note. On each occasion, whilst valuing the specificities of Flemish culture and language, the campaigners sought to emphasise the potential economic advantage of a knowledge of Vlaemsch / Dutch. This economic advantage was seen as directly facilitating contact between French Flanders and its netherlandophone neighbours in Belgium as well as those further afield in the Netherlands and indirectly with the greater Germanic world, including the anglophone countries, as it was felt that a sound knowledge of Vlaemsch (for example), nurtured from an early age, would enable French Flemings to learn the other Germanic languages more

readily (cf. Ch3.6.4). Thus, it was believed, French Flemings would facilitate trade and co-operation between France and the great industrial nations of Great Britain, Germany and the United states, putting the linguistic ability of the "petite patrie" to the service of the "grande," as Lemire might have said (cf. Lemire's speech to the Assemblée Nationale, *Journal Officiel*, 18/2/02, reproduced in *Les Pays-Bas Français*, 1983, p31). While it was no doubt hoped that such arguments would appease those who might have seen such an initiative as contrary to the national ethos, there is no reason to believe that Lemire and the other advocates of the teaching of Vlaemsch were anything other than sincere in their beliefs.

After World War One, however, some progress was made. The period 1919 - 24 saw the foundation of the various Cercles Flamands, discussed in Chapter 4, whose primary reason for existing was to allow the study of Vlaemsch and / or standard Dutch (Gantois, 1942, p39). They were, however, aimed at a rather restricted audience, that of Francophone clerics about to start work in the netherlandophone parishes of French Flanders. Clearly such an initiative was not capable of halting the decline of Vlaemsch but it did ensure that the Church's support for the language was maintained and the teaching of the regional language via the catechism could continue. Furthermore, after the Cercles Flamands had merged to form the Vlaamsch Verbond van Frankrijk, teaching the language remained a priority and for the first time in French Flanders the question of the organisation and co-ordination of classes - particularly regarding practical issues such as the provision of study material - was addressed. Jean-Marie Gantois' *Grammaire à l'usage des Flamands de France*, a grammatical reference book of the French Flemish dialect published around 1924 (Gantois, 1942, p45), is one example of the fruits of this endeavour.

The other important development in the teaching of Vlaemsch / Dutch in French Flanders was the founding of the Chair of Dutch at Lille's Catholic University in 1926. Given its previous hostility, the government's agreement to this move might at first appear somewhat surprising - indeed the French Flemish movement was itself taken by surprise: just the previous year this hostility had been reasserted in a circular issued by the education minister Monzie (*circulaire* 14/8/25). However, two factors should be borne in mind. Firstly, while the course was to take place in Lille, therefore in French Flanders, it was a course of Dutch as a foreign language, not of the Flemish dialect of French Flanders. Indeed - in Camille Looten's opinion at least - it was more a gesture of friendship and esteem on the part of the French government for the Netherlands than an attempt to allow French Flemings to pursue the study of their mother tongue to university standard. Secondly, although the foundation of the Chair of Dutch might have had symbolic importance in terms of official recognition of the worth of Netherlandic culture and thus accorded a degree of prestige to the Dutch language and even practical importance in establishing a centre of study and excellence for Dutch in French Flanders, only a very small proportion of the population remained in education long enough to benefit from it. Furthermore, for netherlandophone French Flemings, could the prestige accorded standard Dutch - a language many saw as related to their own mother tongue but alien nonetheless (cf. Ch6.3 and Introduction) - at university level, compensate for the scorn poured on their mother tongue throughout their earlier education? It is, furthermore, interesting to note that Gantois, already a leading figure in the French Flemish movement, was not allowed to join this Dutch course, as part of the restriction placed on the activities of the Cercle Flamand at the Annapes seminary, following complaints by the Francophone students<sup>2</sup>. Clearly, while some progress had been made, it was limited in scope.

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<sup>2</sup>Gantois gives no further details on the reasons for this punishment, other than to claim that

Rather more successful, it would seem, in terms of reaching a broader public, was the Institut Flamand, discussed in Chapter 4, above. While by no means all of the (ca.4000) students enrolled in 1942 were enrolled in language courses, such courses did represent an important feature of its programme. It is, perhaps, ironic that this very success helped contribute to the disfavour with which Flemish language and culture were viewed in the immediate post-war years, helping create a climate in which any concessions regarding the teaching of Vlaemsch / Dutch were unlikely.

### **6.2.2 Developments in regional language education policy, from 1945 to the present**

Despite the seemingly unpromising conditions, Dutch / Vlaemsch teaching in French Flanders received a somewhat unexpected boost when, in 1949, a Dutch language and culture course was initiated at Lille university, the first time such a course had been sanctioned in a state university in the region(cf. Ch6.4, below). However, as with the course offered at Lille's catholic university (cf 3.6.3), one must question the wider impact of this measure. Indeed, the timing of the move - with the trials of Gantois and other members of the VVF still fresh in the public's mind - could be seen to suggest that the government saw little, if any, connection between the teaching of a Dutch foreign language course and the promotion of Flemish identity in French Flanders. If one is to assume that central government did take the potential benefit of the establishment of this course to the French Flemish movement into account, any such benefit was clearly seen as representing no threat to internal security or unity. It is furthermore noteworthy that the main impetus

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his purely Francophone contemporaries suffered from the same, "complexe impérialiste de supériorité linguistique" as all self-respecting Frenchmen (Gantois, 1942, pp 47-8)

for the course at Lille University had actually come from outside the region, through the university's links with Gent University (cf 6.4, below).

Perhaps the clearest indication of major change in official thinking regarding the teaching of regional languages in France was the loi 51 - 46 of November 11th, 1951, known as the loi Deixonne, allowing:

...une heure d'activités dirigées à l'enseignement de notions élémentaires de lecture et d'écriture du parler local et à l'étude de morceaux choisis de la littérature correspondante. (loi Deixonne, Art. 3)

In addition, teachers were authorised to use regional languages, "chaque fois qu'ils pourront en tirer profit pour leur enseignement, notamment pour l'étude de la langue française."(loi Deixonne, Art. 2)

Clearly, while regional languages were being granted an entry into the curriculum, the scope for their development was not great. The reference to them as "parlers locaux", in particular, suggests that there was some way to go before these languages were seen as a valued part of a child's studies, rather than the last resort when he/she failed to grasp one of the finer points of French grammar. Nevertheless, while regional language activists might easily criticise the loi Deixonne for not having gone far enough, it did represent an important change of attitude on the part of the Ministry of Education - previously even the use of a regional language amongst children outside the classroom had been punishable. Flemish activists, however, were not afforded the luxury of such criticisms, as the loi Deixonne permitted the teaching of Breton, Basque, Catalan and Occitan but excluded Vlaemsch, and the Germanic languages of Alsace-Lorraine, along with Corsican (loi

Deixonne, Art 10). While Flemish activists felt aggrieved at this omission - the Breton movement, for example had been implicated in allegations of collaboration to an equal, if not greater, degree than the Flemish - the post-war context meant that they and their counterparts in Alsace-Lorraine (as supporters of a Germanic language) could not really be surprised. When, however, barely one year later in 1952, the use and teaching of German was authorised in the primary schools of Alsace, French Flemings could be forgiven for feeling they were being discriminated against. Their bitterness was to increase still further when the loi Deixonne was extended to cover Corsican in 1974 and Tahitian in 1981.

Post-war legislation regarding the teaching of regional languages was not, however, restricted to the loi Deixonne and some of the other measures were rather more favourable to the Flemish cause. After the creation of the Commissions Académiques d'Etudes Régionales in 1966 (circulaire 66-361) and in part as a result of the educational reforms which followed the events of May 1968, discussed below, regional languages gained greater importance within the curriculum.

Decree 70-650 of July 10th 1970, for example, allowed the regional languages accepted by the loi Deixonne to be taken as options in the Baccalauréat (décret 70-933, 5/10/70) and an Education Ministry circular of 7th September 1971, allowed all secondary school pupils living in one of the regions covered by the loi Deixonne to study their regional language and culture for up to three hours per week - provided that at least ten pupils wished to do so. Furthermore an optional hour of 'initiation à la langue régionale' - aimed stimulating pupil's interest in their region, its language and literature - was created for primary school pupils (circulaire 71-279). Clearly the new regulations regarding primary school regional language teaching, in

particular, do not represent a major departure from the loi Deixonne. One should not forget, however, that, in many areas, the loi Deixonne had had little practical impact - in French Catalonia, for example, Catalan classes only started in 1975 (Marley, 1995, p25). They may thus be seen as as much a result of the legislation of 1970/1 as of the loi Deixonne. Having been excluded from the loi Deixonne, this legislation was of no direct benefit to the Flemish cause but is clearly indicative of a reevaluation of attitudes to regional language teaching by central government, which would, eventually, benefit Vlaemsch in French Flanders.

During the same period, however, Dutch was given the opportunity to establish itself as a foreign language in state schools (cf. Ch6.3) for the relationship between standard Dutch and Vlaemsch). As early as 1963 Dutch had been taught at the Lycée de Flandre in Hazebrouck (Deleu, et al., 1973, p538), although the classes had stopped in 1966, ironically the same year that Dutch became officially recognised as an optional third foreign language in state schools (Landry and de Verrewaere, 1982, p275). Since 1971 Dutch has been given equal status to English and German in schools in the Académie de Lille and may be studied as the first foreign language. However, the very term "foreign language" was a source of irritation in certain Flemish quarters, with the Comité Flamand, for example, publishing an article in 1978 under the title, "Le flamand, langue étrangère en Flandre (*Bulletin du CFF* No.4 February 1978, p5). The chief complaint made by supporters of Vlaemsch was that, while the languages recognised by the loi Deixonne were taught within the context of the local culture - even if, as in the case of Basque and Catalan, they were more widely spoken outside France - in French Flanders the local context was ignored.

This objection was once again raised after the passing of the education act of July 11th 1975 (known as the loi Haby). While article 12 of this act stated that: "Un enseignement de langues et cultures régionales peut être dispensé tout au long de la scolarité" (loi 75-620), Vlaemsch was still denied the status of a regional language, a decision which left the Comité Flamand asking, "Pourquoi cet ostracisme à l'égard du flamand?" (*Bulletin du CFF* No.4, February 1978, No.4) However, with World War Two over for thirty years and Jean-Marie Gantois dead for seven, a deliberate policy of discrimination against Vlaemsch seems unlikely. The true reason seems much more likely to be that expressed in the same article: "...la tendance des Pouvoirs Publics à considérer la langue du Westhoek comme un simple rameau d'une langue étrangère" (*Bulletin du CFF*, No.4, February 1978, No.4). The education ministry would appear to have felt that authorising Dutch classes in state schools met the needs of the people of netherlandophone French Flanders. Similar thinking was behind the exclusion of Corsican from the loi Deixonne (Milis, *Frankrijk en zijn Minderheden*, p173). In this case it was felt that Italian classes would suffice, although views had clearly changed by 1974 when Corsican was added to the loi Deixonne as a language in its own right. However, whether it was the result of ignorance or paternalistic indifference rather than design, this disfavouring of Vlaemsch continued to create bitterness amongst the supporters of the teaching of the Westhoek dialect, as the Comité Flamand article illustrates.

This bitterness was only increased when a ministerial circular of 29th March 1976 set out plans for the further expansion of the teaching of regional languages and cultures (*circulaire 76-123*). At the request of parents and with the agreement of the local education authority inspectorate, one optional hour per week was available for such study from nursery classes up to the third year of secondary school. This provision was to increase to three hours per

week for the final three years of secondary education, provided a minimum of ten pupils in the year wished to take advantage of this option (as had been possible since 1971). Furthermore, the French Education Ministry started to improve the infrastructure for the delivery of this aspect of the curriculum by creating 'conseillers pédagogiques' to support regional language teachers and placed administrative and educational control of the programme in the hands of local authority inspectors. Nevertheless, despite these developments, Vlaemsch was still suffering from its exclusion from the loi Deixonne: by the academic year 1978/9 the only Vlaemsch courses operating in state schools in French Flanders were, as Sansen puts it, "sous forme quasi clandestine" as "activités socio-éducatives" in some secondary schools (Sansen, ca. 1982, p180).

These measures may be seen to be precursors of the wave of education reforms relating to regional languages passed under the socialist governments of the 1980s. Indeed, even before coming to power, François Mitterrand, in a speech in Lorient (14th March 1981), had declared his support for the creation of:

...un statut des langues et cultures de France, afin que la France ne soit pas le dernier pays d'Europe à refuser à ses composants les droits élémentaires, reconnus dans les conventions internationales qu'elle a elle même signées... (quoted in Marley, 1995, p8).

Between 1981 and 1986, no fewer than thirteen items of legislation were passed regarding development of this aspect of the curriculum, which, during the same period, was also the subject of eleven Education Ministry notes and circulars. By way of comparison, during the twenty four years separating the

loi Deixonne (1951) and the loi Haby (1975), the figures were of seven items of legislation and three circulars.

While it is true that much of the legislation passed under the Socialists during the early 1980s was chiefly concerned with improving on measures already in existence and that these figures are somewhat distorted by the multiple amendments to and refining of one basic reform - the CAPES in Breton alone was the subject of four *notes* and two *arrêtés*. Nevertheless, significant progress was made. Indeed, it was during this period that Vlaemsch - as a regional language – was to benefit from government reforms for the first time.

The June 1982 Education Ministry circular, known as the *circulaire Savary*, after the then Education Minister, in reviewing the provision for regional language teaching made no reference to the loi Deixonne and did not specify the languages concerned. By the academic year 1983/4 courses in Vlaemsch had been established in the *sixièmes* of six schools in Grande-Synthe, Steenvoorde, Hondschoote, Wormhout, Bourbourg and Cassel (Sansen, ca.1982, p180), with the intention that these classes should pursue the study up to *quatrième* in 1985 (cf 6.5 below).

Furthermore, Vlaemsch was specifically mentioned in the 1984 bill (84 - 2157) which led to it being included in the Conseil National des Langues et Cultures régionales, created in 1985. This consultative body - intended to examine all issues regarding the maintenance and promotion of regional languages and cultures and directly attached to the Prime Minister's office - appeared to represent a significant development for minority language groups. At its first meeting in January 1986, chaired by then Prime Minister, Laurent Fabius, several potentially far-reaching proposals were agreed upon, most significantly that "regional language courses ought to be made obligatory in

departments where regional language speakers live" and that the government should "...encourage the production of books in regional languages, buy them, and distribute them" (Sloane, 1989, p236). However, the Conseil's second meeting in July 1987, during Jacques Chirac's premiership, proved considerably less productive. The Conseil had been expanded to include non-regional minority languages, such as Arabic, and languages spoken in France's overseas territories, such as Tahitian. Given the very different objectives of this disparate group, it is not surprising that very little was achieved as the meeting descended into what one Catalonian representative was reported as calling "un fouteoir" (Sloane; 1989, p236). By 1989, the year of Sloane's article, the Conseil had become largely inactive.

Although the teaching of regional languages remained optional, changes in timetabling in 1985 made the option - in theory - more feasible and attractive (arrêté du 23 avril 1985). In addition greater emphasis was placed on the recruitment and training of teachers - at both primary and secondary level - for the delivery of this aspect of the curriculum. Education ministry circular 84 - 047, for example sets out the requirements for the examination of "aptitude pédagogique à l'enseignement des cultures et langues régionales", as an option for the primary school teacher's certificate (circulaire 85-058). Furthermore, in 1985 Breton became an option for the secondary school teaching certificate, the CAPES (arrêté du 10 septembre 1985, notes du 4 octobre 1985 (two), 2 juin & 2 juillet 1986). Nevertheless in French Flanders there remains a shortage of qualified teachers of both Flemish dialect and standard Dutch. A Vlaemsch option was briefly offered as part of the programme at the Ecole Normale de Lille, with approximately twenty students. Unfortunately, after what Sansen terms "un changement de direction à l'école" these classes were suspended (Sansen, p181). Although the situation regarding qualified teachers of standard Dutch is not quite as

dire, G. Van de Louw nevertheless considers their numbers insufficient (Van de Louw 1991, p349, cf. Ch6.4, below).

Whatever may have been the direct benefits for Flemish language and culture in French Flanders, there can be no doubt that, in the space of thirty-five years, the official attitude to the regional languages and cultures had undergone something of a revolution. It may be argued that these concessions were made only once government persecution had eliminated any potential threat posed by regional identity to national unity or even that efforts were only made to revive these languages once they had been driven to the point of extinction. Nevertheless, whether regional languages were to be preserved as quaint reminders of France's rural past or in an attempt to maintain domestic cultural diversity - perhaps as a bastion against the spread of Anglophone culture - their supporters were given the opportunity to promote them in a way denied their predecessors.

### **6.3 Problems inherent in the establishment of Dutch / Vlaemsch courses in French Flanders**

However, the passing of legislation alone is unlikely to be enough to ensure the survival of a minority language; the situation in Eire, where Irish Gaelic has been extensively promoted, protected and supported through government intervention and where the number of people using the language as a means of every day communication continues to fall, is indicative of this. Indeed, one may consider, as Edwards does in *Multilingualism* that: "Schools acting in relative isolation from other social currents...have a very limited potency" (Edwards, 1994, p188).

Vlaemsch has frequently been seen as a particular victim of the deficiencies of the French legislation, legislation which - even when at its most positive under the socialist governments in the 1980s - has been extensively criticised by regional language activists (Marley, 1995, p10). Even the notion that the loi Deixonne and subsequent laws reflect a more tolerant official attitude should be viewed with some caution - frequently a considerable time elapsed between the passing of the legislation and its implementation. For example, "Défense de parler flamand" was still to be found painted on many school walls in French Flanders, until 1960, some nine years after the passing of the loi Deixonne; Ward Herteleer notes in his *Taaltoestanden in de grensgemeenten van de Franse Westhoek*, that primary school pupils were still being punished for their use of Vlaemsch in the early 1970s (quoted in Landry and de Verrewaere, 1982, p275): if at government level minority languages and cultures were being viewed with some benevolence, this benevolence was slow in filtering down to the areas where it was required.

Nevertheless, despite the reservations expressed above, the possibility of the study of regional languages becoming part of the curriculum with the blessing of central government, was important for the prestige of these languages - particularly when one bears in mind that previously their very use had been stigmatised as well punished: the fact that "défense de parler flamand" was frequently accompanied by "et de cracher par terre" testifies eloquently to the degree of esteem which Vlaemsch, for one, had previously enjoyed. However, the very establishment of language classes posed a question which split the Flemish movement in French Flanders, as it had in Belgium, that of which language to teach, standard Dutch or Vlaemsch.

As Landry and de Verrewaere put it:

La question des rapports entre le Westflamand, langue populaire, et le néerlandais, "langue d'élite, ne semble d'ailleurs toujours pas résolue et divise encore certains militants flamands du Westhoek. (p279)

It is therefore important to consider the degree of difference between these dialects and the motives of the respective camps for promoting one or the other; indeed attitudes regarding the first issue often seem related to the second. For example Nicholas Bourgeois, writing in the *Bulletin du CFF* of the Comité Flamand in 1926 states that Dutch is the "expression littéraire" of the Flemish dialect spoken in France (which he calls "West flamand"). Indeed he claims, "Les différences sont des différences d'accent ou de prononciation; sous la forme écrite, elles se réduisent à quelques singularités orthographiques, pratiquement sans intérêt" (*CFF Bulletin du CFF*, 1926, p291). Furthermore l'abbé Depoers, when advertising his standard Dutch course (he, at least, is precise in his terminology) in Hazebrouck in 1995, refers to standard Dutch as "La forme moderne du vieux dialecte flamand du Westhoek."

Fifty years after Bourgeois' article, however, the Comité Flamand perceived the differences as of rather greater significance. In a review of Jean - Louis Marteel's *Cours de Flamand - Het Vlaams dan men Oudders klappen*, it is stated that, "L'écart entre le flamand dialectal du Westhoek et le néerlandais standard n'est pas moindre" and furthermore that "...les différences ne se limitent pas au vocabulaire et à la prononciation, mais affectent la grammaire elle-même..." (*Bulletin du CFF*, Jan 1993, No.38, p18). While this statement and that of Nicolas Bourgeois are perhaps not entirely incompatible, there is very clearly a difference of emphasis.

Given such conflicting opinions from inside the Flemish movement in French Flanders, it is necessary to consider the degree of difference between the region's Netherlandic dialect and standard Dutch.

The term "nederlansch" first appeared in a text dating from 1482 from Gouda (Sansen, ca.1982, p175, Brachin, 1985, p2) and has been used - along with "neder duutsch", "vlaemsch" and orthographical variants on these three - with no great precision, to refer to any number of Germanic dialects spoken between Dunkerque and Leeuwarden. "Westvlaemsch" and variants thereof has usually been used to describe those dialects spoken "...de Dunkerque jusqu'en Zélande, en passant par Bruges" (*Bulletin du CFF* No. 17, June 1982, p10). First attempts at standardisation date from the sixteenth century, with, for example the publication of *De Nederlandse Spellynghe* in 1550. Indeed at this early stage the West Flemish dialect, according to the *Bulletin du CFF du Comité Flamand de France*, was the most prestigious variety and contributed significantly to the standardising process and indeed almost became the basis of the standard (*Bulletin du CFF*, June 1982). Bergues in French Flanders, for example, boasted four chambers of rhetoric in the sixteenth century and the dialects of the Southern Netherlands were often preferred for the translation of religious texts, such as the version of the psalms produced in Cassel in 1566 (Brachin, 1985, p14). It is therefore not surprising that when, in 1592 it was decided that a netherlandophone Bible should be produced using, "the most general, clear and correct language" (Brachin, 1985, p14), the expertise of scholars from the Southern Netherlands should be called upon.

However, the independence of the Northern Provinces in 1579 and the repacification of the Southern Provinces in the following years, the main thrust towards the creation of the standard moved north. This did not, however,

mean the end of the influence of the Southern dialects - principally Westvlaams and Brabants - on the proto-standard. From 1568 large numbers of Protestants from the Southern Netherlands sought refuge in the North, particularly in the provinces of Zeeland and Holland, a movement which accelerated after the fall of Antwerp in 1585. These immigrants soon came to play prominent roles in commerce, administration and the church in these provinces and indeed are considered to have contributed greatly to the Dutch "Golden Age" of the late 16th and 17th centuries. This contribution was also a linguistic one, as Brachin notes:

Modern Dutch is to be formed on a basis of Hollands but not without Flemish and Brabants making an important contribution, with the multifarious personal influences of the refugees adding to the cultural prestige of the South and the Southern written language. (Brachin, 1985, p17)

Confirmation of this may be seen in the language of the *Statenbijbel*, first published in 1637. While inconsistencies in the text do not allow one to claim that the language used was a standard, a definite effort was made to achieve a consensus, so that the resulting work was comprehensible to a wide range of speakers of Netherlandic dialects. To this end translators and revisors were selected from throughout the Low Countries. Of the translators, two came from Friesland, two from West Flanders, one from Zeeland and one from Holland and in general Southern forms were preferred (Brachin, 1985, p21). Clearly at this stage dialects very similar to that of French Flanders were playing an important part in the formation of the Dutch standard which some French Flemings were later to consider a foreign language. Furthermore, the significance of the *Statenbijbel* should not be underestimated. It remained the standard Bible for Protestant

netherlandophones until 1951 and according to Brachin, "...made a significant contribution to the unification of the language." (Brachin, 1985, p22)

However, after the French annexation of French Flanders in the 17th century (ratified by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713), French took over as the official language of law and prestige, in turn leading to the "francisation" of the higher - and therefore better educated - social classes. Thus, whilst Vlaemsch continued to hold sway as the principal language of communication amongst the lower, largely illiterate, classes, it was already in decline as a written language. Given that, in the first instance, standardisation can only hope to target the written language, this decline served to distance Vlaemsch from the Dutch of the Northern Provinces. Some commentators have portrayed this divergence in terms of a contrast between the stagnation of Vlaemsch and the evolution of Northern Dutch under the pressure of economic and technological change. Bourgeois, for example, saw Vlaemsch as "Moins évoluée et par conséquent plus archaïque" (*Bulletin du CFF* 1926, p291).

By the late eighteenth century considerable differences between Vlaemsch and the emerging Northern standard were being noted. Sansen (ca. 1982, p176) gives the example of a Dutch translation of a legal text causing confusion and consternation in Bergues in 1791, with the town's député condemning "...ce flamand barbare qui n'est ni hollandais, ni flamand comme on parle et écrit en Flandre." Two years earlier linguistic differences had brought a priest from French Flanders to translate a passage from the Gospel of St Luke, published in Dutch in Gent in 1787 into Vlaemsch (Sansen, ca. 1982, p177). The regular Northern initiatives to not only standardise but also rationalise spelling - initiatives which continue to this day, with Belgian input - unheeded in French Flanders where written Vlaemsch was becoming increasingly rare, could but widen the gap (cf. Brachin, 1985, pp29-46).

The formation of the Belgian state in 1830 also had repercussions for linguistic questions in French Flanders. In the wake of the Belgian revolution, hostility to the Northern Provinces was such that French was preferred to Dutch as the national language. Furthermore, once the Flemish Movement had started to gain support, partly in response to perceived linguistic injustices, it was by no means clear that the standard Dutch of the Kingdom of the Netherlands would also be adopted as the official language of this Movement. Although the Northern standard enjoyed some support in intellectual circles, the North's attempts to impose the standard on the South by sending Dutch primary teachers to the Southern Provinces prior to Belgian independence, had only served to alienate Southern netherlandophones. Indeed, amongst the Netherlandic dialects of Belgium, West Flemish (considered by Sansen to be "...très proche du flamand de France actuel" (Sansen, ca.1982, p177) enjoyed particular support from, amongst others, Guido Gezelle as a potential basis for a purely Belgian standard.

One must also bear in mind in the Belgian context the significance of religion in linguistic issues. Standard Dutch was the language of the protestant Kingdom of the Netherlands - a fact of particular significance given the unpopularity of the anti-clerical policies pursued by William I; French was the language of socialism; West Flemish, for example, could be a truly Belgian, Catholic, alternative to both. Given the important roles played by clerics in the Flemish movements of both Belgium and France, the significance of such considerations should not be underestimated. Similar religious considerations are reflected in F. Lentacker's article *Les progrès actuels de l'enseignement du néerlandais en France* (*Bulletin du CFF*. No.35, 1991) in which he claims that, when establishing the Chair of Dutch at Lille's catholic university in 1926, Looten was aware of the debate opposing "la froideur

"protestante" - which standard Dutch represented - and "l'ardeur catholique" in the form of regional Flemish.

However, many leading figures from within the Flemish Movement came to consider linguistic unity between North and South as vital to both parties, a sentiment expressed by Jan Frans Willem in his *Over de Hollandsche en Vlaemsche Schrijfwijzen van het Nederlandsch* and stressed in the Taal en Letterkundige Congressen which took place from 1849 onwards with both Belgian and Dutch representatives. Indeed it was those in favour of linguistic unity who won the debate: when netherlandophone Belgians won linguistic equality in 1898, it was standard Dutch which became the official Netherlandic language of Belgium.

This decision had two-fold significance for the Flemish movement in France. Firstly, although non-standard Netherlandic dialects did not suddenly disappear in Belgium, it was henceforth standard Dutch which was promoted in the official and quasi official initiatives through which Belgian netherlandophones have sought to support their counterparts in France - initiatives which have been of considerable significance to the French Flemish movement, particularly after World War Two. Secondly, it suggests that, if Belgian netherlandophones can adapt to what, according to the Comité Flamand de France, would be just as much a "foreign" language to them as it would to French netherlandophones, then so - given the similarity between the West Flemish of Belgium and Vlaemsch noted by Sansen (Sansen, ca.1982, p177) - can French netherlandophones. Sansen also notes, however, that there have been instances of children experiencing some difficulty at school in the Belgian Province of East Flanders<sup>3</sup>, as a result of

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<sup>3</sup> Brachin calls the dialect of this province Limburgs (Brachin, 1985, p3).

differences between the Netherlandic dialect spoken at home and the standard used at school (Sansen, ca.1982, p177).

However, as has been noted repeatedly above, the Dutch / Vlaemsch debate did not disappear after the Belgian decision. Indeed French netherlandophones have often been stancher supporters of their dialect than their Belgian counterparts. Indeed Jean-Marie Gantois discusses the case of one of his early mentors, curé Delanghe from Ghyvelde who was "plus Gezelliens encore que Gezelle" in his championing of his dialect, "il aurait déclenché une guerre de l'orthographe pour - ch - à la place d'un - g -" (Gantois, 1942 p45) Indeed, Gantois goes on to state, "Il (Delanghe) reprochait volontiers à Gezelle lui-même d'avoir gardé sa pureté seulement à la langue, mais non à la graphie." (Gantois, 1942, p45/6) These two quotations illustrate that not only had Vlaemsch missed out the lexical and grammatical standardisation which had taken place in Belgium and Holland but also retained the spelling current in the eighteenth century. One wonders, therefore, to what extent comprehension of written standard Dutch could be made easier for speakers of Vlaemsch simply by adopting standard Dutch spelling for the dialect. The fact that many speakers of the dialect are not literate in it would seem to be a further argument in favour such standardisation.

Nevertheless, even in the 1920s a significant number of French Flemish activists were in favour of the teaching of Dutch rather than of the dialect. Gantois himself, while having been inspired by Delanghe, termed his attitude to the dialect "son fanatisme linguistique" (Gantois, 1942, p46), very soon came to look upon his knowledge of Vlaemsch as a gateway to Netherlandic culture in a much wider sense. Consequently he came to see French Flanders as a part of this extended cultural community, the lingua franca for

which was, of course, standard Dutch. It was, therefore standard Dutch which the VVF chose to promote, although not to the detriment of the the specificities of regional culture. Those who saw in Gantois and the VVF pan-Netherlandic tendencies could, of course, see the promotion of standard Dutch as proof of this.

It has been shown above that Vlaemsch has been isolated from the process of standardisation which has resulted in modern standard Dutch since the sixteenth century or, more significantly, since French annexation in the seventeenth century and that opinions of the degree of mutual comprehensibility of the two varieties varies considerably. A historical perspective on the reasons for various groups and individuals choosing to promote one or other variety has also been given. It is now important to examine the extent to which these issues are currently affecting attitudes to the teaching of standard Dutch / Vlaemsch in French Flanders.

For supporters of the teaching of Vlaemsch their reasoning is quite simple; this is the language of the "terroir" and to teach any other language (ie standard Dutch) in the guise of a regional language is wrong. This attitude is, furthermore, reinforced by the state education system, according to which standard Dutch may be studied as a foreign language, at one and the same time assuming that this option would satisfy those wishing Vlaemsch to be taught in the schools of French Flanders and denying the link between standard Dutch and regional culture - hence the Comité posing the question "Le Flamand, langue étrangère en Flandre?" (*Bulletin du CFF*, du CFF, No 4, Jan 1978, p6).

The second premise is that the degree of mutual comprehensibility between Vlaemsch and standard Dutch is insufficient for speakers of the former to

accept the latter as fundamentally the same language. Are then the supporters of the teaching of Vlaemsch suggesting that their variety of Vlaemsch is a distinct language in its own right? The text of the petition published in the *Bulletin du CFF du Comité Flamand de France* of November 1980 (*Bulletin du CFF* No. 12, p5) under the title of *Pour que le Flamand entre dans les Ecoles du Westhoek* casts light on the confusion surrounding this question amongst advocates of its teaching.

The petition, compiled and circulated by four separate groups from within the Flemish movement of French Flanders - Comité Flamand de France, Cercle Michel de Swaen, Het Reuzekoor and Menschen Lyk Wyder - states that Vlaemsch must not be considered as "dialecte allogène" and therefore "...traité en étranger sur son propre sol" because:

...supprimer une langue, c'est faucher à la base toute une culture, adaptée à un milieu donné, sans pouvoir espérer les mots d'une autre langue [standard Dutch?], forgée sous d'autres cieux, puissent jamais pouvoir exprimer cette mentalité, ces moeurs, cette sagesse.

Here the suggestion would appear to be that Vlaemsch is most definitely a language in its own right and that teaching standard Dutch will result in the disappearance of Vlaemsch. However, in the very next line reference is made to "le flamand dialectal" which, furthermore, is described as a tool for learning "néerlandais", by which one assumes the authors meant standard Dutch. This argument - that knowledge of their local Flemish dialect would facilitate the learning of Dutch and in the opinion of Jules Lemire and Camille Looten, other Germanic languages for French Flemings - is one which has been frequently used by members of the Comité Flamand from the late nineteenth century onwards to advocate the teaching of Vlaemsch (cf Ch3).

If this argument is valid it would surely once again suggest a considerable degree of similarity between the standard and the dialect.

It is this assumption - that a high degree of similarity Vlaemsch and standard Dutch does exist - which forms the basis of the arguments of those in favour of the teaching of the standard. Once this assumption has been made, such arguments are, they would argue, numerous. The case for standard Dutch is often portrayed as one of modernity against anachronicism, the wider socio-economic and cultural context against parochialism, perhaps recalling the words of Luc Verbeke, cited earlier in this section.

In the words of the petition advocating the teaching of Vlaemsch, a people's language is "...un élément fondamental de sa [the people's] personnalité" (*Bulletin du CFF. du CFF* No12, Nov 1980, p5) . Therefore, by assuming a high degree of linguistic similarity, one might also assume a high degree of cultural similarity, which is exactly what a significant number of Flemish activists in French Flanders - both before and after Gantois - have tried to do. Indeed Jacques Femaut, President of the French Flemish association Menschen Lyk Wyder and a co-signatory of the 1980 petition but nonetheless a fervent supporter of the teaching of standard Dutch in French Flanders, states in his article *Le Flamand*, part of Menschen Lyk Wyder's pamphlet *La Flandre en France*, "Il est exclu en effet que le flamand se maintienne seul, sans s'appuyer sur son puissant hinterland culturel d'outre-ligne" (Femaut, undated (a), p[7]). Not only does he see the wider cultural view as important for the maintenance of Vlaemsch / Dutch<sup>4</sup>, but also feels that it is wrong to teach Vlaemsch without reference to netherlandophone culture as a whole. He states:

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<sup>4</sup> For Femaut standard Dutch is merely the literary form of Vlaemsch and the other should complement the other, each flourishing as a result.

Il serait détestable qu'on les (les enfants flamandophones [en France]) confinât dans un idiome local qui, pas plus qu'un autre, ne leur permettrait l'accès à tous les domaines de la pensée humaine, à tous l'empan de leur culture et de leur civilisation propres, et à la totalité des productions actuelles du génie de leur peuple écartelé entre trois Etats. (Fermaut, undated (a), p[7])

This is not to suggest that the advocates of Flemish deny a cultural bond between French Flanders, the Netherlands and netherlandophone Belgium, rather they prefer to emphasize the cultural specificities of their region. In such a view one can, perhaps, see shades of Lemire's ideas of the "petite patrie": the advocates of Vlaemsch prefer to emphasize the specific identity of French Flanders as a *part of France* rather than link this identity more closely to foreign countries, as Fermaut undeniably does. Given the history of the Comité Flamand de France - which played a significant role in the 1980 petition - such a suggestion is not an unreasonable one; indeed, when inciting its members to gather signatures for the aforementioned petition, they state: "Ils [its members] agiront ainsi dans la fidélité aux intentions des fondateurs du Comité Flamand" (*Bulletin du CFF*, No12, Nov 1980, p5).

In addition to cultural considerations, advocates of Dutch classes are also at pains to stress socio - economic ones. For Fermaut the supporters of Vlaemsch fail to recognize the significance of such issues. He claims that, while well intentioned in their efforts on behalf of the regional language,

...ils sacraliseront et la frontière qui l'[le peuple flamand en France] ampute et l'idiome local auquel on l'a confiné, sans se rendre compte qu'ils sacralisaient du même coup, avec des siècles de russification

française, une situation linguistique anormale où un idiome local certes savoureux mais sans assise géographique et sociologique suffisante était censé pouvoir générer une langue de grande communication capable de se maintenir face au français. (Fermaut, undated (a), p[7])

There are several points worthy of note in this extract. Firstly, Fermaut refers to the Flemish dialect as "l'idiome local" - the term used to describe regional languages in the loi Deixonne and one which holds little prestige for the language in question. Secondly and more importantly, he stresses the importance of a geographical and sociological context in which Vlaemsch / Dutch is viable - a context which stretches beyond national frontiers. Furthermore, Fermaut suggests that failure to take account of this context is to condemn both to death in the region.

Within this context, a knowledge of Dutch is seen to have a practical, economic significance, not just for the remaining Vlaemsch speaking areas but for French Flanders - if not the department Nord - as a whole. It is this consideration that Fermaut, again, emphasises, this time in his article *Le Néerlandais, une langue qui monte* (Fermaut, undated (b)). In this article - chiefly an enthusiastic publicity piece on behalf of the Dutch classes offered in French Flanders - he contrasts the economic strength of both Holland and Belgian Flanders with the relatively poor state of France and more specifically the department Nord. In particular he highlights the difference in unemployment rates - close to 20% in Dunkirk and under 3% in Courtrai (his figures, Fermaut undated (b)) and suggests that a knowledge of Dutch would be a considerable advantage in the search for work, either in French companies with contacts in Belgium and / or Holland or to fill existing vacancies over the border. Indeed he states:

L'ANPE de Dunkerque, consultée, confirme que le néerlandais y est la langue la plus demandée après l'anglais et que des milliers de postes restent vacants outre-frontière par méconnaissance de la langue (Fermaut, undated(b), p[2]).

Once again, in inciting French Flemings to take advantage of job opportunities in Belgium, Fermaut is promoting a vision of French Flanders as part of an economic area which does not recognise a frontier he considers artificial. This view is further promoted in a pamphlet advertising Menschen Lyk Wyder's Dutch classes, which borrows many ideas from *Le néerlandais, une langue qui monte* and which has as its principal title, "1992: l'ouverture des frontières" (Menschen Lyk Wyder pamphlet, ca.1990). Both Fermaut's article and the advertisement carry a quotation from Pierre Mauroy, the socialist mayor of Lille, who claims:

L'avenir nous emènera à retrouver notre histoire et reconstituer une zone de commerce et d'échanges comme l'ont été les Pays-Bas, depuis le 17ième siècle. (Pierre Mauroy, interview published in the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*, 13/1/89, quoted in Fermaut, undated (b) p[2] and Menschen Lyk Wyder pamphlet, ca.1990, p[2])

Clearly it is within this "Euro-zone" - which for Fermaut and Menschen Lyk Wyder, amongst others, is as much historical and cultural as it is economic - that Dutch is seen as important for French Flanders. It has already been stated that a purely educational initiative is unlikely to reverse the shift away from a minority language and one may see in the arguments above an attempt to promote an environment in which the regional language - or at least what is portrayed as the standardised version of it - may thrive as a

language of economic prestige and communication. In so doing the partisans of Dutch are, without losing sight of their regional cultural heritage - promoting the language as one of future opportunity as opposed to the nostalgic conservatism they associate with the supporters of Vlaemsch.

However, it would be unfair to claim that the advocates of Vlaemsch classes were completely disinterested in or ignorant of such arguments. One recalls Jules Lemire as early as 1902 describing the economic and cultural possibilities offered by the teaching of Vlaemsch, which he saw as a means of facilitating the learning of other Germanic languages - including Dutch! (cf. Ch 3.6.4) Such arguments were repeated in the 1980 petition (*Bulletin du CFF* no.12, Nov 1980) and are still used by the supporters of regional Flemish today. However, they are obviously easily countered by the supporters of Dutch, who merely say that if the object of learning Vlaemsch is to be able to learn Dutch, then it is more logical to learn Dutch from the outset. Furthermore, even in the economic arguments of Lemire, one can detect a difference in emphasis to those of, for example, Menschen Lyk Wyder; the former saw French Flemings as serving France by spearheading trade with, amongst others, the netherlandophone countries, whereas the latter sees potential economic developments benefitting first and foremost French Flanders itself, which - in common with many of the other regions of France - it feels has suffered from French economic policies which have for too long focused on the Ile de France (cf. Jan van Zoeterstede ca.1990, Menschen Lyk Wyder pamphlet, *La France à 2 Vitesses*). Indeed, one might suggest that when groups like Menschen Lyk Wyder choose to promote the teaching of Dutch in preference to regional Flemish, they do so not because they recognise the importance of the socio - economic context in the reversing of language shift but instead because they wish to strengthen links with Holland and Belgian Flanders at the expense of those with Paris. Clearly these two

arguments are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, given Menschen Lyk Wyder's stated belief in the idea of a "Europe of the Regions" (cf Ch5.4), they might well suggest that the one necessitates the other.

Discussion thus far has centred on perceived linguistic differences and the ideological differences which lay behind these perceptions. One should neither suggest that the two camps are irreconcilable nor that no attempts have been made from within the Flemish movement in France to reconcile them. The Comité Flamand de France, for example, suggested in 1980<sup>5</sup> that pupils from parts of French Flanders where Vlaemsch was still spoken should be taught regional Flemish from the moment they started school and then progress to standard Dutch later in their school careers. It was furthermore suggested that pupils in traditionally Francophone parts of French Flanders, such as Lille, should be taught standard Dutch as a matter of course.

The two crucial issues in this affair are clearly those of mutual comprehensibility and linguistic authenticity - is standard Dutch merely a foreign language? In fact a high degree of mutual comprehensibility would make it difficult to argue that the study of standard Dutch was not "authentic" for French Flemings. Furthermore, there would seem to be no reason why the teaching of standard Dutch should necessarily preclude the use of material in the regional dialect - if for no other reason than to illustrate the differences between the dialect and the standard. These differences, highlighted, for example, in the text of one of the songs from De Coussemaker's anthology (cf Ch 3.6.1) or a poem by Michel de Swaen, could be portrayed in a positive light and serve to kindle pride in the regional identity and cultural tradition. One might, furthermore, ask whether a French Fleming with knowledge of the dialect of French Flanders as a spoken language would

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<sup>5</sup> *Bulletin du CFF*, No.12, Nov. 1980, p5

necessarily have greater difficulty understanding - or even using standard Dutch - than would, for example, a Belgian Fleming or a Dutchman from Zeeland with a strong background in their dialect. In this context it is worth noting that Brachin considers that, even in Holland, it is only since World War Two that standard Dutch has become preeminent as the language of everyday communication for the majority of the population (Brachin, 1985, p43). The key would seem to be exposure to the standard from an early age, without the standard being portrayed as foreign or the dialect being undervalued. One might argue, after all, that French children are only too used to the differences between French as they speak it and the models of "good French" they are required to emulate at school and would perceive the differences between their dialect and standard Dutch in the same way.

Clearly there are differences between Vlaemsch and standard Dutch. However, even the advocates of the teaching of Vlaemsch refer to it as a dialect related to Dutch. It is furthermore seen to be very closely related to the dialect of Belgian West Flanders, where, despite the campaign of Gezelle and his ilk, standard Dutch is taught in schools. Here, at least, the problems posed by dialectal variation have clearly been perceived as surmountable. In addition the teaching of a standard pertains principally to written forms of the language and as has been mentioned above, Vlaemsch largely ceased to exist as a written language more than 200 years ago - one of the arguments used by supporters of Vlaemsch to highlight the differences between the dialect and the standard. As a result a high proportion of the remaining Vlaemsch speakers are not skilled in reading and writing the dialect - a further factor that would seem to favour the teaching of standard Dutch. Given the inconsistencies and archaic nature of the spelling used in many of the existing texts in the dialect of French Flanders and in Westvlaams as a whole, one might actually consider standard Dutch an easier model for students to follow.

Finally, personal experience has shown that the dialect of French Flanders, in its written form at least, is comprehensible to an educated Dutchman or netherlandophone Belgian. One might reasonably conclude that, once unfamiliarity with any written form of a Netherlandic tongue on the part of French Flemings - netherlandophone or not - has been overcome, standard Dutch should be comprehensible. The final word on this issue will be left to the twenty four (out of twenty five) professors of Dutch language and literature and their response in 1966 to Georg Hermanowski's assertion that, "...Flemish Dutch...is as far removed from ABN as, for example, Afrikaans."(Brachin, 1985, p80) In "*Niederländisch": eine Klarstellung*, they stated:

From a scholarly point of view, it is proposterous and fallacious to assert that the language spoken in Flanders and the offical Dutch spoken in the Netherlands are as different as, for example, the latter and Afrikaans...There is no such thing as a "Flemish" language or a "Hollandish" language; there is only the **Dutch language**, which is officially recognised and compulsory both in Flanders and in the Netherlands (quoted in Brachin, 1985, p80).

Indeed, one must conclude that the arguments which have led to different camps championing either the dialect or the standard are more ideological than linguistic. According to Jacques Fermaut, "En Flandre de France, le débat est à peu près clos: les tenants du flamand et ceux du néerlandais ayant fini par se reconnaître complémentaires et non concurrents et encore moins ennemis!"(Fermaut, undated (a), p[7]. It is true that since both the Flemish dialect and standard Dutch can now be accomodated within the state education system, the debate has become less public; this does not necessarily mean that it has disappeared. Clearly the supporters of

Vlaemsch remain on the defensive - as figures below will show, standard Dutch classes enjoy a large numerical superiority, partly because of the greater financial and teaching support they enjoy and partly because of the more modern, more "useful" image of standard Dutch. It is, perhaps, because of this superiority that Jacques Fermaut sees the debate as having come to a satisfying conclusion.

#### **6.4 Standard Dutch and Vlaemsch in Higher Education in French Flanders**

It might be suggested that, coming after compulsory education has been completed and therefore concerning a minority of the population, higher education could have only a limited impact on the promotion and maintenance of standard Dutch and / or Flemish dialect and netherlandophone culture in French Flanders. Certainly in comparison to the potential impact of Dutch classes in primary or secondary education this is the case. Nevertheless it is with higher education that this analysis of standard Dutch / Vlaemsch teaching in French Flanders will begin, since it was in this domain that the teaching of Dutch made its first officially sanctioned breakthrough in the region with the - somewhat surprising - establishment in 1926 of a chair of Dutch at Lille's Catholic University (cf Chapter 3.6.3). Indeed, it might be suggested that it was precisely because higher education concerned only a fraction of the population in 1926, that course met with official approval.

Today, standard Dutch is taught, according to the figures and criteria of the Comité pour l'Enseignement de la Langue et Culture Néerlandaises (CELCN, cf. Ch5.6.1) in eleven higher education establishments in French Flanders and a further two in what it calls "les Pays-Bas Français" - the Université d'Artois (Arras) and the Université de Valenciennes (CELCN, 1996, pp1-6). In each case the language taught is standard Dutch and not Vlaemsch. However, these figures are somewhat misleading since not all of these institutions - or the courses they offer - are really comparable. Lille III university, for example, offers a wide range of courses up to post graduate level, whereas FORCOMEX in Roubaix offers a one year course geared towards international trade and transport.

Indeed, of the ten higher education courses listed by the CELCN in French Flanders in 1996, five are run by private business and language schools. These are; the Ecole Supérieur de Vente Industrielle (Douai), Institut Supérieur du Commerce International de Dunkerque (course run in conjunction with the Université du Littoral), Ecole Supérieur de Commerce (Lille), Forcomex (Roubaix, see above) and the Centre de Pratique des Langues Etrangères (Roubaix), which offers a one year course for receptionists. All of these centres are offering practical, business orientated language courses for non-specialists. As such they cannot be considered a response to the netherlandophone cultural heritage of French Flanders. Nevertheless, they should not be dismissed out of hand since they - perhaps more than the culture based university courses - seek to promote the practicality of standard Dutch as a language of everyday communication and implicitly acknowledge the significance of this language to the economic development of the Nord / Pas-de-Calais region as a whole.

Within French Flanders, the other Dutch courses are divided between the two state universities, Université du Littoral and Université Charles de Gaulle Lille III (and its "antennes") and l'Université Catholique de Lille. This is not to suggest that the teaching of Dutch in higher education in France is limited to French Flanders - the universities in Arras and Valenciennes - outside French Flanders but still within the region Nord / Pas-de-Calais - have already been mentioned. In addition the *Bulletin du CFF* lists Dutch courses at the Sorbonne (established 1952), Paris III, IV, X, XII, Strasbourg, Metz, Besançon, Grenoble, Lyon and Tours as well as mentioning a Dutch option at l'E.N.A. and "dans diverses écoles d'application comme celle des douanes." (*Bulletin du CFF* No. 35, 1991, p5).

As has been mentioned above the most long established Dutch course in French Flanders - indeed in France - is that at l'Université Catholique de Lille (cf. Ch3.6.3). While Dutch does continue to be taught there, it is only as a language option and does not lead to either the DEUG or Licence and is most popular amongst students studying either German or English as their main subject. The situation is similar at l'Université du Littoral, where Dutch may be studied as a third foreign language as part of the Langues Etrangères Appliquées (LEA) programme at the Lamartine campus in Dunkerque and (admittedly outside French Flanders ) at the Pierre Bertrand campus in Boulogne.

While in practical terms the impact of these courses is clearly limited, this does not mean they have no role to play in the Flemish movement in France. The Catholic church and in particular catholic education have long played an important role within the movement and the present course follows in the tradition of Looten. Similarly, the French Flemish movement has very definite connections with l'Université du Littoral in the shape of one of its lecturers

(albeit not in the Dutch section), Jean-Louis Marteel, a leading figure in the organisation *Het Reuzekoor* and co-editor of *Cours de Flamand - Het Vlaams dan men Oudders klappen* (cf. Ch6.7, below). Given that the region's largest provider of higher education Dutch courses, Lille III, is rather less sympathetic to the Flemish cause in France (cf. Ch6.4, below), it is clearly beneficial to the movement that enthusiasts will find a warmer welcome elsewhere, even if the courses are not so prestigious or dynamic.

In addition to these two centres and Lille III, the IUT Villeneuve d'Ascq, an "antenne" of Lille I, offers a Dutch option as part of its business and administration management course.

L'Université Lille III and its "antennes" in Roubaix (UFR des Langues Etrangères appliquées) and Tourcoing (IUT) offer the most comprehensive range of Dutch language, literature and civilisation courses in the Nord / Pas-de-Calais region and its Dutch section is amongst the most well respected in France. The section owes its origins to an exchange of teaching staff during the 1948/9 academic year between l'Université de Lille and the Rijksuniversiteit Gent which brought Professor A. van Elslander to Lille. However, it was with the arrival of Walter Thys in 1953 that Dutch studies really started to develop in Lille. By the 1969/70 academic year sixty students were enrolled on Dutch courses, increasing to 102 by the following year (Deleu, et al., 1973, p538). When he retired in 1989 this figure had increased still further to over 250 students, with approximately 200 hours of Dutch classes taught across all years per week (Van de Louw, 1991), with the licence established during the 1977/8 academic year; by 1989 some twenty to twenty five students were studying for this examination.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Approximate figures quoted by G. Van de Louw in conversation, April 1996.

Today, the Dutch section at Lille III consists of five full and part time staff, including both Dutch and Belgian native speakers and two language assistants under the direction of the Dutch Head of Section G. Van de Louw. Dutch may be studied as the main subject for the DEUG, Licence, LEA, Maîtrise, DEA and as a subject for doctoral research as well as a subsidiary combined with other subjects. In addition to those students studying on campus in Lille, the section also offers its courses via distance learning. For the summer term 1996 there were approximately 150-160 students enrolled on the section's courses, forty four of whom were studying Dutch as their main subject. (see table below)

YEAR	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR	LICENCE	MAITRISE	TOTAL
1989/90	unknown	unknown	20 – 25	n/a	20 / 25
1994/5	16	7	16	6	45
1995/6	16	7	9 + 3(a)	9	41 + 3

Three students on course "néerlandais mention FLE"

(Figures; Université Lille III, 1/3/96, except year 1989/90; G.Van de Louw's approximations.

In addition to these figures, G.Van de Louw stated in April 1996 that twenty students were studying Dutch as the principal language of a LEA course with a further four enrolled for the DEA and seven involved in doctoral research. Examination of student lists at the same time indicated eighty three students studying Dutch as a subsidiary subject, of whom twenty three had German as their main subject and eleven English. In the majority of cases (42), however, the main subject was not given. Clearly it is possible that there may have been certain discrepancies between these option lists and the actual number of students attending classes and sitting examinations but they do offer a

reasonable guide, albeit excluding students on distance learning courses. While these figures indicate a decline in the total number of students enrolled in Dutch courses since the departure of Walter Thys, at the same time they show that the number studying Dutch as their main subject has actually increased.

The Head of Section, G.Van de Louw sees Dutch as having considerable practical significance for the region Nord / Pas-de-Calais, in terms of the development of economic and cultural ties with netherlandophone Belgium and Holland (Van de Louw, 1991, p349). However, he does not feel that this significance is necessarily any greater as a result of the netherlandophone heritage of part of the Nord / Pas-de-Calais and as a result the courses offered at Lille III make no particular effort to emphasise regional netherlandophone culture or identity. Indeed in the introduction to the Dutch section of 1995/6 prospectus of the *UFR d'Etudes Germaniques* (p70) quite the opposite would seem to be the case. It is stated:

Vous avez choisi de faire du Néerlandais en LVE (Langue Vivante Etrangère) et d'apprendre ou d'approfondir les réalités culturelles et littéraires des pays voisins.

However, literature and civilisation modules do examine Flanders as a whole, which, from a historical perspective, clearly includes French Flanders. In fact the only acknowledgement of the existence of netherlandophones in the Nord / Pas-de-Calais is, perhaps, to be found in the prospectus, with the comment, "...pour les étudiants qui ont déjà des connaissances de néerlandais, l'action portera, éventuellement, sur la correction des régionalismes."(UFR d'Etudes Germaniques, 1995/6, p70)

Clearly Lille III is playing an important role for the promotion of the Dutch language in Northern France. Given the tendency for French students to attend a university in their region, it is safe to assume that a high proportion of Lille III's students of Dutch come from the Nord / Pas-de-Calais. Similarly, given that, in terms of employment opportunities, of all the regions of France - with the possible exception of the région parisienne - Dutch is of the greatest importance to the Nord / Pas-de-Calais<sup>7</sup>, one may conclude that a considerable proportion intend to stay in that region. Lille III's Dutch graduates are therefore - in theory at least - well placed to use and promote the Dutch language in French Flanders as a language of everyday communication in the fields of economics and commerce and represent the greatest potential source of the next generation of Dutch teachers in the region. Given the shortage of Dutch teachers in the region discussed by Van de Louw in *Perspectieven voor de Nederlandstiek in Noord - Frankrijk* (p349), the importance of this potential should not be underestimated.

However, does this production of well qualified graduates in Dutch necessarily help the cause of Dutch / Vlaemsch as a regional language? As has already been discussed above at 6.3, the majority of the contemporary Flemish movement in France see standard Dutch as the authentic standard of the regional idiom; the question of alienation, in terms of the language taught, is therefore not posed. However, despite Flanders appearing in both civilisation and literature modules in all years of the DEUG and Licence programmes, as has been suggested above, no particular attempt is made to focus on the Flemishness of French Flanders within the programme. Furthermore, prospectus entries do focus on Dutch as a *foreign* language - a potential source of alienation for any netherlandophone French Fleming

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<sup>7</sup>The ANPE in Dunkirk stated in 1991 that, after English, Dutch was the most sought after language by employers in the town. (Quoted in Jacques Feraut, 1991, p[2])

enrolled on the course. However, according to Mr Van de Louw, there are very few such students enrolled in his section's courses. Interestingly, he characterises the results of the few students who do fit into this category since he has been Head of Section as "disappointing." (G. Van de Louw, in conversation, April 1996)

Perhaps of even greater interest than this potential alienation through omission - somewhat reminiscent of the Comité Flamand's criticism of the teaching of Dutch in state secondary schools, in the article *Le Flamand, Langue étrangère en Flandre? (Bulletin du CFF, No.4, Feb 1978)* - is the attitude Lille III's Dutch section to regional Flemish and the Flemish movement in France. The fact that the section's research centre bears the name Centre de Recherches Michiel de Swaen might lead one to surmise a certain sympathy with the French Flemish movement; has not Michiel de Swaen also given his name to the regionalist group Michiel de Swaenkring? Interestingly, in his *Perspectieven voor de Nederlandstiek in Noord-Frankrijk* (Van de Louw, 1991, p350), Van de Louw specifically states that there is no link between the two. He furthermore goes on to state how he sees Michiel de Swaen, with his mastery of both French and Dutch and his appreciation of each language's culture, as a symbol of the Nord / Pas-de-Calais' linguistic ideal:

En een van de belangrijkste perspectieven die ik voor het Nederlands hier zie is de volgende: de regio Nord / Pas-de-Calais met zijn zones waar meer Frans of meer Nederlands gesproken wordt of werd kan een schakel worden tussen die twee culturen waarvan de taal een van de uitdrukkingen is - rondom wel de meest intieme. (Van de Louw, 1991, p350)

Clearly such sentiments are not incompatible with those expressed by, for example, Jacques Fermaut in *Le néerlandais, une langue qui monte* (Fermaut, 1991) or even Jules Lemire, some ninety years before. They do, however, illustrate a dispassionate objectivity which, one might consider, sets Van de Louw, a Dutchman, apart from the French Flemish movement and would, perhaps, also from a Belgian Fleming.

Similarly, while Van de Louw's refusal to see national borders as an obstruction to linguistic and cultural unity, as expressed in conversation in April 1996, may be seen to echo Fermaut's complaint about the artificiality of the Franco - Belgian border (Fermaut 1991(b), p[3]), comments in his *Perspectieven voor de Neerlandistiek in Noord-Frankrijk*, written five years earlier, make it clear that he feels the French Flemish movement is actually creating its own borders. When discussing the French Flemish movement's attempts to promote Dutch classes he states:

En zonder dat men het waarschijnlijk vermoedt of opzettelijk wil, gaat men dan aandacht besteden aan het Nederlands in die plaatsen waar de Vlaamse bewustwording nog levend is, d.w.z men is bezig ook in deze regio weer een taalgrens te creëren. (Van de Louw, 1991, p351)

Van de Louw therefore sees Dutch as being of significance to the whole of the Nord / Pas-de-Calais. This significance is, however, that of an important foreign language, albeit one which has particular historical, cultural and economic ties with the region. For him, to concentrate attempts to promote Dutch in the traditionally netherlandophone parts of the region is to do a disservice to both the Nord / Pas-de-Calais and to the teaching of the Dutch language, as well as to deny the region's historical bilingualism (cf. Ch2, the division of French Flanders between la Flandre Flamingante and la Flandre

Wallonne). Furthermore, Van de Louw is critical of official Belgian organisations which, tend to favour Dutch teaching initiatives in netherlandophone areas with their funding, rather than, for example, Lille III's Dutch section:

Maar het is wel een feit dat de Belgische initiatieven een bepaald gebied van deze regio bestrijken - en veel land braak laten liggen. En voor mensen van deze regio kan dat geen goed initiatief zijn, omdat het niet regionaal is. En dan blijft de vraag nog open of zij wel weten dat de Belgische autoriteiten, via de Taalunie, meer geld besteden aan dergelijke initiatieven, dan aan het officiële onderwijs aan de universiteit van Rijssel III - tenminste indien mijn inlichtingen juist zijn. (

Van de Louw, 1991, p151)

Such comments might lead one to suspect that, although the Dutch section at Lille III is attaining one of the French Flemish movement's principal goals, the two share little common ground. Indeed, when asked whether any of his section's students were active in the French Flemish movement, he stated that, while this had been the case when he had arrived at Lille III, it was no longer so. He furthermore expressed reservations about attempts to use the language question to serve other [non linguistic] ends (Van De Louw, in conversation, April, 1996). Thus, one might conclude that while Lille III is clearly succeeding in its efforts to promote Dutch within the Nord / Pas-de-Calais, it is not promoting Dutch as an indigenous regional language. Nevertheless, while Van de Louw's vision of the place of Dutch in the Nord / Pas-de-Calais may differ from that of, for example, Jacques Fermaut, they do share the same broad aims of raising awareness of the potential significance of Dutch to the region and increasing the number of Dutch speakers in the region.

## **6.5 The teaching of standard Dutch and Vlaemsch in primary and secondary schools in French Flanders**

Important as higher education standard Dutch courses may be to the future of the language in French Flanders, they clearly cannot hope to have the same impact as a widespread programme of classes within the framework of the primary and secondary education system: the fact that the Dutch courses at Lille's Catholic and state universities were both established considerably earlier than the first officially sanctioned Dutch course in a secondary school - at the Lycée de Flandre in Hazebrouck in 1963 - is surely recognition of this. The importance of the teaching of the regional language has clearly long been understood by the French Flemish movement (see 6.3, above) - as well as by organisations promoting France's other regional languages - and since these tentative beginnings in the 1960s, the provision of Dutch classes has increased considerably throughout French Flanders. Since the 1982 Savary circular, these standard Dutch classes have also been joined by courses in regional Flemish, which has failed to make any significant breakthrough in higher education.

During the 1960s, however, the course at the Lycée de Flandre remained an isolated example of Dutch teaching in French Flanders and even here it only survived for three years, from 1963 to 1966 (Deleu, et al., (eds), 1973, p538) - ironically closing the year Dutch became a third foreign language option in the schools of French Flanders (cf 6.3). However, it was not until Dutch could be studied as a first foreign language option up to the Baccalauréat in 1970-1 (cf 6.3), that its popularity started to increase in the collèges and lycées of French Flanders, with the first course being established in the CES in Bailleul in 1972. Over the next five years Dutch teaching made gradual progress. The *Bulletin du CFF du Comité Flamand de France* of February 1978 (No.4,

p6) cites three state schools, the Lycée at Rosendael (near Dunkirk) and the collèges in Bailleul and Halluin (a small town near Lille), as well the private Collège Saint-Jacques in Hazebrouck, as offering Dutch classes. However, comparison with the KFV's list (below) for the academic year 1978/9 suggests either that the number of schools in which Dutch was being taught doubled within a year, or that the *Bulletin du CFF* list is incomplete.

By the academic year 1978/9 courses were running in eight schools across French Flanders, in Lille (two), Halluin, Dunkirk, Coudekerque-Branche, on the outskirts of Dunkirk, Bailleul and Armentières. Of these eight schools, only one - that in Bailleul - was in an area still considered netherlandophone (KFV, undated information sheet, presumably late 1978 or early 1979, no author given). Once again this list may be incomplete<sup>8</sup> - of the courses mentioned in the *Bulletin du CFF* of the previous year, only those in Bailleul and Halluin are listed by Verbeke. While it is possible that Dutch teaching had ceased in Hazebrouck and Rosendael, it is equally possible that, in the absence of reliable centralised records, classes were being taught about which Flemish activists knew nothing.

The number of schools offering a Dutch option continued to grow throughout the 1980s; *Bulletin du CFF du Comité Flamand de France* No. 35 of 1991(p6), lists four private secondary schools and nine state secondary schools as well as four Lycées Professionnels offering such an option. However, of the schools mentioned in its 1978 list, only the Collège in Bailleul remains. This list includes one school from outside French Flanders but within Les Pays-Bas Français, in Boulogne-sur-Mer. Of the remaining fifteen, six - the private lycées and collèges in Bergues, Bailleul and Hondschoote and the state ones in Bailleul, Hazebrouck and Hondschoote - are in

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<sup>8</sup> No indication is given as to how this information was gathered.

netherlandophone French Flanders. In addition to this progress in secondary education, an experiment began in 1985 in the primary schools of Wervicq-Sud, where Dutch was made compulsory for all pupils from the age of six. A similar programme was initiated in 1990 in Bailleul (cf. Ch6.5.1, below).

The current (academic year 1995/6) situation shows the gradual growth in Dutch teaching evident between 1971 and 1991 to be continuing. The 1996 CELCN inventory names nineteen secondary schools (ten collèges, nine lycées, three of which lycées techniques) across the Pays-Bas Français where Dutch is taught, as well as ten primary and nursery schools. Of the ten primary/nursery schools, nine are in Bailleul and its immediate vicinity, the other being that in Wervicq-Sud. Figure 1, below, summarises this growth over a twenty-five year period.

Fig. 1 Secondary schools in the Académie de Lille where Dutch is taught

YEAR	Total no. of schools	No. of private schools	No. schools in Nthlandophone Fr Flanders
1972	1	0	1
1977/8	4*	1	2
1978/9	8*	see below **	1
1991	17	4	6
1995/6	19	6	4

\* See comments, above, on possible inaccuracies in these figures

\*\* The KFV offer no breakdown of institutions; comparison with later lists suggests all those mentioned were state schools.

In addition to the growth in the number of secondary schools offering Dutch courses - extensively discussed above - these figures also reveal it is the state schools which lead the way in the teaching of Dutch in French Flanders, not private, catholic, ones - the language's traditional champions. It should, however, be remembered that Catholic institutions had chiefly sought to promote Vlaemsch, "la langue du terroir". One might therefore argue that their motives for teaching the regional language are not the same as those who seek to promote standard Dutch, which, dynamic though it may be, remains in the eyes of many a Protestant, foreign language. It would, however, be wrong to suggest that catholic schools are actively hostile to running Dutch classes; quite simply, the reasons for teaching and learning Dutch in French Flanders have changed and given resource and staff limitations, Dutch classes are not such a priority. Nevertheless, this does not prevent Franck Allacker, secretary of the CELCN from condemning private education as the "parent pauvre" of Dutch teaching in French Flanders (Allacker, 1996, *CELCN Inventory*, p15).

Figure 1 also shows that netherlandophone French Flanders is not only not the centre for Dutch teaching in French Flanders but that the number of schools teaching Dutch there is actually in decline. Clearly in terms of population this area is considerably smaller than la Flandre Gallicante (approximately 250 000 inhabitants as opposed to 1.1 million), which, along with Dunkirk, accounts for the other fifteen Dutch-teaching schools. Nevertheless, the netherlandophone part of French Flanders has a key role to play if Dutch is to be seen as anything more than another foreign language in the schools of French Flanders. Indeed, Allacker is highly critical of the Westhoek's (netherlandophone French Flanders plus Dunkirk) schools. On noting what he calls "un tassemement, voire une régression" in the number of Dutch classes in this area, he comments with heavy irony:

Il est vrai que cette micro-région dispose déjà de tellement d'atouts pour se démarquer sur l'échiquier européen (dont sa situation de "cul de sac frontalier au coeur de l'Europe") qu'elle peut se permettre ce luxe... (Allacker, *CELCN Inventory*, 1996, p15).

Clearly, while the amount of Dutch being taught in schools in French Flanders is still increasing, this increase is not uniform across the region. Furthermore, there would appear to be some difficulty maintaining continuity in the provision of these classes. The 1996 CELCN inventory lists no fewer than twelve "Etablissements scolaires où l'enseignement du néerlandais a été dispensé antérieurement", including the Collèges in Halluin and Coudekerque Branche as well as the Lycée/Collège St-Jacques in Hazebrouck, which had been among the first schools to offer Dutch in the 1970s. In contrast, only one school, a private Lycée Hotelier in Orchies, is listed as intending to establish a Dutch course.

In addition, there is no guarantee that a child who has studied Dutch in his Collège will be able to pursue this study when he progresses to the Lycée. Jacques Fermaut highlights this problem in correspondence of March 10th 1997(106). In his classes in the Collèges Privés Saint-Joseph (Hondschoote) and Saint-Winoc (Bergues) Fermaut has a total of seventy three pupils in troisième and quatrième for the academic year 1996/7. However, there is only one Lycée - the Lycée des Dunes in Dunkerque - within reasonable travelling distance, where pupils can continue with Dutch. As a result, the Dutch option is becoming less popular in the two schools. The situation is only a little better for pupils from Bailleul, where Dutch has been compulsory for all pupils in primary and secondary education since 1990 (cf 6.5.1, below). The first pupils to have been part of this compulsory Dutch programme will

progress to Lycée level in the 1997/8 academic year only to find that the Dutch course in the Lycée Saint-Jacques in Hazebrouck, which many of them will attend, no longer exists. Those who move to the Lycée in Armentières will be able to continue with Dutch classes but are likely to find themselves in mixed ability classes with complete beginners.

Nevertheless, the progress made in the teaching of Dutch is in contrast to the demise of the teaching of Vlaemsch. In 1983, barely a year after receiving official approval in the Savary circular, Vlaemsch classes had been established in six collèges in French Flanders (Sansen, ca.1982, p180). However, by the academic year 1996/7 only one such class was left, at the Collège St-Exupéry in Steenvoorde, which had been one of the original six in 1983. It would appear that the euphoria which had greeted the Savary circular amongst supporters of the regional dialect was not sufficient to maintain classes in the long term, particularly bearing in mind the practical difficulties of finding teachers qualified to teach the subject in the absence of any Vlaemsch courses in higher education. One might also surmise that the comparative success of Dutch may well have contributed to the decline in Vlaemsch courses; it is difficult to imagine many head-teachers sanctioning both standard Dutch and regional Vlaemsch classes in the same establishment. Furthermore, as has been discussed above, standard Dutch has enjoyed a marked ascendancy over Vlaemsch in the Flemish movement of French Flanders since at least the early 1990s. This fact, coupled with the wider educational opportunities offered by the teaching of standard Dutch, would lead most head-teachers favourably disposed to Dutch / Vlaemsch to opt for the teaching of the standard. As Francis Persyn, the French Education Ministry's chief inspector for Dutch states in correspondence in March 1997, "...il paraît évident que le néerlandais présente plus d'intérêt aux

yeux de la population du Nord de la France" (F.Persyn, in correspondence, 16/3/97).

Indeed, even at the Collège St-Exupéry, the Flemish teacher, Mr Nutten, does not foresee a long-term future for the Vlaemsch classes, stating in correspondence in September 1996:

... je pense que nous touchons à la dernière génération qui puisse encore s'intéresser à cette langue car elle est la dernière à avoir quelque intérêt à la pratiquer occasionnellement. (B.Nutten, in correspondence, 12/9/96)

Thus the sum total of regional Vlaemsch taught in the schools of French Flanders is three hours per week, with approximately thirty eleven to thirteen year olds benefiting from these classes. Even here there is no guarantee that the classes will be able to continue from one year to the next. As the Vlaemsch classes do not come within Mr Nutten's normal timetable, he is paid overtime for teaching them. Therefore, at the beginning of each academic year, the school's Headmaster must seek official authorisation from the Rectorat to pay this overtime. Admittedly this permission has been forthcoming for the past fourteen years but nevertheless the continuation of Vlaemsch classes is called into question every year.

Perhaps most important for the future of the teaching of regional Flemish in the school environment is the way the pupils see the dialect and their motivations for learning it. Mr Nutten states:

Ils [his pupils] n'envisagent la langue que comme un moyen de communication dans un cercle très fermé, la famille ou les voisins.

(Nutten, in correspondence, 12/9/96)

Indeed, he states that the most common reason for learning the dialect among his pupils is to be able to communicate with their grandparents and to a lesser degree, with their parents (sometimes the case with parents originally from Belgian Flanders). The desire to learn "une langue "étrangère" supplémentaire" is only a motivation for a "très petite minorité" (Nuttent, in correspondence, 12/9/96). The notion of Vlaemsch / Dutch (Mr Nutten claims both pupils and parents alike confuse the two) as a language of mass communication and professional - by extension social - advancement expressed by Jacques Fermaut clearly plays no part in a pupil's decision to chose the option; perhaps in 6ème/5ème such reasoning is rather unlikely. In this context one must agree with Mr Nutten that the long-term outlook for Vlaemsch teaching in schools - as a modern language at least - is bleak.

### **6.5.1 The Wervicq-Sud and Bailleul Experiments**

If the outlook for Vlaemsch is bleak, that for standard Dutch teaching - despite the reservations expressed above - is considerably brighter and the experiments in Wervicq-Sud and Bailleul, represent two of the most significant initiatives in this field.

In September 1985 a Dutch teaching project was launched at the primary school at Wervicq-Sud, a commune near the Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing conurbation, "In het kader van de culturele- en educatieve betrekkingen tussen Frankrijk, België en Nederland" (Van Leeuwarden, 1996, p197). This

school was chosen "door de ligging en de historische achtergrond van Zuid-Wervik (Wervicq-Sud)" - the commune lays just on the French side of the border with Belgium, a border which separates it from the Belgian town of Wervik<sup>9</sup>. Staff for this initiative were Dutch native speakers, one being provided by the Dutch Ministry for Education and Science, the other by the Vlaamse Vereniging voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Technische Bijstand (VVOB), an organisation linked to the Flemish Education Ministry in Belgium.

The Dutch classes at Wervicq-Sud are compulsory for all pupils from the age of six. Pupils are encouraged to communicate as much as possible in Dutch from the outset - even amongst themselves - and are introduced to a variety of every day situations, such as shopping at the market, via role-play. To reinforce this practical, communicative approach, pupils are regularly taken on trips to netherlandophone Belgium and the Netherlands. Furthermore, exchanges have been organised with schools in Wervik (1987-1990), Etten-Leur (Netherlands, 1990-3) and most recently, Amsterdam (Europaschool, 1993 - present). Clearly there is an attempt to introduce pupils to and include them in the wider netherlandophone community, without wishing to see national frontiers as an obstacle. This ideology is dealt with more directly in CM2, when pupils study European unification. The vision of the role of Dutch in Wervicq-Sud implicit in the composition of the Dutch programme in the town's primary school is somewhat reminiscent of that expressed by Mr Van der Louw of Lille III discussed at 6.4, above. Indeed, it is interesting to note that he and his department have lent their support to the initiative (Van Leeuwarden, 1996, p202). Since 1988 pupils from Wervicq-Sud have been

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<sup>9</sup> Wervicq-Sud is not the only French town to have a Belgian "twin"; the town of Comines, approximately 3km from Wervicq-Sud has its counterpart, Komen, known to Francophones as Comines (Belgique).

able to continue with their Dutch classes at the next stage of their education, at the Collège Philippe-de-Commynes in Comines.

However, the Wervicq-Sud project has experienced some difficulties and has not always met with the whole-hearted support on the part of the French Flemish movement one might have expected. Van Leeuwarden attributes these problems to the differences between the Dutch and French school systems:

Het pedagogisch klimaat verschilde sterk van dat in Nederlandse scholen. Extra zorg voor kinderen met leer- en/of gedragsproblemen kenden men niet of nauwelijks. (Van Leeuwarden, 1996, p198)

Van Leeuwarden also claims, however, that the most serious problems were overcome thanks to the intervention, in 1989, of Dutch, Flemish and French inspectors, after the then Education Minister of the Netherlands, Mrs Gijnaar-Maas, had visited the school. Based on the recommendations made by the inspectors, the programme as described above was developed and the project as a whole integrated more fully into the French system.

F. Lentacker, however, writing in the *Bulletin du CFF du Comité Flamand de France* in 1991 (*Bulletin du CFF*, 1991, No.35, pp6-7) offers a different perspective on the project's problems:

En 1989, les 235 élèves en bilinguisme à Wervicq-Sud avaient dans trois cas sur quatre des parents ouvriers, en partie de nationalité marocaine ou portugaise, sans doute peu motivés pour une matière si éloignée de leurs préoccupations.

Even if Lentacker does not wish to suggest that Dutch classes are suitable only, or principally, for middle class children of Flemish origin, the implicit suggestion would seem to be that the traditionally netherlandophone areas would have offered a better background than Wervicq-Sud for this experiment - a notion most definitely rejected by Van der Louw (Van der Louw, 1991, p351). Once again this statement raises the question of whether standard Dutch should be seen as the regional language or as a foreign language of particular significance to the Nord / Pas-de-Calais.

Interestingly, Lentacker does not raise similar objections about the other compulsory Dutch project in Bailleul, a town with a strong netherlandophone tradition, merely qualifying it as "...plus ambitieux..." ( F.Lentacker, *Bulletin du CFF* 1991, No.35, p7). Bailleul is also a town which has long been at the forefront of the struggle to have Vlaemsch and more particularly, standard Dutch, taught in the French Flanders. Local councillor Camille Taccoen has been at the forefront of this campaign since the 1960s and has been organising and teaching independent standard Dutch classes nearly thirty years. Similarly the Dutch classes at the CES in Bailleul, established in 1972, have run uninterrupted for longer than in any other school in the Nord / Pas-de-Calais. Indeed when the idea of a bilingual French / Dutch teaching experiment was first mooted in 1985, it seemed likely that this experiment would take place in Bailleul. However, after much of the preparation had been completed, it was decided that the project should go ahead in Wervicq-Sud instead.<sup>3</sup>

The key to the success of Dutch in Bailleul has been the support it has received from the town council, in particular in the persons of the Mayor Mr

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<sup>3</sup>The reasons for this are unclear. Van Hemel and Halink (1992) merely state, "Toch ketste dit project op het laatste moment af; daarbij is naar alle waarschijnlijkheid met name de rol van toenmalige inspectie doorslaggevend geweest."

Delobel and councillors Taccoen and Steenkiste. Indeed, since 1987 the town has offered in-service training in Dutch for all its employees, with specialist courses for personnel involved in tourism since 1991 (Van Hemel & Halink, *Belle: hartje van onderwijs Nederlands in Frans-Vlaanderen*, Pays-Bas Français, 1992, p66). After the failure to establish the course in 1985 the town authorities decided to independently work with the Vlaamse Vereniging voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Technische Bijstand in Belgium and the Ministerie van Onderwijs en Wetenschappen in the Netherlands. That such initiatives also met with parental approval was illustrated in 1988 when an extra-curricular Dutch course was founded at the Ecole Primaire Sévigné on Wednesday lunch-times, at the behest of the Association des Parents d'Elèves (Van Hemel & Halink, 1992, p67).

These efforts culminated, in March 1990, in the launch of the bilingual teaching project in all of Bailleul's state nursery and primary school, for pupils of five and six years of age, a total of some 300 pupils. Pupils were taught by native speakers (both Belgian and Dutch) in classes of approximately twelve (Van Hemel and Halink, 1992, p68). Pupils continued with their Dutch classes as they progressed through the school system and at the same time each new intake started the programme. Thus by 1990-1 the number of school children learning Dutch in Bailleul had increased to 400, by 1991-2 to 500 (Van Hemel and Halink, 1992, p69). However, as stated above, the problem of continuity of study in Dutch for these pupils remains unresolved. Clearly the Bailleul project - in common with that in Wervicq-Sud can only truly have an impact if there are suitable progression routes available for pupils at Lycée level and beyond.

In many respects the Dutch teaching project in Bailleul resembles that in Wervicq-Sud, indeed experiences gained in Wervicq-Sud influenced both the

syllabus and the materials used in Bailleul. However, pupils in Bailleul start their Dutch classes one year earlier than their counterparts in Wervicq-Sud but have only three lessons per week (as opposed to four per week in Wervicq-Sud) and each lesson is shorter. Consequently students do not progress quite as quickly.

The authorities in Bailleul see the teaching of Dutch as a vital part of an ongoing plan to develop stronger ties within the framework of the Euroregion (cf.Ch7). It should not be forgotten that the VVOB played a vital role in setting up the project and have continued to support it - indeed Franck Allacker, writing in the 1996 CELCN inventory, claims that it is the principal source of funds for both the Bailleul project and that in Wervicq-Sud (Allacker, 1996, p[17]). Education has been one of the priorities in the links Bailleul has forged with the towns of Waregem, Izegem and Heuvelland in Belgian West Flanders. As early as 1992 Mayor Delobel wanted to recruit teachers from Belgian Flanders in order to initiate a Dutch medium teaching programme in Bailleul's schools.

### **6.5.2 Conclusions**

The progress made - in terms of student numbers - in the teaching of standard Dutch is clearly reflected in table 2 below.

Table 2

YEAR	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	TOTAL
1978	all courses -	incl. adults	370

1991	400	900	1300
1997	1500	950	2450

All statistics are approximate

Statistics from: 1978 - *Bulletin du CFF du Comité Flamand*, Feb. 1978

1991 - *Bulletin du CFF du Comité Flamand*, No.35, 1991

1997 - Correspondence, Francis Persyn, 16/3/97

The significance of the contribution made by the projects in Wervicq - Sud and in Bailleul is readily apparent, most particularly in the figures for primary education, as no primary schools from outside these two towns are currently offering Dutch classes. However, the Inspection Académique du Nord has decided to start standard Dutch classes at Cours Elementaire 1 level (age 7) in approximately twenty other school throughout the Académie (Persyn, in correspondence, 16/3/97).

The table also highlights the problem of continuity of study discussed above: between 1991 and 1997 the number of pupils learning Dutch in primary schools almost quadrupled, whereas the number learning the language in secondary showed a modest increase of around 5.5%. It should also be remembered that the figure given under the *secondary* column is for both CES and Lycées together and that considerably more Dutch is taught in the former than in the latter. However, one must assume that, if the Inspection Académique du Nord is planning a large increase in Dutch teaching at primary level, a similar expansion at secondary level is envisaged, indeed F. Persyn comments, "Cela [ the founding of new CE1 courses] se traduira sans doute par une augmentation des effectifs dans l'enseignement secondaire"(Persyn, in correspondence, 16/3/97).

One may therefore conclude that, within the school system, the outlook for the teaching of standard Dutch in French Flanders is probably more promising than at any time since the introduction of mass education. Nevertheless the significance of this success for the French Flemish movement and for Flemish identity in French Flanders must be questioned. While it is true that - for the most part - the French Flemish movement now accepts standard Dutch as the regional language, as has been discussed above, it is taught as a foreign language in the schools of French Flanders. One may reasonably expect a an active member of the Flemish movement such as Jacques Fermaut to incorporate an awareness of French Flanders' Flemish cultural heritage into his Dutch classes but such an approach is clearly not universal. Francis Persyn assumes that some teachers do endeavour to foster such a cultural awareness "lorsque cela s'avère opportun" (Persyn, in correspondence, 16/3/97) but admits that this depends on individual teachers and their relationship the region's netherlandophone heritage. Indeed, although many Flemish activists in France would be very pleased with Van Leeuwarden's positive assessment of the Wervicq-Sud project, her statement, "Hieruit kan men concluderen dat hoe jonger men met het aanleren van een vreemde taal<sup>4</sup> begint, hoe makkelijker dat gaat" (Van Leeuwarden, 1996, p204), could only cause them dismay.

## 6.6 The "Cours Libres"

In addition to the official, state sponsored standard Dutch and Vlaemsch

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<sup>4</sup> My italics.

classes in French Flanders, there are a large number of independent courses, grouped together under the title of "cours libres". Some of these courses are organised by Flemish cultural associations, some by private individuals - traditionally often priests<sup>10</sup> - and some by training agencies. When organised by Flemish activists they are usually non profit-making; when organised by training agencies, however, the opposite is usually the case. The latter are discussed at 6.4, above. For the most part these are evening classes, organised for adults, although children do sometimes participate; indeed some classes are, as discussed below, aimed specifically at them.

In short they represent a highly disparate collection of courses, whose very nature makes it difficult to obtain accurate information. Nevertheless, they are of significance within the French Flemish movement, being in many ways the direct successors to the individual initiatives - such as Gantois' at the seminary in Annappes in the early 1920s - which for so long represented the only Dutch / Vlaemsch teaching in French Flanders.

After World War Two, these individual initiatives received support from the Belgian Komitee voor Frans-Vlaanderen (KVF) (cf. Ch5.1.2). For example, while Camille Taccon provided much of the impetus for the standard Dutch course which started in Bailleul in January 1967, it was the KVF which provided the financial backing and the teacher (Van Hemel and Halink, 1992, p62). This beginners course is still running thirty years later and was joined by a second level course in 1969 and a third level course in 1973 (Van Hemel and Halink, 1992, p62). By the academic year 1990-1, four level one courses

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<sup>10</sup>cf Chapters 3 and 4

were operating in Bailleul, as well as three level two and one level three. These included one level one course and one level two course aimed specifically at young people (*CELCN inventory*, 1990, p2)<sup>11</sup>. While this success is, in part, undoubtedly due to the drive of one man, Camille Taccoen - who progressed from student to teacher and was still teaching one of the classes in 1990 at the age of 76 - and to the positive attitude of Bailleul's town council toward the teaching of Dutch, it is doubtful whether so much could have been achieved without the support of KFV which, in addition to continued financial support, has helped provide staff and teaching materials.

#### **6.6.1 Le Comité pour l'Enseignement de la Langue et Culture Néerlandaises.**

Although the KFV had long played a vital role in supporting evening classes in standard Dutch and the Flemish dialect of French Flanders, this was not its sole preoccupation (cf. Ch5.1.2) and by the mid 1980s it was felt within the French Flemish movement and the KFV, that a committee needed to be created with the express aim of organising and promoting these classes. Consequently the Comité pour l'Enseignement de la Langue et Culture Néerlandaises (CELCN) was created, meeting for the first time on January 1st 1987. The CELCN's report on this first meeting states that, as far as the teaching of standard Dutch and Flemish dialect was concerned, it intended to

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<sup>11</sup>The CELCN's 1995-6 inventory reveals that there are now only three classes being held in Bailleul, one at each level. There are no longer classes specifically for young people. This reduction may be attributed to the programme of compulsory Dutch teaching in Bailleul's, which was only just beginning in 1990 and which obviates the need for extra curricular classes for the town's young people. Furthermore, one of the CELCN's stated aims was to rationalise the number of Dutch classes offered and it may be that eight classes in a town of Bailleul's size were not viable.

replace the KFV "aussi complètement que possible"<sup>12</sup>. However, a more recent (though again undated) CELCN information sheet states:

Le Comité pour l'Enseignement de la Langue et Culture Néerlandaises (C.E.L.C.N.) est un groupe de travail créé en 1987 par le Comité pour la Flandre française / K.F.V....Le K.F.V. organise et soutient des cours associatifs de néerlandais. Le C.E.L.C.N. coordonne ces cours et met tout en oeuvre pour en assurer la pérennité et le développement, et en tant que la Langue de Culture néerlandaise (incluant le dialecte flamand occidental) n'aura pas trouvé la place qui convient et lui revient dans l'enseignement officiel de Flandre, mais aussi en Artois et dans le Hainaut français.

The CELCN is made up principally of teachers of standard Dutch and / or Vlaemsch, with many prominent figures from the French Flemish movement sitting on its board, including Camille Taccoen as Honorary President, Jacques Fermaut as President, Franck Allacker as Secretary and Dirk Verbeke as the representative of the KFV. The involvement of these men would seem to be a clear indication of the importance attached to the teaching of standard Dutch and Flemish dialect by most French Flemish activists. Indeed one of the CELCN's stated aims is to forge links with Flemish cultural associations and regional publications, "à l'exclusion de tout parti politique". Furthermore, in May 1990 contact was made with the Davidsfonds in Belgium and a five stage plan developed to establish links between students on CELCN courses and netherlandophone Flemings.

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<sup>12</sup>Quotation taken from an undated report on the first meeting, presumably written in early 1987, probably by the CELCN's Secretary, Franck Allacker.

Although, as indicated above, the CELCN does not seek to exclude the teaching of Flemish dialect from its programme, in practice all of the courses it offers are in standard Dutch. As in secondary and higher education the reasons for this are chiefly practical and economic ones; indeed the CELCN has always emphasised the economic importance of standard Dutch to the Nord / Pas-de-Calais region in its publicity material. Furthermore, one must not forget the role played by the KFV in the founding of the CELCN and that, in common with many netherlandophone Belgian cultural associations, the KFV seeks to promote standard Dutch. Similarly, leading figures in the CELCN, such as Jacques Feraut, have long been partisans of the promotion of the standard rather than the dialect in French Flanders (cf. Ch6.5, above). However, five dialect classes are included in the 1995/6 inventory, all of which are listed as "Hors KFV", although the two courses held in Dunkirk are run by Het Reuzekoor (cf. Ch5.5.1) "Avec le soutien du Comité pour la Flandre Française / KFV" (*CELCN Inventory [B]*, 1995 / 6, p [3]).

The committee's work revolves around three principal concerns: co-ordination, publicity and resourcing, of which co-ordination was clearly pre-eminent. To this end one of the CELCN's priorities in 1987 was to rationalise the provision of courses offered. This rationalisation was considered necessary in order to maximise the committee's resources but was intended to be carried out through "concertation" between teachers, rather than being imposed by the CELCN hierarchy (CELCN report, 1987). As a result the number of courses operating under the aegis of the CELCN has remained relatively constant since 1990, when its inventory of courses was first published. The 1990-1 inventory lists a total of forty CELCN classes and that of 1995/6 (the most recent available at the time of writing) thirty five and a further four associated classes. In some areas, such as Bailleul, the number

of classes offered actually fell. However, during the same period, the number of *communes* in which these classes were taught increased from twelve to fourteen (*CELCN inventories*, 1990-1 and 1995-6).

Similarly, the CELCN has endeavoured to divide its courses into four levels. Niveau I is termed "grands débutants" and is intended for those with no prior knowledge of the language. Niveau II, "débutants" is rather confusingly intended for those with "niveau moyen au plus", whereas Niveau III "approfondissement" insists on this "niveau moyen" as a minimum requisite. For the academic year 1995-6 there were no Niveau IV ("conversationnel") classes; in 1990-1 there had only been one, in Coudekerque-Branche, taught by Denise Lemière-Demey, who is currently teaching one of the two level one classes there, plus the level three class. Nevertheless "...niveau IV...demeure envisageable" (*CELCN inventory*, 1995-6). However, the CELCN admits that, "La notion de niveau est relative et peut varier beaucoup d'un cours à l'autre" (*CELCN inventory*, 1995-6). Nevertheless an effort towards standardisation has been made and has gone hand in hand with an attempt to insure a degree of quality control. It is envisaged that, after having followed the CELCN courses for two to three years, students will be in a position to take the "Certificaat Nederlands als Vreemde Taal". Students are able to sit the examination at the CELCN's own examination centre in Hazebrouck.

The CELCN's inventory, constitutes in itself a major contribution to the effort of co-ordination. Compiled annually in September<sup>4</sup>, the inventory comes in two parts, one listing all the "official" standard Dutch and Vlamesch classes taught throughout the "Pays-Bas Français"<sup>5</sup> and the other listing all the

<sup>4</sup> The 1996/7 inventory, however, was still in production on 23/6/97, according to Franck Allacker's correspondence of that date.

<sup>5</sup> French Flanders, plus Artois and French Hainaut

CELCN's classes, as well as a handful of others, notably the Vlaemsch classes run by Het Reuzekoor. The inventory is distributed to the Flemish cultural associations with which the CELCN has sought to forge links and is also available on request from the CELCN's headquarters at the Centre Het Blauwershof in Godewaersvelde. It is not only an important consultation document for those interested in netherlandophone culture in French Flanders but also serves as a prospectus for the CELCN courses. In the "cours libres" section, details are given of the day, time and location of courses, as well as the tutor's name, the level of the course and a contact telephone number. Explanations are also given about class levels and enrolment costs; students pay a 100Fr registration fee but then receive all material used in class at no extra cost and any student participating in the CELCN's essay competition at the end of the academic year, may join an excursion to Belgian Flanders, again at no additional cost. The tutors are all unpaid volunteers.

The inventory is not, however, the only form of publicity used by the CELCN. In his role as the CELCN's Secretary, Franck Allacker has produced many information sheets detailing the committee's work, as well as publicity sheets highlighting the importance of the Dutch language to the Nord / Pas-de-Calais and the annual inventory, discussed above. These publications are distributed in the same way as the inventory itself. Individual classes are usually publicised locally in community centres, libraries, etc by tutors themselves, although the CELCN's address is also often given.

Clearly if Franck Allacker's wish to see French Flemings study standard Dutch on a large scale (Allacker, in correspondence, 23/6/97) is to be realised, advertising is of the utmost importance. However, while distributing publicity material to Flemish cultural organisations does, admittedly, mean that the

CELCN is reaching groups of people favourably predisposed towards its classes, the members of such groups represent only a very small proportion of the population of French Flanders. Furthermore, one may assume that the proportion of netherlandophones in these associations is higher than in French Flanders as a whole. Given the obvious limitations of the "poster in the library" form of marketing on which many tutors rely, the CELCN's publicity is clearly not reaching the majority of French Flemings.

The CELCN also seeks to support tutors with provision of teaching resources, many of which come from Belgium and the KFV in particular. All CELCN tutors are issued with a list of resources available; other Dutch teachers receive the list on request (CELCN report, 1987). Furthermore, the CELCN has facilitated contact between tutors and thus a far greater exchange of ideas and materials than was previously possible. While the CELCN's resources are primarily for the use of its own tutors, the committee also offers support to schools where standard Dutch or Vlaemsch are taught, although they did state in the 1987 report that it was felt that this was really the task of the Rectorat de Lille (CELCN report, 1987).

### **6.6.2 Students of "cours libres" and their motivations**

According to the KFV approximately 600 students were enrolled on CELCN classes during the academic year 1995/6 (*CELCN inventory [B]*, 1995/6, p[6]). This figure must be close to the total number of students learning Dutch via the "cours libres", since the CELCN is by far the biggest provider of such courses in French Flanders. The vast majority of these students were adults,

although children do sometimes enrol as well. Nestor Depoers<sup>13</sup>, one of the CELCN teachers in Hazebrouck, states that the youngest student enrolled in his courses in the 1995/6 academic year was just ten years old but adds, "...c'est vraiment exceptionnel" (Depoers, in correspondence, 27/11/95). The CELCN courses designed specifically for children listed in the 1991 inventory no longer exist, presumably as the growth in Dutch teaching in schools has made them redundant. In general, however, Depoers sees no particular trend in the ages of his students. He does add, however, that some students have been attending his classes for up to ten years, progressing to such an extent that they can, in turn, teach the level one class. (Depoers, in correspondence, 27/11/95).

Similarly, based on the example of Nestor Depoers' courses, the students come from varied - although more often middle class - backgrounds. For 1995/6 he lists his students as "...docteurs, instituteurs, professeurs (de langue), des employés, des collégiens ou lycéens", as well as "personnes agées". However, it is perhaps fair to say that these categories are those who are (with the exception of secondary school pupils), in general, more likely to take part in adult education courses perceived as "academic". The presence of secondary school pupils on CELCN courses in Hazebrouck is undoubtedly due to the absence of either Dutch or Vlaemsch courses in the town's secondary schools.

Given the differing ages and backgrounds of the students enrolled on the Hazebrouck courses, it is not surprising that their motives for studying the language are similarly very varied. What van Hemel and Halink term

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<sup>13</sup> L'Abbé Nestor Depoers, founder and former Headmaster of the Institut Agricole in Hazebrouck continues the tradition of Church involvement in the teaching of Dutch in French Flanders. He has been teaching standard Dutch at (CELCN) levels 1, 2 and 3 in Hazebrouck for over twenty years and has now incorporated his classes into the framework of the CELCN.

"sentimenteel - culturele' redenen," (Van Hemel and Halink, 1992, p63) are common to both the Bailleul and Hazebrouck courses - and probably many others besides. Van Hemel and Halink use this term principally to describe those students with family members who speak Vlaemsch - or who speak it themselves - but want to be able to speak the "algemeen beschaaafde' versie" (Van Hemel and Halink, 1992, p63). However, it might equally be used to describe Flemish activists and those with an interest in the netherlandophone heritage of French Flanders in general; Depoers has students with an interest in local history who need at least a reading knowledge of Dutch (or Vlaemsch) in order to be able to consult local archives (Depoers, correspondence, 27/11/95).

Students are also motivated by economic / professional considerations. Indeed, much of the CELCN's efforts to promote its courses stresses the economic strength of the Netherlands and netherlandophone Belgium and their importance for the regional economy of the Nord / Pas-de-Calais (cf. *CELCN inventory* [A] 1995/6, pp[19-20]). For this reason some of Depoers' students see a knowledge of Dutch as enhancing employment prospects, both in France and across the border in Belgian Flanders. This sentiment is echoed by van Hemel and Halink when discussing the Bailleul courses:

Tenslotte zijn er mensen die meer economisch gemotiveerd zijn: zij hebben zakenrelaties in West-Vlaanderen of Nederland, werken zelf in West-Vlaanderen, of hopen gewapend met de kennis van het Nederlands hun kans te vergroten een arbeidsplaats te vinden aan de andere kant van de grens. (Van Hemel and Halink, 1992, p64).

Indeed the close proximity of Belgian Flanders - "le Texas de l'Europe", in the words of the CELCN (*CELCN inventory* [A], 1995/6, p[20]) is in itself a motive

for learning Dutch; Hazebrouck is only 20km from the border, Bailleul merely 4km. As a result, not only do 25,000 French people go to work every day in Belgian Flanders<sup>14</sup> but many more go there to shop. Indeed, contact between the border communities is so great that many French Flemings have friends, acquaintances, even relatives on the other side of the border.

### 6.6.3 Conclusions

Thanks largely to the CELCN the *cours libres* are far better organised than ever before and the teaching of a uniformly higher standard than was often previously the case. However, such courses no longer have the importance they did before the Second World War when they represented the sole opportunity that French Flemings had to study either Dutch or Vlaemsch. Clearly the 600 - 700 students learning Dutch and Vlaemsch in the various *cours libres* is a very small fraction of the population and is dwarfed by the 2,450 pupils learning Dutch at school. Indeed the proliferation of - in particular - Dutch courses in schools across French Flanders since the late 1970s has progressively reduced the importance of the *cours libres*.

However, this is not to suggest that these independent classes have now become redundant. They continue to provide an opportunity for those unable to study Dutch at school - either because they went to school before Dutch found favour with the Ministère de l'Education National or as is the case in Hazebrouck, because Dutch classes are offered in local schools - to learn the language. Furthermore, the Vlaemsch classes organised under the auspices of Het Reuzekoor maintain a provision - albeit limited - of dialect teaching,

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<sup>14</sup>Statistic quoted in CELCN *inventory* 1995/6, p[20], with French customs cited as the source.

when dialect classes are almost entirely absent from the schools of French Flanders.

Clearly it is the schools which hold the key to the widespread teaching of Dutch in French Flanders. However, as discussed at 6.5 above, the link between the Dutch language and the netherlandophone heritage of French Flanders is not necessarily emphasised in schools. The *cours libres*, organised for the most part by the CELCN, have close links with the Flemish Movement, both in Belgium, in the form of the Komitee voor Frans-Vlaanderen (Kfv) and in France, in particular with Menschen Lyk Wyder (cf. Ch5.4). Even if students do not join CELCN courses out of any desire to maintain netherlandophone culture and identity in French Flanders, they cannot fail to be made aware of these concerns and via the joint activities organised with the Kfv are drawn into the wider netherlandophone world. Similarly those students learning Dutch purely to seek employment in Belgian Flanders or to be able to go shopping across the border more easily are actually unwittingly helping the two communities together and are doing so through the medium of the Dutch language. Indeed, in many ways students joining CELCN courses who were not previously involved in the French Flemish movement are potentially of more interest to it as they represent possible new converts. Thus, while small in number, those learning Dutch at one of the *cours libres* do have a role to play in future development of the language in French Flanders; how significant that role will turn out to be would, however, seem dependent on an increase in their numbers.

## 6.7 Home study courses

In addition to the many standard Dutch and Vlaemsch classes, there are also home study courses available for both. The vast majority of these are, not surprisingly, for standard Dutch and are not specific to French Flanders. Some come from Belgium and the Netherlands; those produced in France are usually part of a self tuition series, such as 40 Leçons or Assimil.

One notable initiative which is specific to French Flanders is the radio course broadcast by Radio Uylenspiegel (cf Ch5.6) and even in this instance the course is based on *Le Néerlandais pour Tous en 40 Leçons* by Frans van Passel, published by the Paris based company Presse Pocket. Nevertheless, Radio Uylenspiegel's place within the French Flemish movement ensures that the regional dimension is maintained. One hour long programme is broadcast every Saturday evening and is then repeated on Wednesdays and the entire course is regularly broadcast. Clearly it is difficult to asses how many people are learning or have learnt standard Dutch in this way but the potential number is great, although the majority of Radio Uylenspiegel's listeners are those who already have an interest in the netherlandophone heritage of French Flanders; indeed many may of those who listen to these broadcasts may already be learning standard Dutch elsewhere who wish to supplement their classes.

However, while nationally and internationally produced standard Dutch home study courses abound, there is a considerable dearth of material for those wishing to learn Vlaemsch. Indeed Francis Persyn states, "...il n'existe aucun matériel didactique digne de ce nom qui puisse donner une assise à un

enseignement du dialecte" (F. Persyn, in correspondence, 16/3/97).<sup>15</sup>

However, two successful home study courses in Vlaemsch - aimed principally at adults - do exist and given that Mr Persyn is only responsible for the inspection of standard Dutch in schools, it is unlikely he intended his comments to be applied to these publications; indeed, in the course of his work, he would have no occasion to encounter them. The two titles - *Vlaemsch Leeren* and *Cours de Flamand* - differ considerably in their approach and one may argue, in their aims.

*Vlaemsch Leeren* was written by Jean - Paul Sepieter at the age of 25 in 1976, at a time when Flemish was still excluded from the schools of French Flanders and standard Dutch was struggling to establish itself. Sepieter was already a committed Flemish activist and contributed to *Tyl*, the magazine of the Cercle Michel de Swaen (cf Ch5.3). Initially *Vlaemsch Leeren* was published weekly in *Journal des Flandres* in 1977, a local newspaper with a circulation of 6,500 to 7,000 readers (Sepieter, *Vlaemsch Leeren*, Editions du Westhoek, 1980, pp 14 and back cover). In 1980 these weekly lessons were collated and published as a paperback by Westhoek Editions of Dunkirk (cf 5.6.1), initially as a numbered first edition of fifty copies, which was immediately followed by the second edition.

The book is divided into twenty one units, covering 111 pages, with a thirteen page irregular verb list and ten pages of vocabulary. It is accompanied by three ninety minute cassettes recorded by, "Des locuteurs flamandophones du Westhoek qui ont l'avantage d'une pratique quotidienne et constante du

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<sup>15</sup>Three books - *Vlaamsch voor de Kruts*, *Cours de flamand en 6ème* and *Lexique flamand / français - français / flamand* - were published by Tegaere Toegaen in 1983 and 1984 for use in the classroom, to coincide with the establishment of Vlaemsch classes in six schools in French Flanders, after the publication of the Savary Circular in 1982 (cf 6.5). Whether Francis Persyn's comments are intended to include these books is unclear; as Tegaere Toegaen is no longer active, the publications are out of print and may quite simply be impossible to find.

flamand" (Sepieter, 1980, p150). The book is intended to teach the basics of the French Flemish dialect, starting with greetings and progressing (grammatically) as far as the perfect and imperfect tenses. Each unit deals with a practical area of "typical" language use in French Flanders - for example discussing the weather, health or Flemish cooking - and contains a series of sentences in Vlaemsch with French translation, an explanation of a point of grammar and an illustrated section entitled "Aspects du Westhoek".

Indeed, it is these "Aspects du Westhoek" sections which are the most interesting, proving that, in the words of *L'Echo de la Lys* (a local newspaper): "Vlaemsch leeren n'est pas seulement une méthode captivante d'études linguistiques mais aussi un acte de foi pour le régionalisme de Flandre française" (Thursday, May 4th, 1978, reproduced on the back cover of the 1980 edition of *Vlaemsch Leeren*). Under this heading Sepieter discusses, for example, the origins of Flemish in France and the reasons for its decline - not hesitating to attack the "colonisation linguistique" (Sepieter, 1980, p26) of which he considers France guilty, as a principal reason for this - local history and aspects of French Flemish culture, from poetry to popular culture, in the form of drinking songs, humour and traditional cooking and in so doing reveals his own, particular regionalist philosophy<sup>16</sup>.

First and foremost *Vlaemsch Leeren* is intended to persuade French Flemings to learn their language, following the final unit with the entreaty, "En nu klap, schryft en leest nuus Vlaemsch!" (Sepieter, 1980, p125). Furthermore, he is unequivocal in his belief that the language they should learn should be the dialect form. In his *Charte de la Langue flamande* (Sepieter, 1980, pp68-9), he describes his vision of a trilingual education system for the schools of French Flanders. He, like many French Flemish

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<sup>16</sup> This philosophy is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

activists both before and since, sees the study of Vlaemsch as facilitating the later study of standard Dutch and therefore advocates that Vlaemsch be taught to all children in French Flanders, from the time they start school and standard Dutch once they start secondary school.

However, far from seeing Vlaemsch as a mere tool in the teaching of standard Dutch, Sepieter highlights its role as the "langue populaire" of French Flanders, intimately linked to the region's "culture populaire" (Sepieter, 1980, p69) and therefore one of the defining traits of the regional identity. Indeed, the notion of the uniqueness of each region's identity and the necessity of maintaining this uniqueness is evident throughout *Vlaemsch Leeren*. He takes care to link the struggle for Vlaemsch to that for other minority languages in France, stating:

Notre démarche gagnera beaucoup à s'enrichir de l'expérience éprouvée d'autres langues minoritaires...Les langues minoritaires de l'Hexagone forment ensemble une majorité d'intérêts linguistiques!  
(Sepieter, 1980, p79)

and also including a list of names and addresses of groups campaigning on behalf of Alsatian, Picard, Basque, Corsican, Breton and Occitan.

In his introduction to *Vlaemsch Leeren* it is not surprising that Eric Vanneufville considers that, despite being of undoubted interest to the linguist, the historian and the geographer, it is the philosopher who will appreciate Sepieter's work the most. One can fully understand why; the entire book is infused with the author's particular regionalist philosophy. According to this philosophy the French Fleming, his language and his environment are all naturally linked to their environment. This environment is

under threat from national and international capitalism which is best served by a uniformly anonymous, replaceable - and inherently alienated - workforce. Sepieter feels that this process should be combated by maintaining regional - in this instance Flemish - culture. Regional Flemish must therefore be maintained as a vital part of this culture but remains only one element in the struggle against the ravages of capitalism.

Thus, despite being ostensibly a self-study manual for those wishing to learn Vlaemsch, *Vlaemsch Leeren* is far more a vehicle for the expression of its author's regionalist philosophy, although it does - in theory at least - fulfil a vital role within this philosophy. Comparison with Jean-Louis Marteel's *Cours de Flamand* serves to emphasise this point still further.

Marteel, "...fils de marin-pêcheur..." (Marteel, 1992, inside cover) from Bray Dunes, is a native speaker of Vlaemsch and a member of the Flemish cultural group Het Reuzekoor. He has taught the organisation's Vlaemsch classes in Dunkirk since 1980 and is also responsible for the standard Dutch course at the Université du Littoral in Dunkirk.

Published in 1992 by Miroirs Editions and Het Reuzekoor, *Cours de Flamand - Het Vlaams dan men Oudders klappen*, at 444 pages, is more than twice as long as *Vlaemsch Leeren*. It is divided into thirty units, each of which contains grammatical explanations, vocabulary and a variety of exercises, including ones on grammar, vocabulary and translation; in contrast *Vlaemsch Leeren* contains no exercises of any description. From unit three simple dialogues, followed by comprehension questions, are introduced, whereas in *Vlaemsch Leeren*, there are no dialogues, merely statements and questions on a common theme. Although a French translation of these sentences is provided there is little (if any) attempt to test comprehension or explain the

way in which the sentences have been constructed. There is also a reference section - rather more substantial than that in *Vlaemsch Leeren* - including sixteen pages of vocabulary and a verb list. The list in *Cours de Flamand* also indicates local variation in verb forms. *Cours de Flamand* is, in the words of the Comité Flamand's book review (*Bulletin du CFF* No.38, January 1993), "...une méthode...scientifique...systématique." Marteel strives for consistency in spelling and also includes a careful explanation of pronunciation with the aid of phonetics; pronunciation is explained by comparison to French orthography in *Vlaemsch Leeren*. In addition *Cours de Flamand* contains an appendix written by E. Duvoskeldt, one of the members of the Dutch department at the University of Lille III, discussing the relationship between standard Dutch and Vlaemsch as well as highlighting the differences in pronunciation between the two.

Thus Marteel's work may be seen as an important practical contribution to the struggle to maintain regional Flemish and is, perhaps as a result of its author's professional background, of greater use to the student whose goal is to be able to communicate in the dialect. It does not, however, have the philosophical dimension apparent in *Vlaemsch Leeren*. This is not to suggest that *Cours de Flamand* is purely an academic / pedagogical exercise. The illustrations, both photographs and reproductions of paintings by local artists, principally of rural scenes from French Flanders, betray a romantic vision of the region echoing Sepieter's depiction of the rustic French Fleming and his harmony with his environment and the implicit belief in the superiority of the uncomplicated rural lifestyle of the past. However, it is interesting to note that, whereas Sepieter is hostile to Paris-centred French culture, the preface to *Cours de Flamand* claims that this book is "...l'oeuvre de coeur d'un Flamand de France d'aujourd'hui, enraciné tant dans sa culture française que dans sa culture flamande." Furthermore, in the acknowledgements, Marteel

thanks the region Nord / Pas-de-Calais for using their influence with Miroirs Editions to facilitate the books publication. However, this is not to suggest that *Cours de Flamand* attains the goals its author had set for it while *Vlaemsch Leeren* fails, rather their goals were different from the outset: Sepieter's book, while seeking to actively contribute to the teaching of Vlaemsch, uses the text book format as a pretext to discuss broader regional issues, whereas Marteel's work is intended to be no more and no more than a systematic, scholarly method - albeit one produced by a Flemish activist - of acquiring a practical knowledge of the dialect.

## 6.8 Conclusions

It is clear that standard Dutch teaching in French Flanders is in a far stronger position than it was twenty years ago. At that time the standard Dutch classes which were being offered, were, for the most part, the result of isolated, individual initiatives and involved probably no more than 600 students<sup>17</sup>: today that figure is over 3000.<sup>18</sup> As stated at 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7, above there may well be some inaccuracies in these figures and the global estimations provided by the Comité Flamand de France and the CELCN do not correspond to precisely the same geographical area. Nevertheless a substantial growth in student numbers is apparent. Potentially even more significant than these figures are the breakthroughs made by standard Dutch

<sup>17</sup> Figure base on the CFF estimate of 370 students learning the language in schools and *cours libres*, published in their *Bulletin* of February 1978, plus the approximately 200 students at the University of Lille and the knowledge that a small number were also studying standard Dutch at the Catholic University of Lille.

<sup>18</sup> Figure based on F. Persyn's estimate of 1500 primary school pupils and 950 secondary school pupils learning standard Dutch (Correspondence, 16th March, 1997), the CELCN estimate of 600 students in its classes (*CELCN inventory [B]*, 1995-6), Van de Louw's figure of 150 - 160 students studying standard Dutch at various levels at the University of Lille (in conversation, April 1996) and L. Ravier's figure of thirteen students at the Catholic University of Lille for the academic year 1994 - 5 (Ravier, *Universiteit van Rijssel*, 1997, p234). No figures are available for the Université du Littoral.

in the state school system, notably at Wervicq - Sud and Bailleul. Furthermore there is now a clear structure to standard Dutch teaching in French Flanders with progression routes available from primary school to higher education, although such continuity is, admittedly, not uniform across the region.

However, the relative success of standard Dutch has undoubtedly come at the expense of the teaching of Vlaemsch, which after flourishing briefly in the early 1980s is reduced to a tenuous foothold in one school in Steenvoorde - where even the teacher of Vlaemsch sees no real future for either the classes or the language / dialect - and a handful of independent evening classes involving probably no more than 100 students<sup>19</sup>. Indeed it may well prove to be the decision of the French Flemish movement and that of the French Ministry for Education to promote the teaching of the standard which finally condemns the teaching of the dialect to death.

Although, in comparison to Vlaemsch teaching, the position of standard Dutch is more promising, its success is nevertheless relative. While it is true that the number of students learning standard Dutch has increased five fold in under twenty years, a total of 3000 students for the whole of French Flanders, a region with 1.5 million inhabitants (*CELCN Inventory* [B], 1994/5, pl), still only represents 0.2% of the population. Even if this growth rate were to be maintained, the number of students of standard Dutch would still only reach 5% of the population in forty years time. Furthermore, learning standard Dutch does not guarantee achieving a high degree of proficiency in the language and such proficiency is surely a prerequisite if standard Dutch is to

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<sup>19</sup> Figure based on B. Nutten's estimate of 30 pupils at the Collège St Exupéry, Steenvoorde (Correspondance, 12th September 1996) and the average number of students per *cour libre* (approximately fourteen) multiplied by the number of dialect classes (five), giving a total of seventy students. No specific student numbers are available for the dialect classes.

assume the title of regional language in French Flanders to any significant extent. Indeed, in the words of Frank Allacker, "L'essentiel reste à faire: convaincre les Flamands de France d'étudier massivement le néerlandais" (Allacker, in correspondence 23rd June, 1997).

However, if in promoting the teaching of standard Dutch, the aim of the CELCN - and the Flemish movement of French Flanders as a whole - is to "save" the regional language, or at least its standard form, there is more to do than merely convincing a significant proportion of the French Flemings to learn standard Dutch. First and foremost French Flemings must be convinced that standard Dutch *is* the regional language. To achieve this a concerted effort would be required on the part of standard Dutch teachers, regardless of their personal opinion of the Flemish movement in France. Pupils and students would need to be made aware of the netherlandophone heritage of French Flanders; a concrete way of doing this could be, for instance, to study texts and / or inscriptions from French Flanders, written in Vlaemsch - perhaps the only future the study of Vlaemsch itself has. Furthermore a move away from teaching of standard Dutch in favour of teaching *in* standard Dutch, thus promoting the language as a means of every day communication and as one suitable for an educational environment, a matter of some considerable importance given the low educational prestige with which Vlaemsch was stigmatised.

Such concerns are of particular significance in state schools. Teachers of the *cours libres* frequently come from within the French Flemish movement and teach standard Dutch precisely in order to promote the language and French Flemish culture. Furthermore, proportionally more of their students are likely to be aware of this culture before starting a course than would be the case with pupils in schools; indeed this awareness is, in some instances, the

original motivation for *cours libres* students learning the language. In schools, however, the words of Van Hemel and Halink at 6.5, above illustrate how standard Dutch is promoted not as regional language but as a particularly useful *foreign* language. Failure to place the study of standard Dutch in the wider context of regional netherlandophone culture would result - at best - in pupils having no greater affinity for the language than, for example, English.

Even if one is to assume firstly that standard Dutch will be taught on a far greater scale than at present and secondly that it does come to be seen as the regional language of French Flanders, it is still unlikely that teaching the regional language alone will halt its decline. For this to happen the teaching and learning of standard Dutch must be a response to economic as well as cultural necessity. In this context the economic growth of French Flanders' netherlandophone neighbours, its economic links to these neighbours and future developments within the European Union (such as the euroregion Nord / Pas-de-Calais - Belgian Flanders - Zeeland - Kent) are likely to prove at least as significant to the future of netherlandophone language and culture in French Flanders as the large scale teaching of standard Dutch; indeed they could prove the catalyst for it.

## Chapter 7 Conclusions

As discussed in Chapter 2, it is very difficult to estimate the number of speakers of a minority language in France, partly due to the difficulty of defining such a speaker and partly to the lack of official census data relating to their use. For these and other reasons (cf. Ch2) the figure of 70,000 – 100,000 Vlaemsch speakers in French Flanders, in addition to its obvious lack of precision, is highly questionable. Given that this generally accepted figure is based on a survey carried out by the University of Lille in 1970<sup>1</sup> and in light of personal experience in the course of this research, one must favour – at best – the lower figure, although as Walter states, "Il est toutefois difficile de hasarder un chiffre, même approximatif." (Walter, H., *Le français dans tous les sens*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1988, p141.) Similar reservations also apply to France's other minority languages, to varying degrees. Nevertheless, based on existing data, table 6(a) clearly shows the vulnerability of the position of Vlaemsch.

**Figure 6 (a)**

Language	No. of Speakers	Date of Estimate
Occitan	2,000,000 <sup>2</sup>	1971
Alsatian	1,066,078 <sup>3</sup>	1954
Breton	350,000 <sup>4</sup>	1988

<sup>1</sup> All minority languages in France suffer from a preponderance of older speakers. Consequently the number of Vlaemsch speakers is likely to have dropped as these older speakers have died and not been replaced.

<sup>2</sup> Lafont, R., *Cles pour l'Occitanie*, Seghers, Paris, 1971, quoted in Walter, H., 1988, p147 "usagers à temps plein". Sidney S. Culbert gives a figure of 4,000,000 in 1997. (Quoted in Frémy, D.&M.(eds),1998, p114.

<sup>3</sup> I.N.S.E.E., 1954, quoted in Héraud 1966, p206. J.A. Hawkins estimates somewhat higher, 1,500,000 in 1988 (*Ethnologue*, March 1999)

Francique	300,000 <sup>5</sup>	1998
Corsican	281,000 <sup>6</sup>	1993
Catalan	200,000 <sup>7</sup>	1966
Basque	80,000 <sup>8</sup>	1991
Vlaemsch	80-100,000 <sup>9</sup>	1971

However, according to White's categorisation of minority language situations, Vlaemsch in French Flanders is a type seven minority, a close knit minority group, contiguous to a majority group in another country, in this case in Belgian Flanders.(White, P., *Geographical Aspects of Minority Language Situations in Italy, in Linguistic Minorities, Societies and Territories, Multilingual Matters*, Clevedon, 1991, p49) This type is considered to be the one with the best chance of survival. Interestingly, White notes that, "political unrest aimed at revising the border" (ibid., pp49/50) is common in such situations, recalling the pan-Netherlandic (cf.Ch4) aspirations of some French Flemings and the PFF's (cf. Ch.4.7.1) brand of federalism, although their activities were perhaps not substantial enough to be termed unrest.

However, French Flanders may only be placed in this category if one is to consider Vlaemsch and standard Dutch essentially the same language. However, although the Flemish movement of French Flanders has largely opted to promote standard Dutch, the majority of netherlandophones in that

<sup>4</sup> Walter, H., 1988, p138. H.L.Humphrey estimates 686,000, in Williams, C., 1991. ICDBL (1989) gives a figure of "500,000 speakers for whom it is the daily language in France (*Ethnologue*, March 1999)

<sup>5</sup> Gau un Griis, in conversation.

<sup>6</sup> Johnstone in *Ethnologue*, March 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Héraud, 1966, p203. *Ethnologue* estimates 260,000 (undated figure, given in March 1999)

<sup>8</sup> Trask, L. (University of Sussex), quoted in *Ethnologue*, March 1999, Walter, H., 1988, p137. However, Walter later puts the figure at 130,000 (Walter, H., 1994, p272).

<sup>9</sup> Sepieter, 1980, p14, referring to an earlier University of Lille survey. Stephens gives a figure of 90,000 (Stephens, M., 1976, quoted in *Ethnologue*, March 1999). Walter, however,

region speak Vlaemsch. In this respect it might be more useful to consider Vlaemsch as being a type three minority group, that is a minority group which is contiguous to another minority group of speakers in another country. The other minority group in this reformulation would be speakers of West Vlaams in Belgian Flanders. Still White considers such a situation a potentially strong one for the minority language.

While there are some problems applying White's model to French Flanders – the nearest description would be of a type three minority aspiring to become a type seven – it is useful in identifying which of France's other linguistic minorities might be meaningfully compared to the French Flemings. Thus, setting aside, for the moment, considerations of interdialect differences, France's other type three minority languages are Alsatian, Francique, Basque and Catalan. This categorisation of Catalan and Basque is relatively uncontentious, in fact rather less so than that of Vlaemsch. However, one might wish to argue that Alsatian and Francique are examples of type seven minorities, Hochdeutsch being the contiguous majority language. In contrast to the French Flemish movement's attitude towards standard Dutch, the regional movements of both Alsace and Lorraine reject this assertion. The French government seemingly acknowledged Alsatian's status as a language in its own right when, in 1988, authorisation was given for it to be taught in the region's schools. The campaign for such classes to be created for Francique lies at the heart of the regionalist movement in Lorraine (cf. pp.330-333, below).

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claims, "il est toutefois difficile de hasarder un chiffre, même approximatif, aucune enquête ne

The difference in size between the minorities of Alsace and French Flanders - even taking into account that the figures for the former predate those for the latter by some 16 years – is too great for any real comparison to be made. Of the remaining type three languages, valid cases can be made for comparison with each. The Basque minority is closest in terms of size, although there are still probably twice as many Basque speakers as there are netherlandophone French Flemings. The struggle of the Basque and Catalan movements for linguistic and political freedom in Spain recalls that of the Flemish Movement in Belgium. This struggle provides a precedent and model for their counterparts in France. Similarly the economic strength of Catalonia and the Basque country in Spain as well as that of Belgian Flanders can be translated into employment possibilities for those inhabitants of the French sister region with sufficient knowledge of the regional language in either country. As in all three cases, the French region is economically weaker than its French or Belgian counterpart, this represents a practical incentive for improving one's knowledge of the given language. Furthermore, as North and South Catalonia, like French and Belgian Flanders, are linked in a Euroregion, such economic ties should be strengthened and increased with potential repercussions for regional language use on the French side of the border.

Interestingly, Dawn Marley's study of language use in Perpignan, *Parler Catalan à Perpignan* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 1995) reveals, however, that the prestige which Southern Catalonia's economic wealth bestows on Catalan in

Spain is not – in the minds of French Catalanophones - necessarily passed on to the regional language in Northern Catalonia. She notes:

Apparemment les gens commencent à être conscients de la réussite du catalan en Catalogne du Sud et se rendent compte que le catalan peut être une langue vibrante, bien adaptée à la vie moderne...Ce qui d'ailleurs ne les encourage pas forcément à renverser la substitution mais peut même avoir l'effet contraire. (Marley, D., 1995, p101)

The attitudes she finds among inhabitants of Northern Catalonia towards the Catalan of Southern Catalonia recall those of some French Flemings towards standard Dutch:

Les catalanophones du Rousillon qui ont la possibilité maintenant de voir et d'écouter les émissions en catalan de Barcelone trouvent qu'ils ne comprennent pas ce catalan-là, et sont donc convaincus que ce qu'ils parlent n'est pas le vrai catalan, ce qui aggrave leur sentiment que leur langue est inférieure. (Marley, D., 1995, p101)

Such sentiments show how deeply ingrained the sense of shame of regional languages can be in France. Furthermore, if echoed in French Flanders<sup>10</sup>, they call the Flemish movement's policy of promoting standard Dutch in question.

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<sup>10</sup> In view of the absence of Vlaamsch / standard Dutch television and radio programmes in France, it is not uncommon for French Flemings to watch or listen to broadcasts from Belgium.

However, while there are undoubtedly similarities between the situation in French Flanders and that in the French Basque country and Northern Catalonia, neither group had to bear the stigma of Germanophobe propaganda in post World War Two France. The degree of hostility towards the Germanic languages in France and the assumption of collaboration so widespread were enormously damaging to the regional movements of French Flanders, Moselle Francique and Alsace. Having shared this traumatic experience and in light of the other similarities of situation discussed above, it is perhaps with the Francique-speaking minority of Lorraine that the Flemings of France might best be compared.

In terms of numbers of speakers, Francique would appear to be in a stronger position than Vlaemsch. However, these figures can be deceptive as even one of the leading figures in the Francique movement, Hervé Atamaniuk admits, "Le francique et une des huit langues régionales de France, une des plus courantes, une des plus menacées." (Atamaniuk, in *Kumpel*, Winter 1998 edition, p[7]) The repression suffered by the France's Germanic regional languages in the period after World War Two has undoubtedly been a crucial factor in the decline of Francique. All of France's regional languages, as a result of deliberate government policy, have suffered from low cultural prestige. Germanic languages suffered doubly as they were also stigmatised as the languages of collaboration. The strength of the autonomist movement

in Lorraine in the 1920s, like that of the VVF in French Flanders<sup>11</sup>, merely served to turn suspicion into conviction. Germanophone Lorraine underwent what Gérard Boulanger terms, “une francisation forcenée” (Boulanger, G., 1997, p49) akin to that which France’s other regional languages (with the exception of Alsatian) had experienced in the latter part of the nineteenth century and which Francique, at that time part of the German Reich, had been spared<sup>12</sup>. It might reasonably be assumed that, had Lorraine experienced both periods of *Francisation* – as French Flanders did – the number of Francique speakers would be considerably lower today. That this period of repression came at a time of modernisation and urbanisation, two factors which have long worked against France’s regional languages (cf. Ch2 and Weber, 1976), contributed to its effectiveness.

In the early 1970s central government attitudes started to relax and German classes were once again authorised in the region’s schools. However, only the teaching of Hochdeutsch as a foreign language was permitted, just as only standard Dutch could be taught in French Flanders, Francique, like Vlaemsch having been omitted from the loi Deixonne. Although Alsatian was added to the list of languages covered by that law in 1988, with regard to Francique, “...la position de l’administration scolaire n’a pas changé: la langue régionale de Moselle-est est l’allemand.” (Boulanger, G., 1997, p50)

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<sup>11</sup> There were, in fact, links between the two movements. Unlike the VVF, however, the Heimatbund, the principal autonomist association in Germanophone Lorraine, had considerable support from the regional Communist Party. (Boulanger, G., *Petite histoire de la langue francique*, Gau un Griis, Bouzonville, 1997 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), pp45-6)

The desire to change this state of affairs was one of the prime motives for the founding of the post-war regionalist movement in Lorraine, the first signs of which date from 1975. Today this movement consists principally of three organisations, Bei uns Daheim, Gau un Griis and Wéi Laang Nach who, in addition to their own, individual activities, work together under the umbrella of the Fédération pour le Lothringer Platt. Promoting the teaching of the regional language is one of the movement's priorities, as it is with the Flemish movement of French Flanders (cf. Ch6). However, the two movements differ fundamentally in their attitude towards standard varieties of the regional language. As has been noted on numerous occasions above, Flemish organisations have, for the most part, opted to promote standard Dutch. In Germanophone Lorraine, on the other hand, regionalists refuse to abandon Francique. One reason for this is the apparent strength of related dialects in Germany and of Luxembourgish, also a close relative and – along with French – the official language of Luxembourg. Jean-Louis Kieffer, President of Gau un Griis states:

Le francique ou platt est la langue (ou dialecte) pratiquée de part et d'autre de la frontière, c'est notre langue régionale en même temps que "Bindungssprache" entre Sarrois, Lorrains, Rhénan et Luxembourgeois. (Kieffer, J-L., in correspondence, 1/9/98)

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<sup>12</sup> It should, however, be noted that the occupying Germans sought to promote Hochdeutsch rather than Francique, with the result that, in 1939, 67.6% of the population of Germanophone Lorraine spoke the former and only 41.1% the latter.(Boulanger, 1997, p49)

The Francique movement advocates instead a "trilinguisme français / francique / allemand, somewhat similar to the proposals of Tegaere Toegaen and Jean-Paul Sepieter. Kieffer argues that children should learn Francique "dès la maternelle" in order to combat the linguistic and cultural alienation - what Atamaniuk terms "le malaise identitaire" (*Kumpel*, Winter 1998, p7) - prevalent in Germanophone Lorraine since World War Two:

L'enfant doit retrouver ses racines, la langue qu'il peut entendre à la maison, dans la rue...Il s'agit bien de lui faire comprendre que sa langue n'est pas un allemand fautif. (Kieffer, J-L., in correspondence, 1/9/98)

Only once the regional language has been mastered should Hochdeutsch be taught and even then only with constant reference to Francique and to the Germanophone cultural heritage of Lorraine. It is hoped that, in this way, not only will the standard be easier to learn but should also appear a less foreign language. Such an approach would also allay the suspicion of some members of the Francique movement that central government has promoted the teaching of Hochdeutsch to eliminate the use of Francique, thus completing the process of Francisation of the region (*Kumpel*, Winter 1998, pp[7,8]).

The Francique movement is chiefly concerned with promoting the teaching of the regional language within the state school system. In contrast, in French Flanders, the CELCN is very active in the organisation of independent classes

aimed, for the most part, at adults.<sup>13</sup> This difference may be accounted for in several ways. Firstly, it should not be forgotten that the CELCN is chiefly engaged in the promotion of classes in standard Dutch. Consequently it receives considerable support from Belgium, in particular from the KFV. The associations of the Fédération pour le Lothringer Platt do not benefit from any similar arrangements.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, the fact that the CELCN is organising classes for adults suggests that the older generation as well as the younger have abandoned the regional language. In Germanophone Lorraine this would appear to be less the case; Kieffer, for example, claims that children can still hear Francique spoken at home. The Francique movement would therefore appear to be concentrating on ensuring the transmission of the regional language to the young. Finally, in French Flanders knowledge of standard Dutch could be seen as enhancing job prospects; in Lorraine such advantages would come from a knowledge of Hochdeutsch and, as stated above, the Francique movement does not seek to promote Hochdeutsch.

However, the Francique movement does not restrict its actions to the field of education but is engaged to a range of activities similar to those undertaken by the Flemish cultural organisations in French Flanders. These activities include publishing books, periodicals and compact disks, staging shows and theatre performances raising the profile of Francique and the efforts to ensure its survival via the mass media. In recent years the Francique movement has been rather more successful than its Flemish counterpart – Gau un Griis

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<sup>13</sup> Gau un Griis intends to organise such classes but as of September 1998 plans had not been finalised.

alone has appeared on German television in 1996/7 and between 1995 and 1997 featured in radio programmes on Swiss radio and mainstream local stations in Metz and Nancy.

In terms of publications, the Francique movement has been quite prolific in recent years. *Bei uns Dahem*, for example produces its own quarterly magazine, *Kumpel*, which is similar to those produced by Flemish organisations in French Flanders. Most of this publication is written in French with some articles and / or literary pieces in the regional language (not Hochdeutsch). Articles are chiefly concerned with the organisation's activities and philosophy, with less emphasis on general interest items regarding the regional culture. However, *Bei uns Dahem* have an extensive list of publications dealing with regional issues, in both French and Francique. In addition, the organisation publishes children's books, novels and collections of poetry all in Francique, as well as compact disks and cassettes of music – both traditional and modern – in the regional language. *Gau un Griis* too has been active in this field with twelve publications to its credit since it was founded in 1986. These include Gérard Boulanger's *Petite Histoire de la langue francique*, published in 1989 which has sold 1300 copies in two editions Jean-Louis Kieffer's Francique vocabulary *Saa Moll!*, which has met with even greater success, with 2200 copies sold in two editions since 1992 (*Gau un Griis, Nos actions*, information sheet, ca.1998). This success may be contrasted with the situation in French Flanders where an adequate replacement for Westhoek Editions has yet to be found (Cf.Ch5.6.1).

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<sup>14</sup> Although the *Gau un Griis* intends to run the above courses in conjunction with the

In general, the regionalist movement of Germanophone Lorraine appears, at the present time, rather more active than its counterpart in French Flanders. One reason for this may be that the former has limited its involvement in the political arena to lobbying to attain specific goals, such as the introduction of Francique classes in the region's schools (*Kumpel*, Winter 1998, pp[7-10] & Gau un Griis, *Nos actions*, information sheet, ca.1998). In this way the Francique movement has managed to avoid the allegations of extremism which have undoubtedly cost the Flemish movement of French Flanders sympathisers. Indeed, Bei uns Dahem sees the promotion of regional culture as having an important role to play in preventing the spread of extremism, since it will combat the cultural alienation from which Germanophones have suffered in Lorraine since World War Two, "Le malaise identitaire est fort, la population se sent étrangère dans son propre pays, le vote extrémiste se développe." (*Kumpel*, Winter 1998, p[7].)

Furthermore, the Francique movement enjoys a greater cohesion than the Flemish movement of French Flanders, with the three principal organisations prepared to work together under the umbrella of the Fédération pour le Lothringer Platt. While such co-operation has existed on occasion in French Flanders – during the preparation of the *Manifeste des Flamands de France*, for example – the political stances of the individual groups have always made it somewhat problematic. The internal divisions within the Flemish movement have undoubtedly weakened it as it is clearly an advantage for small

organisations run by a handful of activists to be able to count on the support of other groups working towards broadly the same objectives.

The situation of Francique is vulnerable, as even those who seek to promote the language admit. Nevertheless, the efforts of the regional movement do seem to be meeting with some degree of success. Walter claims that, "...on assiste depuis une vingtaine d'années à un renouveau d'intérêt des jeunes générations pour leur langue et pour leur culture" (Walter, 1994, p388). This sentiment was echoed by Philippe Bauduin<sup>15</sup> when addressing a conference organised by the Fédération pour le Lothringer Platt, "Les associations de défense du francique sont parvenues avec un minimum de soutien à faire germer une conscience culturelle régionale." However, similarly positive statements were made about the Flemish movement of French Flanders in the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1982 Landry and de Verrewaere wrote of "une renaissance de la conscience culturelle flamande dans le Westhoek" (Landry & de Verrewaere, 1982, p301): few people today would be quite so positive in their assessment.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Flemish organisations were and are run, for the most part, by a relatively small number of activists, a situation which has direct implications for an organisation's effectiveness and even longevity. Examination of the contributors to revues such as *Kumpel* or the authors of Gau un Griis' publications reveals a similar state of affairs and, potentially, the same inherent problems. The Francique movement is rather younger than the

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<sup>15</sup> Lecturer at the Ecole normale de Liège who carried out research into Francique in 1997.

Flemish movement – Gau un Griis in particular was not founded until 1986 – and the next few years will show whether it has enough committed, active support to sustain its efforts.

There are a number of similarities between the linguistic situation of germanophone Lorraine and that of netherlandophone French Flanders and, not surprisingly, the strategies adopted by the respective regionalist movements to preserve and promote their languages and cultures share a good number of common points. At the time of writing it is the Francique movement which is the more active and which is meeting with the greater success. In light of this and the fact that there are considerably fewer netherlandophones in French Flanders than there are germanophones in Lorraine, Francique would appear to have the greater chance of survival in the medium term. Given the vulnerability of the position of Francique, the outlook for Vlaemsch / standard Dutch (as regional language) would appear bleak.

However, there are a number of factors which work in favour of the regional language in French Flanders. It, along with the other regional languages of France, is no longer the victim of the repressive central policies. In fact, now that regional movements no longer represent a threat to national unity, regional cultures may be seen as helping form a new national identity – a decentralised cultural identity – one rooted in the diversity of France's cultural heritage and one which, ultimately, may be more resilient to the forces of globalisation (cf. Jenkins, B. & Copsey, N., *Nation, Nationalism and National Identity in France in Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe* Ed. Jenkins,

B., & Sofos, S.A., Routledge, London, 1996). The reforms under Mitterrand regarding regional cultures may be seen as recognition of this. Perversely, in French Flanders the lack of persecution seems to have deprived the regionalist movement of its driving force.

Furthermore, economic links with Belgium and the Netherlands, reinforced by the creation of the Euroregion Nord-Pas-de-Calais / Kent / Belgian Flanders, provide a practical incentive for learning standard Dutch. If standard Dutch can be seen as leading to social promotion, it will inevitably gain in prestige. Prestige will also come from the language's acceptance at school and from the promotion of the region's netherlandophone heritage. The latter is vital if the inhabitants of French Flanders are to accept that standard Dutch really is their regional language and it is clearly in this domain that the Flemish organisations have a role to play.

In order to play this role effectively, the Flemish movement must distance itself from extremist political positions which only serve to alienate those who sympathise with the movement's cultural and linguistic aims. This would not be an easy task; the Flemish movement has suffered – often as a result of its own actions – from more than seventy years of negative publicity, propaganda and innuendo in this respect. It is made all the more difficult inasmuch as the struggle to promote a minority language and culture undoubtedly has political implications, both ideologically – with regard to the challenge to the established national identity it represents – and practically - in terms of changes in legislation, regarding education, for example, it might require.

However, having made the ideological choice to affirm one's regional identity, further political action may be usefully limited to specific cultural and linguistic issues. Thus political divisions in already small organisations may be minimised. This admittedly less ambitious approach is ultimately more effective; one might cite the fact that both Vlaemsch and standard Dutch may now be taught in schools in French Flanders as proof of this. Regional autonomy, on the other hand, remains as far away as ever. Furthermore, one might question the extent to which political autonomy would favour the regional language. However one chooses to divide the regional territory, for French Flanders or the Pays-Bas Français to be a viable economic unit, Vlaemsch would still be the minority language. Moreover, the example of Eire illustrates that political independence alone is not enough to bring about a language revival. For French Flanders unification with netherlandophone Belgium might, but this was never the objective of more than a minority of Flemish activists. Furthermore, for this group, linguistic considerations are only part of an ethno-nationalist ideology.

If its cultural activities are to be effective, the Flemish movement would be well advised to adopt a more balanced, holistic approach. At the moment the movement is largely engaged in promoting the teaching of, principally, standard Dutch. It can easily be understood why the Flemish movement, in common with minority language organisations elsewhere favours what seems a very direct approach to restoring the regional language, particularly as education was one of the principal weapons used against it by the French State. Clearly it is an important area for activity; clearly classes must be

provided, both in schools and independently. However, the Irish example once again illustrates that an education-based strategy has distinct limitations. For it to be effective there must be both a need and a desire to learn the regional language. If economic links with netherlandophone Belgium and the Netherlands do not constitute a need, they do represent an incentive and one which may gain in significance. The desire to learn Vlaemsch / standard Dutch (most likely the latter) can only come from the perceived relevance and prestige of netherlandophone culture in French Flanders. Only when large numbers of the inhabitants of French Flanders – not just ethnic French Flemings –, particularly from the younger generation, want to learn the regional language will the classes have any significant impact. It is the Flemish movement's task to persuade them to want to.

The other great challenge facing the Flemish movement of French Flanders is to persuade French Flemings that standard Dutch is *their* language and not merely a useful foreign language. This can only be achieved in the context of a wider campaign to raise awareness of and interest in the netherlandophone cultural heritage of French Flanders and, more importantly contemporary cultural production. Knowledge of Vlaemsch also undoubtedly has a role to play in this context.

In order to promote Flemish culture effectively, the Flemish movement must have greater access to the means of cultural dissemination. In terms of the written word small, local publishers are having some success but within distinct logistic limitations. *Pays du Nord* brings Flemish culture to a wider

audience though not regularly and perhaps with the tourist too much in mind. Clearly nothing has replaced Westhoek Editions.

Today radio and television are vital tools in the promotion of culture, particularly popular culture. While the efforts of Radio Uylenspiegel are laudable, they are obviously no substitute for a regular, substantial presence in mainstream radio and television. Such a presence would allow Flemish culture to spread its influence and increase its prestige; its absence, apart from denying the Flemish movement this opportunity, also creates a poor media image, suggesting that Flemish culture does not merit a place on television or radio and that there is no real public interest in it.

Thus it may be suggested that it is not too late to save Vlaemsch in French Flanders. Political and economic factors do not necessarily condemn it and there are activists dedicated to ensuring its survival. The Flemish movement undoubtedly has a great deal to do and at present is not making much progress. While the number of people using Vlaemsch as their everyday language of communication is likely to continue to decline, the efforts of Flemish activists are likely to prevent it from disappearing completely. As far as standard Dutch is concerned, there is every possibility that, thanks to economic circumstances and the efforts of the Flemish movement, the number of speakers using the language regularly will actually increase, although it is difficult to imagine this becoming a mass trend. As long as the inhabitants of French Flanders retain an awareness of their netherlandophone

identity and culture and as long as enthusiasts are prepared to preserve and promote this culture, it is difficult to imagine the language disappearing.

Ultimately, modern technology, for so long seen as working in favour of national cultures at the expense of minorities, may well come to aid of the French Flemings. Access to the mass media has been democratised inasmuch as it is relatively easy and inexpensive for individuals and interest groups to produce magazines, compact disks, internet web sites, even television programmes, via public service broadcasting. Effective exploitation of these tools should allow the regional language, be it Vlaemsch or standard Dutch, to survive – perhaps with very few speakers – as long as the Flemish cultural identity persists in French Flanders. Although this may only be survival in a very limited sense, it is not death and contemporary use of Hebrew in Israel shows that a language's resilience should not be underestimated.

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