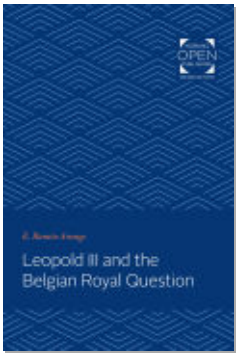
Chapter 7. The End of the Royal Question



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CHAPTER 7

THE END OF THE ROYAL QUESTION

The Two-Year Stalemate

THE COMMISSION'S *Report* failed to gain converts to the cause of Leopold III. The four major political parties maintained their positions, and the royal question continued to await the deciding voice of the Belgian people. In the meantime, however, an armed truce was declared in Parliament. The Leopold affair was put aside so that the nation could go about other business which had been delayed too long, above all postwar reconstruction. In March, 1947, the same month in which the *Report* appeared, the tripartite Left bloc, which had governed Belgium since July, 1946, was forced to resign when the Communist ministers withdrew from the Cabinet so that their party might go into opposition.[1] The government which was formed to replace the bloc proved that for the time being the royal question was to be "ignored." The Socialists and the Catholics, the leading antagonists in the affair, governed in coalition under the premiership of Paul-Henri Spaak until the election of June, 1949.

Only two significant voices were heard during this two-

[1] The decision had nothing to do with the royal question; Communist withdrawal from the Government in Belgium was following a pattern seen throughout Europe. On May 5, 1947, they left the Government in France.

year armistice—the voice of Hubert Pierlot, the prime minister of the exiled wartime Government, and that of Victor Larock, a Walloon Socialist. Pierlot had hitherto taken no part in the controversy over Leopold, but the findings and conclusions of the *Report* prompted him to speak. He published a series of twelve articles entitled *Pages d'histoire,* which appeared consecutively in the independent Brussels newspaper *Le Soir* beginning July 5, 1947. The articles were important because they were written by one of the men most intimately involved at the beginning of the royal question and particularly because that man was a prominent Catholic at odds with the policy of his party regarding King Leopold. Pierlot's articles defended his own behavior and that of his Government from May, 1940, until September, 1944, and supported the position taken on the royal question by the parties of the Left. In short, it was not so much the content but the source of the articles which was significant.

With two exceptions the articles that concerned the conduct of the war, the relationship between the King and the Cabinet during the eighteen-day campaign, and the months of confusion during the summer and fall of 1940, added nothing that was not already known. Indeed, they seemingly were written with a single purpose: to recall the memory of that period and to create a climate of opinion unfavorable to the King. They resembled the speeches made by Paul-Henri Spaak on July 24 and 25, 1945. Nevertheless, Pierlot did make two valuable contributions. First, he placed the royal question in its historical perspective, pointing out that the separation of King and Cabinet on May 25, 1940, was the final episode in a long developing controversy between Leopold and the Government over what lay within the range of monarchical authority. Pierlot spoke briefly of the circumstances of the prewar period that had forced Leopold to play an active role in Belgian affairs, a role which Leopold, abetted by Louis Wodon, had not considered as extraordinary but as normal, provided one

accepted his conception of the role of the sovereign. Pierlot commented:

> The reinforcement of the personal role of the King in the policy of independence and soon afterward in his functions as commander-in-chief accentuated a disposition which under ordinary circumstances doubtlessly would never have had appreciable consequences because the King was not a fascist as it has been alleged and he did not think of going beyond legal means.[2]

In spite of this statement, Pierlot gave startling evidence of what Leopold considered "legal means," and this constituted Pierlot's second contribution. He helped to clarify the basic issue of the royal question, i.e., the controversy over personal monarchical prerogative under the Constitution, by showing to what dangerous lengths this personal interpretation of the prerogative could lead.

On January 10, 1940, during the "phony war," a German plane came down in Belgium, allegedly because of motor trouble. The captured pilots carried papers (which they succeeded partially in destroying) that revealed the German invasion plan of Belgium and Holland. Pierlot wrote that the Belgian government could not determine whether or not the landing was a German trick calculated to cause panic among the Belgians and to prompt their appeal for Allied aid under the 1937 agreement. Such action would have given the Germans a legitimate excuse to invade "aggressive" Belgium. The Government decided therefore to increase national watchfulness but to take no other action. King Leopold, on the other hand, on January 14, 1940, made inquiries in Great Britain:

> Without consulting a single minister, the King took it upon himself to ask of the British government, through the intermediacy of Admiral Keyes, what would be the guar-

[2] *Le Soir,* July 7, 1947, p. 1.

> antees given to Belgium in case she were to call for Anglo-French assistance. The question was put by the Admiral to Chamberlain on the morning of the 14th.
>
> The King received the answer of the British government from Keyes on the morning of the 15th. The British were prepared to enter Belgium, adding that as far as they knew, the French were ready to do the same thing. The response contained an enumeration of the guarantees.[3]

The inquiries were interpreted in London and Paris as an appeal by Belgium under the terms of the 1937 agreement, and Allied troops were massed along the Franco-Belgian border. When Daladier informed the Belgian Ambassador on January 15 that the troops were in place, the Ambassador had not the slightest idea what the French Premier was talking about. When the Ambassador questioned his Government in Brussels, the ministers were equally in the dark.

In the meantime, a meeting had been held on January 13 in the office of the chief of the Belgian general staff, General Vandenbergen. It was decided, again without the knowledge of the Government, to lower the barricades which had been placed in the roads along the southern (i.e., French) border.

> The first night (the 14th) at 1 A.M. the order was given to the southern frontier posts to allow Allied troops to enter if they were to arrive. These decisions were taken in the presence of and with the agreement of General van Overstraeten [Leopold's aide-de-camp], who was present at the conference. The Government was neither consulted nor informed.[4]

When the Government became aware of what had happened, the order was revoked, and Vandenbergen offered his resignation, which was accepted.

[3] *Le Soir*, July 9, 1947, p. 1.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

> In the presence of these facts, two questions present themselves: why was General Vandenbergen designated as the author of the order sent on the night of January 13—14? Why did Vandenbergen accept the sanctions without any reservation? I can find no other answer than this: the head of the general staff agreed to "cover" the King vis-à-vis the Government.[5]

Pierlot went on to give more evidence of the personal nature of Leopold's authority. The reader will recall that on May 25, 1940, Leopold read to his ministers the letter which he had prepared to send to the King of England.[6] Pierlot commented:

> The King came back time after time to that idea which drove him on: to obey his conscience, [to do] his duty. In his letter to the King of England . . . the King wrote: "In spite of all the contrary advice which I have received, I feel that *my duty commands me*. . . . If I felt I was able to act in that way then I would abandon the mission *which I have assigned to myself.*"
>
> "The mission which I have assigned to myself." Isn't that statement striking? The inspiration which the King followed was of an indisputable grandeur, but irrespective of how imperative the voice of conscience, it is not sufficient to guide those who govern. They have to keep in mind the rules of positive law, at least under a constitutional regime. Faced with a decision of the greatest seriousness, the King decided to recognize no other law than the opinion he had formed of his duty. That way of viewing the royal function differs in no way at all from personal power.[7]

The other voice heard during the two-year stalemate was that of Victor Larock, a Walloon member of the House of Representatives who wrote a series of articles for the leading

[5] *Ibid.*
[6] See Chapter 3, p. 69.
[7] *Le Soir,* July 13, 1947, p. 1.

Belgian Socialist newspaper *Le Peuple.* Fifteen articles entitled *A quand la lumière?* were published beginning September 23, 1948. The articles had only one purpose: to embarrass the King. They were a mixed bag of fact and insinuation based on Larock's contention that Leopold had not believed in an Allied victory and had courted the Germans. Larock called Leopold's policy *attentisme* and thus differs from my opinion in only one respect: Larock believed that Leopold thought conclusively that the Allies would be defeated. But if Leopold was convinced that Germany would be victorious, why play a game of "wait and see"? It seems illogical to charge, as Larock did, that Leopold practiced *attentisme* and also believed in an ultimate German victory:

> A treasonable policy? No, but one of supple accommodation. Not to be solidly with either belligerent; to ignore the resistance; to adjust to the "new order" in order to save the essential [things]. These were the principles of *attentisme* which the growing chances of liberation rendered more prudent but scarcely less pointed.[8]

Had Leopold believed in a conclusive German victory, a policy of "wait and see" would have been unwise. It was only because he could not know for sure that he adopted *attentisme. Attentisme* as Leopold practiced it, however, involved a calculated risk even if the Germans should win. Leopold would not openly collaborate with Hitler as many rulers and crowned heads had been only too willing to do. Thus Leopold was not completely "in favor" with Hitler, although he was not completely "out of favor." At the meeting at Berchtesgaden in November, 1940, Hitler had assured Leopold that his throne would be safe after the war. The visit to Berchtesgaden only deepened Leopold's commitment to *attentisme.* Leopold had not been able to get Hitler to agree to a guarantee of Belgian

[8] *Le Peuple,* October 16, 1948, p. 2.

independence after the war, and Hitler had not been able to convince Leopold openly to join the Nazi cause. Thus the middle road was the only one left to Leopold. He had sought an audience which had produced nothing except perhaps the ill will of Hitler. Leopold would not openly support the Allies because in 1940 it appeared that Germany would be victorious, yet he had refused to commit himself wholeheartedly to the German cause.

The subtlety involved here is peripheral to the main issue of the royal question, i.e., whether or not the King could formulate and follow a policy not approved by responsible ministers. But since at this point (1948) Leopold still hoped to have his policy weighed favorably against that of the Government, this nuance is significant in considering the moral culpability of the King, the most vital of all considerations in the mind of the average Belgian.

Larock built his case not by speaking against Leopold but by speaking against his entourage, principally Louis Frédéricq and Count Capelle, and by denying the contention of the Commission's *Report* that Frédéricq and Capelle had maintained contact with various known collaborators in a personal capacity only without the knowledge or approval of the King.

> Can we take issue with Count Capelle for having accepted the role of intermediary? No, to the extent that he only carried out orders. Didn't *La Libre Belgique* [the pro-Leopold, conservative Catholic Brussels newspaper] write "Shouldn't a secretary be in rapport with his master?" The observation is only too true. But here is the delicate point: the collaborators whom the Count honored with his meetings saw in him the confidant of Leopold III. Received by him [Capelle] after having sought audience with the King, they were convinced that his opinions, his advice and counsel reflected the sentiments of the King. Count Capelle and the King himself could not have doubted that the interviews were interpreted in this manner. The activity of

> the collaborators was powerful. They openly supported the "new order"; they served the designs of the enemy. Moreover they made no secret of their relations with the Court. They took advantage of this to preserve and to fortify their esteem with their public if they were journalists, with their subordinates if they occupied high position.[9]

On January 9, 1944, Capelle wrote to De Becker, the editor-in-chief of *Le Soir* during the occupation: "I had the honor of giving your message to the King as well as a copy of the special issue of *Le Soir* devoted to Belgian unity. His Majesty was touched by the homage and asks me to thank you."[10] Larock quoted a passage from that issue written by De Becker and praised by Capelle:

> If we isolate ourselves we shall die. It no longer concerns us to choose our partners. . . . Germany and England face each other in a duel to death. . . . We have chosen. We have done so by revolutionary conviction and for love of Belgium. The destiny of our country is linked to that of the continent, its prosperity to that of Central Europe. By choosing Germany we choose Europe. Victorious Germany will expel England from the continent and will assure peace for a long time.[11]

Larock then demanded that the investigation into Capelle's activities during the occupation begun in 1946 be continued. In the summer of 1946 a preliminary inquiry was made into Capelle's association with collaborationists. The examination, conducted by a single judge without jury and attorneys, lasted for two years and ended with a *non lieu,* i.e., a declaration that there was not sufficient evidence for trial. The dossier com-

[9] *Le Peuple,* September 23, 1948, p. 1.
[10] *Le Peuple,* September 24, 1948, p. 1.
[11] *Ibid.*

piled by the presiding judge, Hussart, was handed over to the Minister of Justice and was not made available to the public. Larock stated that a *non lieu* was decided because, had there been a subsequent trial, the King himself would have been exposed. Larock wrote that the preliminary investigation of Capelle revealed that Capelle had established contact with Robert Poulet, editor of the pro-German newspaper *Nouveau Journal,*[12] and that after each of the interviews with Poulet as well as after all interviews with those involved in the collaboration, Capelle had given a written report to the King, keeping duplicate copies for his own files.[13] Larock observed that contrary to former statements made by Count Capelle, those interviews were not strictly private but were known, admitted, and controlled by King Leopold. It was revealed, too, that shortly before the opening of the investigation into Capelle's activities in 1946 the Count had given to the King's secretary, Jacques Pirenne, the above-mentioned duplicates, as well as the memorandum book in which Capelle had noted down all appointments made during the occupation. King Leopold had both the originals and the duplicates but refused to make them public. Larock demanded that the truth be known claiming that the innocent had nothing to fear. *"A quand la lumière?"*

Larock also discussed Leopold's relations with the *Légion Wallonie,* a volunteer group of approximately 7,300 Belgians who had fought with the Germans on the eastern front against the Russians. Larock believed that this was an unfortunate and pitiful group that had paid dearly for its political naïveté by losing 3,000 men in Russia. These men were not the usual breed of traitor; not all had been pro-German. Many were idealists who had hoped to rid the world of communism. Whatever their reasons for joining the *Légion,* Larock claimed

[12] See Chapter 5, pp. 112–14.

[13] There were more than twenty of these interviews, which is contrary to an earlier statement made by Capelle that there had been only ten.

that all the men shared one characteristic—their devotion to Leopold. "The only certain fact which pleads incontestably for them is that they were never repudiated or undeceived by the King whom they believed they were serving." [14] Next, Larock dealt with Capelle's denial that he had given any form of encouragement to the *Légion*. The Count's statement had appeared in a letter to the editor of *Le Peuple* on July 11, 1945. In that letter Capelle said:

> Never did I encourage or approve (in any form, written or verbal) the activities of the *Légion Wallonie*. Never did I think, say, or write that the oath of loyalty to the King was compatible with service in the *Légion* and with the oath to the Führer. Any affirmation to the contrary is a lie. Any document declaring the contrary is false.[15]

Opposing this statement, Larock quoted an unidentified source:

> Father F. [Fierens], the chaplain of the *Légion* who honored me with his friendship and who took me into his confidence on several occasions, went back to Belgium on leave every two or three months.
>
> After having been received at the Palace of Brussels by Count Capelle, secretary of the King, he told me that the Count inquired about Commander Lippert [commandant of the *Légion*] whose brilliant qualities as an officer seemed to be known at the Palace. According to Father F., Count Capelle affirmed that His Majesty King Leopold III considered the *Légion Wallonie* a guarantee in case of a German victory, while the Belgian army at London was called to render the same service in case of an Allied victory. He held the two in equal esteem.[16]

[14] *Le Peuple*, October 6, 1948, p. 1.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] *Le Peuple*, September 25, 1948, pp. 1–2.

Larock supported the above statement by the following testimony given by former members of the *Légion:*

> A letter coming from the secretariat of the King and signed by Count Capelle was communicated to the troops at the time of their stay at camp Regenwurmlager near Meseritz in August–September, 1941. According to the letter the King authorized the active officers and noncommissioned officers who had sworn an oath to him to take part in the *Légion Wallonie* if they thought that to be their duty. (Testimony of Lt. R. Wastiau, of Legionnaire A. Calui, of Lt. C. Peeters, and of Captain J. Vermeire.)
>
> During the winter of 1941–1942, a telegram came from the *Maison du Roi* to the *Légion,* which was at that moment in the Ukraine, confirming the royal approbation. (Testimony of Calui.)
>
> Father Fierens, chaplain of the *Légion* from 1942 to 1944, was in regular contact with the entourage of the King and of the Archbishop. (Testimony of Adjutant Cougnon.) [17]

Later on during the trial of Robert Poulet, Count Capelle modified his position concerning the *Légion* that he had taken in the article written to *Le Peuple* in July, 1945:

> It is true that my purposes regarding the *Légion* were varied. That is explained by the fact that I had learned that Robert Poulet had told several persons that the Palace and Count Capelle approved his actions and his articles. As a consequence I thought it my duty to be particularly circumspect regarding that which he had said. I wanted to prevent the Germans, who would have been aware of any statement made by Poulet regarding that subject, from harboring resentment against the King for having concerned himself with political questions.

[17] *Le Peuple,* October 6, 1948, p. 2.

> It was because of that same reason that I never told him [Poulet] that he was wrong to praise the intentions of certain legionnaires, but I never told him that he was right. It was for the same reason of prudence that I told Poulet that if Lippert, the commandant of the *Légion*, requested an audience of the King, his request would be examined.[18]

In response to this Larock asked: "Could not this noncommittal position have been legitimately interpreted by the *Légion* as approval on the part of the King?"

Finally, Larock presented evidence that Leopold had taken more than one trip to Austria during the occupation. The following testimony was given on October 23, 1947, by L. Rieder, a German police official whose job it had been to accompany statesmen of occupied countries on their travels abroad.

> I was with the King of the Belgians at Heidelberg, Munich, and in Vienna where his jaw was operated on by a dentist who lived in the area of the city hall. A Belgian professor assisted at the operation.
>
> After that, the King went to the home of Count Kuhn at Nikolsburg close to the Czeckoslovakian border. He was there four weeks, going back to Vienna from time to time for treatment. At the end of September, 1940, he returned to Belgium passing through Munich and Cologne.
>
> He returned to Nikolsburg in October, 1940 [Larock wrote in a footnote that the date was possibly an error in transcription and should read 1941], going again to the home of Count Kuhn. This time he was accompanied by a woman. It was not until later that I learned that she was his wife. He went to Heidelberg, Munich, and Vienna. After a visit of approximately four weeks he returned to Belgium.[19]

[18] *Ibid.*
[19] *Le Peuple,* October 15, 1948, p. 2.

These articles by Pierlot and Larock did not change the basic issues of the royal question. They did, however, add weight to the moral culpability of the King, an issue of great importance during the two-year stalemate between March, 1947, and June, 1949.

Relations between King and Government, 1947–1949

Upon taking office as Prime Minister, Paul-Henri Spaak told Parliament on March 25, 1947:

> No fundamental agreement can be reached on the royal question. Each of the two parties maintains its position. Neither of the two asks the other to abandon any of its convictions. The royal question cannot be resolved at the present time, but the Government is conscious of the fact that it must promote an agreement between the parties in order to arrive at a solution which will respect our national institutions.[20]

Spaak himself broke the silence between the Government and the King in a letter to Leopold on September 25, 1947. Spaak wrote that he believed some solution could be arrived at even though the parties remained adamant in their positions. He stressed that the dispute between the Government and the King was not a moral one but one exclusively political in nature; the honor of the King, he said, was not at issue. Although this statement contradicted Socialist opinion, Spaak commented:

> It seems to me that the general turn of events permits me to say that the Socialists, while continuing strongly to criti-

[20] *Rapport présenté par le Secrétariat du Roi sur les événements politiques qui ont suivi la libération, (mai 1945–octobre 1949)*, p. 110. This will be cited henceforth as *Rapport présenté par le Secrétariat du Roi.*

> cize the decisions taken by the King during the war, do not intend thereby to place in doubt the motives which inspired these decisions. Thus, the difference, however important and serious it might be, that exists between the King and the Socialist party is of a purely political nature which does not have the delicate and painful character of a moral conflict. The Socialist party . . . appears to me to understand that it ought to be possible to eliminate from the discussion all [those things which] might be an affront to the person of the King as well as to the intentions which guided him.[21]

It might appear odd that Spaak, whose accusations in 1945 were aimed principally at the moral behavior of King Leopold, should now declare in 1947 that morality was no longer an issue. It is probable that Spaak had not changed his mind but only his tactics. Between 1947 and 1949 Spaak, as prime minister, was seeking a compromise. Although the constitutional issue had remained basic to the royal question, Leopold had appeared to be most sensitive to the accusations made against his moral behavior as King. Spaak probably reasoned that if the moral onus could be removed, the King might be willing to reach an agreement if he were convinced that by doing so he was not at the same time compromising his honor.

The King desired equally to have the moral onus removed, but for a different reason. In an answer to a group which had gone to Switzerland to urge him to reassume contact with the Government, Leopold wrote:

> To the wish that you have expressed to see me re-exercise my constitutional prerogatives, I can have only one answer. When I swore the oath to respect the Constitution and the laws of the Belgian people, I contracted vis-à-vis the nation duties from which it does not fall to me to unburden myself. I remain ready, when it has been publicly declared

[21] *Recueil*, p. 747.

> that nothing has ever stained the honor of the Head of the Dynasty, to assume responsibility.[22]

Leopold wanted to be rid of the moral stain for a reason just the opposite to that of Spaak. The King reasoned that if the stigma of his immorality could be removed from the mind of the Belgian people, they would be in favor of his return. Spaak, on the other hand, believed that if the stigma could be removed, Leopold would be willing to negotiate.

Most Belgian people cared little and understood even less about the basic constitutional issue; their primary concern seemed to be the morality or immorality of the King's behavior. Moreover, socioeconomic issues never seemed to have loomed large in the case against Leopold. From time to time, the Socialists did indicate that a return to reaction would accompany Leopold's return, but this reaction may be identified primarily with religious and ethnic issues and not with economics. An investigation into Leopold's prewar position regarding the working classes does not reveal any antilabor sentiments, and paradoxically, Leopold's association with Henri De Man, however unfortunate it may have been politically, to an extent did indicate the King's sympathy with De Man's economic philosophy, one in which the rights of labor were predominant. Furthermore, all during the royal question, the most important ally of the Socialists were the Lib-

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 764. Spaak made the public declaration in an address to the House of Representatives on December 10, 1947:

> As far as I am concerned I have always explained that the problem which presents itself to us does not concern the honor of the King. It concerns a political debate. . . . I want you to understand that we must do everything in our power to prevent the debate from becoming a personal quarrel which involves the honor of the Head of the Dynasty. . . . There are a certain number of Belgians who find that the King misinterpreted the articles of the Constitution. . . . There, Gentlemen, lies the debate. One can have a difference of opinion about such a point without doubting the intention and good faith [of the King]. (*Rapport présenté par le Secrétariat du Roi*, p. 117.)

erals, among whom could be found some of the wealthiest families in Belgium, anti-Catholic and anti-Leopold, but conservative economically. If, therefore, economic conservatives and economic radicals were fighting against the return of King Leopold, his economic policies must not have been a primary issue. This is well illustrated, for example, by the series of anti-Leopold articles published by the Socialist Victor Larock and by another series of similar articles attacking Leopold which appeared during May, 1949, in the Socialist newspaper, *Le Peuple*.[23] In spite of the general condemnation of the King and all his activities, socioeconomic affairs were never mentioned.

Both parties to the dispute were thus maneuvering on January 18, 1948, at the first meeting since April, 1946, between the Government and the Sovereign. The King asked Spaak: "What is the exact nature of the controversy? Is it one against me personally or is it, on the contrary, the monarchy itself which is threatened?" [24] Spaak answered that he did not consider the monarchy to be threatened, because the mass of Belgians, including the Socialists, were not republicans. At the second meeting between the Government and the King, Spaak told Leopold that it would be wise for him [Leopold] to make some statement of his position to the people since elections would be inevitable the following year as the result of new electoral laws.[25]

In a letter to the Prince Regent on June 22, 1948, Leopold expressed his opinion regarding the royal question and revived the issue of a popular consultation. The King wrote that, contrary to the position taken by Spaak on December 10, 1947, and again at the meeting on January 18, 1948, it was

[23] This series of articles was entitled *De Wynendale au Reposoir* and appeared in *Le Peuple* on successive days beginning April 23, 1949.

[24] *Rapport présenté par le Secrétariat du Roi*, p. 121.

[25] On March 27, 1948, the law was passed granting the vote to women. The electoral lists were to be revised beginning November 21, 1948, in preparation for the elections to be held in June, 1949.

impossible to attack the person of the King and not attack, at the same time, the monarchy as an institution. Furthermore, elections would not be the proper way to settle the royal affair because elections dealt with many political questions and were held within the framework of party activity. This would be quite improper, for the King was always above party:

> Today I have arrived at the conclusion that elections necessarily made within the framework of parties and dealing with the whole of political questions are not able to express the national will in a problem touching the royal prerogatives.
>
> It is thus that I have rallied to the idea of a consultation of all citizens authorized by law. If that consultation does not give me an indisputable majority in favor of the restoration of my constitutional prerogatives, I shall abdicate. On the other hand, if the majority is favorable to me, I expect Parliament, instructed by the national will, to use the powers given to it by the law of July 19, 1945, and put an end to the present constitutional crises.[26]

Leopold thus succeeded in destroying Spaak's strategy. Not only had the King forced the Government to state officially that the morality of the King's behavior was not an issue, but he had also told the nation that a political campaign involving the person of the King would threaten the monarchy itself. What was the reasoning behind Leopold's strategy? It seems that the strategy, largely psychological, took advantage of a nation's historic and emotional attachment to the monarchy. By having the country express itself in a consultation on the single issue of the royal question, the King would force

[26] *Recueil,* p. 799. A consultation would be a nation-wide advisory vote whose results the legislature could accept or reject. It was suggested as an alternative to a referendum whose results are binding but forbidden under the Belgian constitution. As it was conceived, however, the consultation would have differed not at all from a referendum.

out all other considerations. The people would be faced with either choosing or rejecting Leopold, yet Leopold himself had said that an attack on the King was an attack on the monarchy itself. True enough this was only the King's opinion, yet it was the opinion of one whom many of the people were conditioned by history and by emotion to respect.

On October 20, 1948, Leopold's suggestion for a consultation was rejected by the Senate. As an alternative means of deciding the royal question, the Liberals suggested that a commission be appointed to study and decide when it would be opportune for the King to resume his royal functions. A provision was made that the King send two representatives to sit with the commission. Leopold refused to consider this proposition.

> The King cannot rally to a project thus conceived. He will not agree to take part in a commission charged with saying when it would be opportune for him to resume his prerogatives. He could not take into account the highly subjective advice of such a commission.
>
> That advice could not pretend to represent that of the majority of the Belgians who would be the only ones who could lead the King to abdicate, if that opinion were unfavorable.[27]

There the matter rested. The royal question continued to hang fire until the dissolution of Parliament on May 19, 1949, prior to the elections in June.

In March, 1949, after the Government had made the decision to dissolve Parliament, contact was resumed between Leopold and the Government, and the Prince Regent also took part in the discussions. Prime Minister Spaak advised Leopold that there were only two possible positions for him to take before the elections, i.e., either to keep out of the campaign or to throw himself into it and to define his position in a

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 837.

manifesto to his subjects. Spaak suggested the first of these. At the same time Spaak also changed his approach toward Leopold. His original strategy having failed, i.e., to play down the moral issue in order that Leopold might find abdication honorable, Spaak allowed the moral issue to be re-emphasized. During the months between the Senate's rejection of a popular consultation in October, 1948, and the elections in June, 1949, the King was the subject of violent attack by the anti-Leopold press in Belgium. Leopold complained officially to the Government, saying that he remained sovereign even though in exile and was protected by Article 63 of the Constitution against personal attack. Spaak answered the complaint by recalling his address to Parliament on March 25, 1947, in which he had said that he would attempt to find some solution to the statement. He added:

> The Government feels that it has done all in its power to achieve that goal. . . . Those were our sentiments at that time. They have not changed. We regret that these rules have been violated. Violent polemics, wherever they arise, can only further poison the problems which reason and the national interest require to be resolved with dignity.
>
> Nevertheless, in these matters the Government can only give counsel. It has reiterated this counsel to everyone in a most pressing manner. We wish that throughout the present electoral campaign those who wish to explain themselves on the royal question do so with the moderation which the situation demands. . . .[28]

In short, Spaak would do nothing to stop the diatribes, and Leopold decided not to take an active part in the elections.

The elections, whose predominant issue was the solution of the royal question, were held on June 26, 1949, and women voted for the first time. The Minister of the Interior announced

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 848.

that the total electorate would number 2,705,182 men and 2,930,270 women, the latter being in the majority in all provinces except Limbourg. The results of the election appear in the following table:

Table 1

The Distribution of Seats after the Elections of June, 1949 (Figures in parenthesis are the distribution of seats after the elections of June, 1946)

Party		House	Senate
Catholic Social party	(P.S.C.)	105 (92)	92 (83)
Socialist party	(P.S.B.)	66 (69)	53 (55)
Liberal party	(P.L.B.)	29 (17)	24 (12)
Communist party	(P.C.B.)	12 (23)	6 (17)

Comparing the elections of 1949 with those of 1946, the Catholics gained 22 seats, 13 in the House and nine in the Senate; the Socialists lost five seats, three in the House and two in the Senate; the Communists lost 22 seats, 11 each in the House and the Senate. The Liberals gained 24 seats, 12 each in the House and Senate. The gains of the Liberal party had little connection with the royal question, however, but were the result primarily of a highly publicized electoral campaign championing a great reduction in the income tax. As a result of the election, the Catholic Right had 196 seats and the Left bloc had 190 seats; the Catholics won a majority in the Senate but only a plurality in the House of Representatives. The election, while reinforcing the position of the partisans of the King, revealed that the Belgians remained divided on the issue. The majority in Catholic Flanders in effect voted for the King, while the majority in Socialist Wallonia voted against him. Furthermore, the increased strength of the Catholic party in the House, 105 seats as compared to 92 in 1946, cannot be described as a gain in the popular vote, for the

Catholics increased their share of the popular vote by only 1 per cent, 43 per cent instead of 42 per cent in 1946.[29] The gain of 13 seats was due to changes in the electoral law and the redistricting of House constituencies.

The stalemate would have continued had the Liberal party not changed its position. From June until August, 1949, the three major parties attempted to form a government, but no agreement could be reached. On August 3, 1949, the Liberals issued a manifesto in which they altered their hitherto unequivocal position for the effacement of King Leopold and supported the Catholic proposal for a national consultation. The Liberals knew that this compromise was fraught with danger: "What will become of Belgian unity on the day when the Walloons say that the Flemings imposed upon them a king they did not want, or the day when the Flemings say that the Walloons prevented the return of a king whom they wanted?" [30] Nevertheless, they considered this to be less risky than the indefinite prolongation of national crisis. They reemphasized that their first preference was for the effacement of King Leopold and for the accession of Prince Baudouin as the fifth king of the Belgians, but they stated that if Leopold refused to agree to this, a consultation was the lesser of two evils. The party's decision to allow a consultation was based on its analysis of the results of the June elections, which showed that Liberal opinion was no longer unanimous. Whereas the Liberals in Wallonia and Brussels remained overwhelmingly opposed to King Leopold, Liberal opinion in Flanders had become more fluid. The party added, however, that if its proposal were to be accepted the results of the consultation would have to be more than a simple majority:

> It is necessary that in each region of the country at least half the people pronounce in his [the King's] favor; it is

[29] *Les élections législatives du 4 juin 1950* (Institut De Solvay, Bruxelles: Editions de la Librairie Encyclopédique, 1953).
[30] *Recueil,* p. 857.

necessary, too, that he receive [the vote of] at least two-thirds of the whole electorate.[31]

The Liberals suggested that Leopold make his opinion known regarding their proposal.

The King answered in a message dated August 5 that he would have to be guided by the Constitution:

> I have been asked if I would consent to fix a specific percentage which I would consider necessary in order to reassume the exercise of my prerogatives. My answer to that question can only be dictated by the Constitution. . . . It has been suggested, by evoking the two-third's rule which is demanded for every constitutional change, that the same percentage be applied to the consultation. That proposal is not justified since the Constitution and the law provide that Parliament by a simple majority name the Regent, state the end of the "impossibility to reign," and determine when the throne is vacant.
>
> In order to be constitutional the consultation can only be considered as an opinion rendered by the electorate to Parliament and to the King.
>
> By the law of July 19, 1945, Parliament reserved for itself the power to decide the end of the "impossibility to reign." It therefore falls to Parliament, clarified by the national consultation, to pronounce the end of the "impossibility to reign," in full liberty and under its own responsibility.
>
> It would be inadmissible . . . for the King thus to restrain the powers of Parliament.[32]

These words can only be called smug, the words of a man to whom a compromise was offered but who rejected it as beneath his dignity, taking refuge behind constitutional niceties. Leopold could not have failed to realize that a consultation, no matter how camouflaged, was unconstitutional. He

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 858.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 861.

himself had suggested a consultation several times before, and the pro-Leopold party had been the first to place the proposal before Parliament in 1945. Then and subsequently it was rejected as unconstitutional. In 1949 it was no less unconstitutional, but the Liberals, eager to put an end to the dangerous schism that had existed in Belgium for almost ten years, were willing to make concessions. Leopold did not deny the constitutionality of a consultation because he reckoned that such a consultation could be *favorable* to him. He denied the constitutionality of a fixed percentage larger than a simple majority because these results could be *unfavorable* to him. Leopold held out for a consultation whose results would be determined by a simple majority, yet even these results he would not consider absolutely binding:

> I do not intend to be tied to specific figures. When I declared in my letter of June 22, 1948, that I would abdicate "if this consultation does not result in an indisputable majority in favor of the restoration of my constitutional prerogatives" I wanted to make known that in considering the results of an eventual consultation, my only care would be to conform *to what appeared to me,* without any possible doubt, to be the will of the nation, taking into account not only the number of votes cast but also the circumstances which accompanied the consultation and the inferences drawn from these circumstances.[33]

On August 11, 1949, the Catholics and the Liberals formed a coalition cabinet under the premiership of the Catholic Gaston Eyskens. They agreed to hold a consultation, but no details were announced. The Socialists expressed their firm opposition thus:

> Does the Parliament need further clarification by means of such a consultation? The P.S.B. does not think so. The

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 862. Emphasis added.

> balloting of June 26 was sufficiently significant . . . following which the P.S.C., having placed at the head of its program, as in 1946, a solution identical to that set out in the King's message, received only 2,187,310 votes, whereas 2,604,421 male and female electors decided in favor of the parties opposed to that solution.[34]

Furthermore, the Socialists declared that if, in spite of their opposition, a national consultation were held, they would consider a simple majority insufficient and a personal interpretation of the results by the King as totally inadmissible:

> It would be inexcusable to expose the country to the dangers of a popular consultation if it did not bring about a definite solution to the royal question. A discussion would inevitably spring out of the problem of interpreting the results if no accord were reached beforehand regarding the subject.[35]

The Consultation

The Eyskens Government spent the fall months of 1949 preparing for the consultation. A legislative commission was appointed by the Government to study the constitutionality of the consultation. The Commission's report appeared on December 22, 1949, and supported the consultation. The report included a minority note written by Victor Larock, the author of *A quand la lumière?*, and a fellow Socialist from Flanders, Henri Fayat, disagreeing with the majority opinion and declaring the consultation to be unconstitutional.

The report and the minority note were of interest, but not so much because of their findings and opinions—these were predictable considering the political composition of the Com-

[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 862–63.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 864.

mission. It was the reasoning behind each opinion which was remarkable. The majority opinion, basically Catholic, claimed that the consultation would be an advisory vote and not a referendum, and it pointed out that the Constitution was silent on advisory consultations. The majority reasoned that the legislature had residuary powers to handle those things not specifically forbidden by the Constitution. Had not the legislature interpreted the Constitution and used its residuary power when it passed the law of July 19, 1945, regarding the Regency? The Constitution was silent regarding the manner in which the Regency should be brought to an end, and the legislature was legitimately entitled to interpret this silence:

> The Houses dispose of the residue of sovereignty. Beyond their legislative or political function they exercise the sovereign function in the place of the nation from which all power is derived. The fundamental principle of our constitutional law flows from the existence in Belgium of a parliamentary constitutional regime as well as from Articles 25 and 78 of the Constitution.[36]

The minority note, on the other hand, interpreted the consultation in the opposite light.

> Such procedure [the consultation] was not provided for by any disposition of the Belgian constitution and one would take great liberty with regard to the latter to pretend that, on such an important point which touches so intimately the functioning of our representative regime, omission was the equivalent of permission. . . . To justify . . . the constitutionality of the project by evoking the residuary sovereignty of the legislative power, to support [the contention] that the Houses are able to adopt such a

[36] *Rapport fait au nom de la commission spéciale sur la consultation populaire au sujet de la question royale* (Chambre des Représentants, 22 décembre 1949; Projet de loi instituant une consultation populaire au sujet de la question royale), p. 13.

> project for the simple reason that nothing in the Constitution explicitly forbids them to do so is, in reality, to pretend that the Houses can reverse constitutional order indirectly when they are not able to do so directly.[37]

Whether or not the two major parties realized it, they were reversing their basic position on the royal question. Hitherto, the Catholics, by defending King Leopold and his ideas about the monarchy, had been supporting a conservative, legalistic interpretation of the Constitution, claiming that the Constitution was to be interpreted and enforced strictly to the letter as it appeared in the document of 1831 and in its subsequent amendments. The Socialists, on the other hand, by opposing King Leopold and his theories of the monarchy, had been supporting, under the impact of universal suffrage and political parties, a broadened interpretation of the Constitution and its amendments. According to them power had come to rest in a strong legislature which could interpret the Constitution in the light of evolving customs, whether or not such customs had been formally added to the basic law. The law of July 19, 1945, gave to Parliament the authority to determine when the Regency should come to an end. At that time, the Socialists and their allies argued that because the Constitution was silent on the matter, Parliament could legislate and thereby fill in the gap left in the Constitution. In 1945 the Catholics had rejected this line of reasoning, claiming that Parliament could not act merely because the Constitution was silent. Now in 1950 the reasoning was reversed. Catholics championed a broadened interpretation of the powers of Parliament under the Constitution, while the Socialists clung to a narrow legalistic conception.

On March 12, 1950, approximately 5,500,000 Belgians (the total number voting in the elections of June, 1949, was 5,635,452) went to the polls to answer this rather ambiguous

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 38–40.

Table 2

Consultation of March, 1950, Results by Province in Actual Number of Ballots Cast and in Percentage

Province		Ballots Cast	
		Actual Number	Percentage
Flanders			
Antwerp	Yes	514,889	68
	No	241,011	32
East Flanders	Yes	529,789	71.8
	No	207,737	28.2
West Flanders	Yes	430,778	74.7
	No	146,040	23.3
Limbourg	Yes	——— [a]	83
	No	——— [a]	17
Wallonia			
Liége	Yes	244,678	41.7
	No	341,182	58.3
Namur	Yes	115,373	53
	No	102,551	47
Hainaut	Yes	267,311	35.8
	No	477,207	64.2
Luxembourg	Yes	83,696	67
	No	44,445	33
Brabant (Brussels area including Brussels)			
	Yes	554,173	50.6
	No	530,405	49.4

[a] Correct figures not available.

question: "Etes-vous d'avis que le Roi Leopold III reprenne l'exercice de ses pouvoirs constitutionnels?" [38] It was agreed

[38] The question posed to the electorate was ambiguous for the very reasons that Victor Larock had pointed out in his minority note: "An affirmative response is perfectly clear. A negative response is obscure. 'No' could signify either abdication or the postponement of the question. . . . Many in good faith believe that they have to choose between a return to the throne and the indefinite suspension of power." (*Rapport fait au nom de la commission*, pp. 50–51.)

Many, too, were of the opinion that a vote against the King was a vote for a republic. The Catholics did little to quash this erroneous belief.

Table 3

"Yes" Vote in Consultation of March, 1950; P.S.C. Vote in 1949; Liberal Vote in 1949; Combined P.S.C. and Liberal Vote in 1949, by Provinces, in Percentages

Province	P.S.C. Vote 1949	Liberal Vote 1949	Combined Liberal and P.S.C. Vote 1949	"Yes" Vote 1950
Limbourg	73	10	83	83
East Flanders	52	15	67	72
West Flanders	56	13	69	75
Antwerp	51	11	62	68
Luxembourg	58	16	74	65
Namur	43	12	55	53
Brabant	37	22	59	50
Liége	32	15	47	41
Hainaut	25	14	39	36

that the ballots would be counted on a regional basis, i.e., Wallonia, Flanders, and Brussels, but no percentage was officially decided upon. On October 18, 1949, a joint communiqué had been issued by Leopold and Eyskens in which Leopold declared that if the percentage in his favor was less than 55 per cent he would not reassume the exercise of his prerogatives. He did not say, however, that he would abdicate.[39]

Balloting was secret and compulsory, but each elector had the option to cast a blank or deliberately invalidated ballot; 2,933,392 electors (or 57.68 per cent of the *valid* ballots) voted "yes," while 2,151,881 (or 42.32 per cent of the *valid* ballots) voted "no." Approximately 10 per cent of the *total* ballots cast were *invalid.* Table 2 gives the results of the consultation in actual ballots cast and in percentage by province. Table 3 compares by province the vote on the consultation with the

[39] *Recueil,* p. 872.

ballots cast in 1949 by the Catholic party and by the Liberal party, the two parties supporting the consultation.

The country as a whole voted for Leopold by 57.68 per cent, but in Flanders the pro-Leopold vote was 72 per cent. All the Flemish provinces voted for his return. Wallonia voted against Leopold by 58 per cent, and Brussels voted against him by 52 per cent. Yet, in Wallonia, only two provinces voted against him by more than 50 per cent, Liége by 59 per cent and Hainaut by 64 per cent. Both these provinces were areas of heavy industry and mining and were the largest centers of Socialist strength in Belgium. In Flanders the province with the lowest percentage favorable to the King (68 per cent) was Antwerp, the port of whose major city, Antwerp, was a stronghold of the Federation of Socialist and Communist trade unions (F.G.T.B.). The province with the highest percentage favorable to the King (83 per cent) was Limbourg in Flanders, predominantly agricultural and considered to be the most conservative and Catholic in the nation. Brabant offered the most interesting phenomenon. This is the province in which Brussels is located and is the only province bisected by the language frontier, i.e., the invisible line which separates Flanders from Wallonia. In other words, Brabant is approximately half French-speaking and half Flemish-speaking. It split 50–50 on the consultation, while the city of Brussels voted against the King by 52 per cent.

Comparing the "yes" vote in 1950 with the election results in 1949, one observes that in Flanders the percentage favorable to the King in 1950 was larger than the combined vote for the Catholic and the Liberal parties in 1949, while in Wallonia the percentage was smaller. In Flanders, the consultation verified what the 1949 election had indicated, the strong pro-Leopold sentiment among Flemish Liberals. The increase in the consultation over the combined Catholic-Liberal vote in 1949 can be attributed in part to votes from the minor Flemish parties that had drawn ballots away from

the Catholic party in 1949 but which remained pro-Leopold on the royal question, and in part to other defection from the Left. According to a study made by the Solvay Institute of the University of Brussels, in the country as a whole, about 15 per cent of the members of parties on the Left voted against their party's position on the royal question. This was true particularly of the Liberal party, and if the reader compares Wallonia with Flanders, this was particularly true in Flanders. In Wallonia and in Brussels the consultation seemed to indicate that party regulars in both the Catholic party and the Liberal party abandoned their party to show their opposition to Leopold.

The Liberals, who had been responsible for the compromise which had allowed the consultation, now refused to vote with the Catholics to implement the law of July 19, 1945. They considered the percentage favorable to Leopold to be too small to satisfy their requirements.[40] Although the Liberal party would not vote for Leopold's return, it agreed to continue negotiations with him. The Catholics and the Socialists, on the other hand, remained adamant, the Catholics for an unconditional resumption of power, the Socialists for abdication. Parliament was once again at an impasse.

On March 14, 1950, Prime Minister Eyskens left Brussels for Geneva to receive Leopold's decision. The King refused to act and threw the initiative back to Parliament:

> The national will has been clearly expressed. Under the circumstances, I can only remain at the disposition of the nation. True enough, the fact that the royal question has become an element in the platforms of political parties is not without difficulty. But these exclusively political difficulties are not my responsibility. I personally only assume the obligations which are derived from my dynastic role.
>
> It is up to Parliament to take political responsibility. In virtue of the power conferred upon it by the law of July 19,

[40] See this Chapter, pp. 182–83.

1945, the organs of national sovereignty must without further delay solve the present crisis.[41]

Leopold's maneuverings were beginning to darken the mood of the nation; above all, the Flemish-Walloon animosity was growing ominous. On March 19 the National Walloon Congress (a Walloon separatist organization) met at Namur:

> The permanent committee of the National Walloon Congress states that the national consultation has underlined the division of Belgium into two totally opposed groups; it states that the great majority of the citizens of Wallonia and Brussels has pronounced clearly against the return of Leopold III; it considers that the resumption by him of his royal prerogatives would seriously disturb the duty of Walloon loyalty to the Belgian state; it calls all organizations hostile to the return of the King to unite in common battle; it salutes with great emotion the thousands of workers who have been engaged in the battle until now; it affirms its irrevocable will to bring about by all the means in its power the triumph of the cause of Wallonia, part of the cause of democracy and liberty; it decides to sit permanently and to keep ready for any eventuality.[42]

On the same day, another separatist group, Free Wallonia, spoke of breaking away from Belgium if the King should return:

> The general council of Free Wallonia . . . proclaims that the restoration of Leopold III would have as its consequences the disaffection of the Walloons with regard to the Belgian state and [proclaims] that the Walloon movement could be led to revise its doctrines and demand the liberation of Wallonia in conformity with the charter of the United Nations.[43]

[41] *La Libre Belgique,* March 17, 1950, p. 1.
[42] Taeda, "De la consultation populaire au message royal," *Le Flambeau,* XXXIII, No. II (April, 1950), 169.
[43] *Ibid.*

The religious issue, too, became a serious part of the growing conflict:

> Moreover the maneuverings after the consultation have crudely displayed the desire of the Flemish clergy to establish their hegemony over the whole of Belgium. They plan, under the cover of a King who has become their instrument, the planting on our soil of a regime [like that of] Salazar. . . .[44]
>
> The clergy, at the instigation of its chief [Cardinal Archbishop Van Roey at Malines] has waged an open campaign in favor of the return of the King. Cardinal Van Roey has gone so far as to invoke in his [the King's] behalf the fourth commandment (Honor thy Father and thy Mother), and Monsigneur de Tournai publicly censured Chanoine Demine, who had the temerity to think . . . that the royal question was a free question.[45]

On March 19, 1950, Eyskens and his coalition Catholic-Liberal cabinet resigned, unable to solve the dilemma. For the next two weeks, first Eyskens, a Catholic, and then Albert Devèze, a Liberal, tried in vain to form a new government. On March 19 the Socialists, at an extraordinary national congress declared by the unanimous vote of 1,162 delegates:

> The P.S.B. remains disposed to try any peaceful national solution other than the return of Leopold III to the throne. . . . The action committee will continue and will extend its activity by all the means in its power until Leopold III, finally understanding that the interest of the country passes beyond his [personal interest], makes room for the fifth King of the Belgians.[46]

On March 22, Paul-Henri Spaak appealed to the King to consider the greater good of his country and to abdicate in favor

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 179.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 166.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 168.

of his son. Spaak said that the Sovereign should consider that his honor had been vindicated by the results of the consultation and should step down:

> Sire, the discussion which swirls around your person is fundamental and essential: it is the very functioning of our institutions; above all, it is the approval or condemnation of that which we thought we should have done during the war, at the hour of battle, for our independence and for our liberty. It is the whole concept of the Fatherland, of its interest and its duty. When all that is at stake, the minority will not give way; it will continue the battle. . . . Sire, Belgium, its unity and prosperity are in danger. Everything that the majority wants is not necessarily good; everything that is legal is not necessarily to be recommended.
>
> The great statesmen are those who first prevent certain problems from arising, and then who know how not to abuse victory.[47]

Spaak's appeal went unheeded. As a result, both Eyskens and Devèze failed to form a government, and on April 6 Prince Charles charged the Catholic Paul Van Zeeland with the task. The Liberals announced that they were still willing to compromise and would support Leopold's return but not unconditionally. The Catholics stood their ground, and Van Zeeland rejected the Liberal compromise. At this point the Liberals withdrew all support from Van Zeeland and rejoined the Left in its opposition to King Leopold. It was once again clearly the Catholic Right against the combined Liberal, Socialist, and Communist Left.

On April 13 Van Zeeland, still attempting to form a cabinet, flew to Geneva to consult with the King. On April 17 Leopold issued a statement which, for a moment, offered a measure of hope. For the first time he expressed the willingness to com-

[47] *Le Peuple,* March 22, 1950, p. 1.

promise. He would temporarily delegate power to his son, retaining for himself, however, the right to declare when that delegation had come to an end. In Belgium the statement was considered ambiguous. The Left saw the delegation as an indirect means whereby Leopold could reascend the throne. At a round table discussion of the King's proposal, the three major parties again reached a stalemate over attempts to agree on answers to the following questions: (1) Should the declaration of the end of the Regency and the delegation of power to Prince Baudouin take place simultaneously (in other words, should Leopold be allowed to reassume his powers even for a limited time)? (2) How long would Leopold remain in Belgium (in other words, would Leopold appear for the formal delegation of authority to his son and then resume his exile)? (3) Under what conditions would the King consider that it was time to reclaim for himself the powers of Head of State?

Leopold refused to help in resolving the stalemate. On April 24 he expressed pique at the parties for suspecting his intentions:

> In taking the initiative to attempt to put an end to the present crisis . . . you know full well that I was guided only by the desire to assure a just equilibrium between the rights of the majority and those of the minority and to make possible a reconciliation between Belgians.
>
> I will not hesitate to say that I am astonished . . . to witness the discussion that has come up regarding my presence in the country. . . . Guided by the proposals which had been submitted to me I made a suggestion; let it be accepted in the spirit in which I presented it. . . . There is no need whatsoever for guarantees which can add nothing to the value of my word.[48]

It appeared that the immovable object had met the irresistible force. As a result, on April 30, 1950, the Prince Regent dis-

[48] *La Libre Belgique,* April 26, 1950, p. 1.

solved Parliament and called for elections to be held on June 4.

The Elections of June 4, 1950, and the End of the Leopold Affair

As a result of the elections the Catholics received an absolute majority of seats in Parliament, though they did not receive an absolute majority of votes in the country, as shown in Tables 4 and 5. The increase in Catholic strength in the elections of June, 1950, as compared to the elections of June,

Table 4

Actual Vote and Percentage of Total Vote Cast for the House of Representatives by Each of the Parties in the Elections of June, 1950, Compared to the Figures for the Election of June, 1949

	1950		1949	
Party	Votes	Percentage	Votes	Percentage
P.S.C.	2,354,965	47.69	2,190,898	43.55
P.S.B.	1,704,360	34.51	1,529,720	29.75
P.L.B.	557,019	11.28	767,180	15.25
P.C.B.	234,325	4.75	376,765	7.49

Table 5

Distribution of Seats in the House of Representatives after the Elections of June, 1950, Compared to the Distribution after the Elections of June, 1949

Party	1950	1949	Gain or Loss
P.S.C.	108	105	+3
P.S.B.	77	66	+11
P.L.B.	20	29	−9
P.C.B.	7	12	−5

1949, was due in part to the fact that the P.S.C. had been able to prevent the formation of small, right-wing Flemish parties and in part to pro-Leopold members of parties of the Left, primarily the Liberals, who had to vote P.S.C. if they wanted to support the King. The Liberals lost in part because they were not able to carry out their fiscal program while they were in the Government from August, 1949, until March, 1950, and in part because of their vacillating position on the royal question. Many Liberals who wanted to be sure that opposition to Leopold would not slacken voted for the Socialist party even though by June, 1950, the Liberal party was once again firmly in opposition to the King. The success of the Socialist party was due primarily to the reasons given above but also to the appeal that it made for middle-class votes, a new phenomenon in Socialist campaigning.

The distribution of party strength in the various provinces, shown in Table 6, indicates that the parties maintained their

Table 6

Percentage of Total Votes Secured by the Various Parties in Each Province in the Election of June, 1950

Province	P.S.C.	P.S.B.	P.L.B.	P.C.B.
Flanders				
Antwerp	51	40	7	2
East Flanders	58	27	12	3
West Flanders	62	26	11	1
Limbourg	78	20 *		2
Wallonia				
Liége	33	46	13	8
Namur	45	42	10	3
Hainaut	26	52	12	10
Luxembourg	62	35 *		3
Brabant (Brussels area)	41	38	16	5

* Joint Liberal-Socialist ticket.

traditional strongholds. Limbourg again voted overwhelmingly for the Catholic party, but in Antwerp, industrial and dock workers reduced the Catholic strength in Flanders. Brussels again divided almost evenly between Socialists and Catholics, with the Liberals holding the balance. In Wallonia, the Socialists maintained their strength as the Catholics had in Flanders, but Luxembourg, the southernmost province of Wallonia, continued to give a strong majority to the Catholic party, for Luxembourg is essentially rural and deeply conservative.

On June 8, 1950, a Catholic cabinet was formed under the premiership of Jean Duvieusart. That same day, the Socialists in the House of Representatives threatened the Catholics:

> The Socialist group in the House states that the P.S.C. owes to the Flemish vote (the champions of *incivisme*) the gain of three seats which it has obtained in the House. It denounces before the country the extremely grave character of the decision announced today according to which the first action of the Government will be to call a joint session of the two Houses in order to bring the Regency to an end and to recall Leopold III to the throne.
>
> The Socialist group believes that by acting in this manner the P.S.C., which did not receive 50 per cent of the votes in the country as a whole, is deliberately rejecting the solution which alone can lead to national agreement; that it [the P.S.C.] abuses intolerably a majority of four seats; that it scorns the clear significance of the only election which the Constitution recognizes, i.e., that of universal suffrage, which offers startling proof that Leopold III is only the king of an essentially regional and partisan majority; and that the P.S.C. is placing the personal causes of the King above the evident and immediate interests of the working class and of the middle classes which have so long been neglected.
>
> The Socialist group addresses a solemn warning to the

P.S.C. that it will never accept that our form of government be placed before a *fait accompli* by a majority acquired at the price of justice and of a shameful alliance.

Knowing that our democratic institutions as well as our civil and social peace are in peril, the Socialist group will wage merciless war in Parliament, and if Leopold III is called back because of the wishes of his partisans, the Group and the Party will not cease to oppose both the King and his party.[49]

On June 27 Duvieusart announced that Leopold would soon return. That same day, the F.G.T.B. declared that if Leopold returned, the members of the Federation would no longer recognize him as king. On July 6, 1950, the Catholic government called the Houses into joint session for the purpose of implementing the law of July 19, 1945. The session began amidst violent opposition within Parliament, in Flanders and within Wallonia, in Brussels, and in the larger cities of Flanders. The debate which raged for the following two weeks added nothing that was not already known about the royal question. It is enough to say that the debate was a violent résumé of ten years of conflict. Considering the composition of the Houses, the vote at its conclusion on July 20 was inevitable.

By July, 1950, however, what was happening in Parliament was no longer important. Political action had failed, and the anti-Leopold forces were beginning to take direct measures of reprisal. On July 6, the first demonstrations began against the return of Leopold. In Charleroi workers struck for half an hour; in Liége, forty mines went on strike and workers' demonstrations took place in Le Centre. On July 9, 80,000 workers came to Brussels to pay homage to the Prince Regent and hear Paul-Henri Spaak praise the Regent, while everyone knew he was condemning the King:

> They thank you for never having despaired of the fate of the Fatherland, even during the blackest days of the

[49] *Le Peuple,* June 9, 1950, p. 1.

> war; for having shown your complete fidelity to our Allies, aiding them by having taken part in the Belgian resistance; for having carefully avoided all contact with the occupant and for having preferred the dangers of going into hiding to deportation.
>
> They thank you for having accepted, on the morrow of the liberation, the difficult task of Regent, for having exercised your functions in a scrupulously constitutional manner, for having done everything to maintain the prestige of the country, for having been the symbol of the unity of your compatriots.[50]

That the speech was illogical, that it was impossible to compare the wartime behavior of the captive Sovereign to that of his brother who held no position of authority until September, 1944, was no longer important either to the speaker or to the audience. There was only one objective, to prevent the return of Leopold, and every device, legal or illegal, would be used to accomplish it.

On July 10 there were demonstrations in Antwerp against the King, and between July 10 and 12 the entire "black country," the coal mining area centering on Charleroi, was paralyzed by strike. On July 12, 20,000 workers marched through Charleroi carrying banners with inscriptions such as: "Leopold III, symbol of unity of the *incivique* Catholic Party"; "Leopold III, the repudiated King without respect either at home or abroad"; "We defy Leopold III to put foot in Charleroi." On that same day there were strikes in Ghent, Namur, Mons, Le Centre, and in the Borinage. On July 14, the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, 10,000 demonstrators poured into La Louvière screaming "Leopold to the gallows"; "Abdication"; "Down with Leopold!"; "Hang him, hang him!" The demonstrators listened to Max Buset, the president of the Socialist party:

[50] *Le Peuple,* July 10, 1950, p. 1.

> We find ourselves now in the Chambers [of Parliament] sitting in joint session with the "yes-men" of Malines. ["Les 'ja-ja' de Malines." "Ja" is Flemish for yes; Malines is the seat of the Cardinal Archbishop.] There will be no *joyeuse entrée* for their Beloved. I defy the Government to announce the day and the hour of the *joyeuse entrée*. There will be no speech from the throne. Leopold will not speak. When he shall ask for consultations not one Socialist will respond to his appeal. The Socialist ministers of state will resign. You will see! We will give back our decorations with an expression of our contempt. The P.S.B. solemnly declares that it repudiates the King; that it no longer recognizes him as king of the Belgians. The P.S.B. declares solemnly that it will carry the fight until abdication! [51]

That same day, July 14, there were strikes and demonstrations by the F.G.T.B. at Verviers. Some of the banners carried by the pickets read: "Sire, your son is our King"; "Our Queen Astrid did not deserve this"; "Would you accept Liliane Baels as Queen?"; "Shh, don't speak of the resistance! Leopold is listening!" The President of the Regional Committees of Communal Action of the F.G.T.B. told the demonstrators:

> He is the king of one party, the P.S.C., which because of its majority wishes to reinstall a Saxe-Coburg-Gotha despite the working class which will not stop the fight until the king of the Germans has abdicated. During two wars, our soldiers fought for liberty against foreign tyranny. They do not want the workers to accept today a dictatorship which would be installed on the throne along with Leopold III.[52]

The Catholics remained deaf to the opposition, and on July 20 the united chambers voted to end the Regency. A total of 197 Catholics and one Liberal voted for the King; the So-

[51] *Le Peuple,* July 15, 1950, p. 1.
[52] *Ibid.*

cialists, the Communists, and the remaining Liberals left the chamber and refused to vote. On July 22, King Leopold, Prince Baudouin, and Prince Albert returned to Belgium. They arrived early in the morning and were driven immediately to Laeken.[53] During the afternoon the King addressed his subjects by radio and asked them to unite and forget, but half the population was willing to do neither. The next day there were mass meetings at Liége and Brussels. Paul-Henri Spaak told the crowd gathered at the Place des Martyrs in the capital:

> We are in a relatively difficult situation. "Relatively" because our adversaries are completely wrong if they imagine that they have won this battle which has lasted since May 25, 1940. The King refused to follow the advice of his ministers in order to be able to continue that foreign policy which he had premeditated, that monstrous policy which placed on the same footing the Germans who had attacked us and the Allies to whom we called for help.
>
> This fight has gone on for ten years. This is not the final phase. We Socialists have decided to continue the combat. Perhaps we will lose this or that battle, but because we represent political honor and the memory of resistance, and because our cause is fine and just, we will eventually win! [54]

On July 26 the Regional Committees of the F.G.T.B. met at Charleroi to hear Arthur Gailly tell the delegates:

> The object of our battle is the abdication of Leopold III. The King is responsible. . . . We have only one resource to make him listen to reason. He will have to hear our complaints because this time we will act. The future depends on him and on him alone; one word, only one word, and the movements which we are about to unleash

[53] Even in 1960 Belgians speak of the "cowardly" return in the early morning hours when there would be few people on the streets.

[54] *Le Peuple,* July 25, 1950, p. 1.

> will stop immediately; if not . . . the strike. . . . It will be total, resolute, firm, disciplined.[55]

On July 27 thousands of demonstrators marched through the streets of Brussels singing *La Marseillaise* and *L'Internationale* and chanting "Leopold to the gallows!" "Abdication!" One-half block from the doors of Parliament, at the corner of Rue Royale and Rue de la Loi, Spaak joined the agitators and led them to the royal palace. There pro-Leopold demonstrators met anti-Leopold groups and shouts of "Long Live Leopold" "Down with Leopold" "To Moscow" "*Incivique*" mingled with each other. That same day the F.G.T.B. sent a letter to Prime Minister Duvieusart announcing the first strikes which would gradually spread and paralyze the entire national economy. The next day, July 28, there were approximately 500,000 strikers in Wallonia. The trains leaving Belgium were held up at the frontier, and highways were impassable after strikers had covered them with nails. By July 30 the strikes were almost total throughout Wallonia, and in Flanders, the port of Antwerp could no longer operate. Barricades were built in the streets of Liége, and at Grâce Berleur, near Liége, three Socialist demonstrators were killed by the police. In the capital, insurgent strikers controlled half the railroad stations, and transportation within the city was at a standstill. Violence broke out between the tramway workers belonging to the non-striking Catholic union and those of the striking Socialist union. From France trade unionists came across the border illegally to aid their Belgian brothers, and by July 31, 100,000 demonstrators had started to march on Brussels. The roadblocks which were set up on and around the plains of Waterloo were ineffective, and the demonstrators infiltrated by the thousands into the capital. Belgium was poised on the edge of civil war.

On July 30 the National Confederation of Political Prisoners

[55] *Le Peuple,* July 26, 1950, p. 1.

and their Descendants (no more unbiased and apolitical group could be found in Belgium) called a meeting to which were invited the leaders of the three major political parties. All agreed, including the delegates from the P.S.C., that abdication was the only solution if Belgium were not to be torn apart by revolution. A delegation was sent to Leopold and was received by him at 1 A.M. July 31. At 2 A.M. a cabinet meeting was called which lasted until 7:30 A.M. The remainder of the day was spent in conferences between the Government and the leaders of the three major political parties and finally between the Government and the King, his secretary and his personal secretariat. At 8 P.M., July 31, Leopold agreed to abdicate, but the communication announcing his decision was delayed until the following morning. During the night Leopold had misgivings. He had agreed earlier to delegate power to Prince Baudouin, who would ascend the throne as king automatically on September 7, 1951, on his twenty-first birthday. Leopold sought one last time to reserve for himself the right to decide, in consultation with his ministers, when the delegation of power to Baudouin should come to an end. His attempt failed, and at 6:45 A.M., August 1, 1950, the Minister of Public Education read the message of abdication to the press. On August 3 the abdication was submitted to Parliament, and on August 11, 1950, Prince Baudouin, now Prince Royal, took the oath of office as prescribed by Article 80 of the Constitution.