

# On the 'Two Faces' of right-wing extremism in Belgium

## Confronting the ideology of extreme right-wing parties in Belgium with the attitudes and motives of their voters

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Hans DE WITTE

Phd. in Psychology, Head of the 'Labour' section of the Higher Institute of Labour Studies (HIVA), KU Leuven

### I. Introduction

Belgium, like most West-European countries, has in the last decades been confronted with a remarkable electoral growth of parties on the far right. The chronology of this development, however, differed in Flanders and Wallonia (Ysebaert, 1994). Electoral support for Vlaams Blok in *Flanders* was fairly negligible in the early eighties (between 1 and 2%), but increased unexpectedly in the European elections of 1989 (6.6%). In the national elections of November 1991, Vlaams Blok managed to win no less than 10.6% of the total votes in Flanders, with the party's support even rising to 12.6% in the European elections of June 1994, a score which was almost repeated in the national elections of May 1995 (12.2 to 12.4%). The electoral gains of the extreme right-wing parties is more recent in *Wallonia*. Front National's breakthrough came with the European elections of 1994, with 7.9% of the vote, compared to only 1.1% in 1991. The smaller Agir party, a party limited to the Liege region, got 1.9% of the vote in 1994. Together, both extreme right-wing parties thus obtained almost 10% of the vote (9.8%) in Wallonia in 1994. At the national elections of 1995, however, the total percentage of these parties' voters fell to 6.3% (5.5% for FN; 0.8% for Agir).

The spectacular growth of extreme right-wing parties in Belgium poses various questions, for example as to the reasons for this development, and as to the appropriate responses to it. In this article, however, we will limit ourselves to the question of the *significance* of this phenomenon. There is, after all, a great deal of confusion in public opinion and in political debate about the nature of a *party* such as Vlaams Blok. Should Vlaams Blok be seen as an extreme right-wing party, as political commentators have fairly unanimously labelled it since its electoral gains in November 1991? Or is it a respectable, populist party, characterised by a popular, and hence hardly extreme message? The same confusion dominates when we look at the *voters* for such a party. Did they vote out of racist, or even fascist-like motives, was it an apolitical protest vote, or did they fall for a deliberately populist election campaign?

These questions will be answered by comparing the ideology of such parties with the attitudes and motives of their voters. First the profile and the ideology of the parties will be laid out, then the ideological profile and the electoral motives of the voters will be examined. The contrast between the two uncovers the

strategy which such parties follow in gaining votes. This strategy will be examined in a third section. The dangers which this strategy poses to the functioning of democracy will be considered in the conclusion. In answering these questions we will largely look at Vlaams Blok in Flanders. The electoral breakthrough of the Front National (and Agir) in Wallonia is, after all, a very recent development. Research into the ideology of these parties and their voters has still largely to be done, and the reliability of existing research into FN and Agir voters is uncertain, since so far only thirty of them have been interviewed. We will, however, refer to these findings when relevant.

The analysis of *extreme right-wing ideology* held by parties and their voters implies a definition of extreme right-wing attitudes. In general, five components of extreme right-wing ideology have been distinguished in the research literature (see e.g. Falter & Schumann, 1988; Mudde, 1995; for a review, see: De Witte et al., 1994). *Biological racism* refers to the belief in differences between races based on hereditary superiority, which leads to inequalities between 'peoples' based on biological grounds. In extreme *nationalism* the central concept is one of a homogeneous ethnic or national community, in which one's own 'national characteristics' are portrayed in a positive and strongly romanticised fashion. This national community is conceived as a strong, united group to which the individual is subordinate. A belief in the necessity of strong leadership is the basis of the *leadership principle*. This authoritarian concept of mankind ties in with the *rejection of parliamentary democracy*, which is seen as a weak or inefficient system of government. Such anti-parliamentarianism is linked to anti-democratic and anti-pluralistic views. These last express themselves in a *militant opposition to political opponents* (anti-socialism, anti-communism and resistance to any form of 'progressiveness').

These five central components of extreme right-wing ideology are related, representing different facets of a single ideology with its own internal logic. Thus anti-pluralism is an aspect of the concept of a homogeneous ethnic or national community (homogeneity excluding difference), while anti-parliamentarianism and the leadership principle are two sides of one coin. Also biological racism and extreme nationalism are related, if one sees the 'bloodtie' as the element which holds together the 'ethnic community' and distinguishes it from foreign peoples. The coherence of the various facets of extreme right-wing ideology is not coincidental. After all, they all come back to a single basic concept: the belief in the *fundamental inequality of individuals, groups and peoples* (see e.g. Cochrane et al., 1979; Hagendoorn & Janssen, 1983: 74). Peoples can, in this view, be ranked from superior to inferior on a genetic basis, while society should be hierarchically ordered (leaders versus followers). This elitism, or assumption of inequality, also implies that left-wing ideologies must be combated, since the basic value of equality is central to these ideologies.

## II. Can we speak of extreme right-wing parties?

Various journalistic studies concerning Vlaams Blok have appeared recently (De Moor, 1992; Gijssels, 1992 & 1994; Vander Velpen, 1992; van den Brink, 1993; Elbers & Fennema, 1993). Together with existing political research into this party and extreme right-wing groupings in Flanders (Verlinden, 1981 & 1991; Spruyt, 1994 & 1995) these studies allow us to sketch a profile of the ideology and significance of Vlaams Blok. Three important conclusions can be drawn from this analysis (De Witte, 1994).

Firstly the links of Vlaams Blok with the extreme right of before, during and immediately after the Second World War are remarkably strong. The political platform of Vlaams Blok explicitly refers to the nucleus of extreme right-wing ideology held by the pre-war extreme right-wing organisations in Flanders. The party also openly celebrates the leaders of such organisations. Thus Jef François, one of the leaders of the 'Algemene SS-Vlaanderen' during the Second World War, was a guest of honour at the Vlaams Blok election conference in 1988 (Gijssels, 1992: 246). *Furthermore* it is apparent that the links with the mosaic of extreme right-wing organisations active in Flanders in the 1960s and 1970s are noticeable. Almost all those elected in 1991 and 1995 were previously active in extreme right-wing organisations such as the fascistic private militia VMO, the intellectual think-tank Were Di and the activists' group Voorpost. The links between both periods are *finally* ensured by a number of key figures, the most important of whom take up leading positions in Vlaams Blok, for example Karel Dillen and Roeland Raes. Karel Dillen played a crucial part in bringing together the various fractions of the post-war Flemish far right, while Roeland Raes can be considered the ideologist and international contact of the extreme right in Flanders (Gijssels, 1992: 243-246 & 269-271; De Moor, 1992: 16-28 & 71).

We will examine here the first conclusion in particular, since it is crucial to our concern. The interested reader can obtain further information on the other two conclusions in the works cited above (see especially, De Witte, 1994). It should be mentioned that openly referring to pre-war organisations and their leaders in Flanders is - at first sight - probably less compromising than in most of the surrounding countries. After the war a romanticised historiography of 'great Flemish examples' was developed to minimise their involvement in, among other things, collaboration with the Nazi regime (Seberechts, 1992). Their selfless idealism was emphasised, while references to, for example, Nazi sympathies or involvement in the Nazi movement went unmentioned (cf. descriptions of Cyriel Verschaeve, who became active in the 'Algemene SS-Vlaanderen' during the Second World War).

From the founding of Vlaams Blok the party made references to '*solidarism*' as a system for organising the socio-economic framework of society (see the Vlaams Blok leaflet 'Grondbeginselen' [Basic Principles], 1979: 9-10). Central to solidarism is the emphasis on the organic coherence of society. In this view, all those who belong to the same people experience a strong and deeply rooted feeling of ethnic solidarity. This feeling of mutual 'belonging' excludes a competition of interests within one nation and leads to corporatism: all segments of the population should cooperate, because by definition they strive for the same goals. Given the emphasis on the organic and homogeneous coherence of the ethnic community, this socio-economic view is typical of extreme right-wing ideologies (Verbeeck, 1994: 221-227). In developing its solidarist doctrines, Vlaams Blok based itself on the writings of two pre-war extreme right-wing organisations in Flanders: the 'Verbond van Dietsche Nationaal Solidaristen' (Verdinaso) and the 'Vlaams Nationaal Verbond' (VNV). Both organisations can be considered authoritarian, anti-democratic and close to fascism. Verdinaso saw itself as 'the sole bearer of the fascist revolution' (Vanlandschoot, 1975: 1744). The historian De Wever has shown that the VNV was from its very beginning conceived as a party that appealed to fascism, with the purpose of achieving a Flemish version of German national-socialism (De Wever, 1992).

References to a fundamental inequality between individuals and peoples is - as mentioned above - at the heart of extreme right-wing ideology. Such references are met fairly frequently in the Vlaams Blok. Thus, in its *Grondbeginselen* the

party emphasises the 'fundamental natural inequality and difference of individuals and communities' and opts for the building of a 'hierarchically structured community of natural and ethnic unity' (Grondbeginselen, 1979: 17-18). At its conference on immigration in 1984 Vlaams Blok reiterated its faith in the principle of inequality: 'It is one of our first and most difficult tasks to destroy the monstrous lie of equality. Individuals, peoples and races are not equal' and 'The left (...) bases itself on an ideal of equality which we find utterly unacceptable. With Nietzsche we say that true injustice lies in the claim for equal rights for everything and everyone' (Raes, 1984; Gijssels, 1992: 181-182 & 203).

We can deduce from Spruyt's detailed analysis of the various Vlaams Blok programs that this party's ideology is characterised by all the extreme right-wing concepts set out above (Spruyt, 1994 & 1995). His research also shows the ideological consistency of Vlaams Blok ideology. Support for an ethnic-nationalist state organisation, in which the national community is conceived of as a 'genetically unified ethnic community', is integral to this. The concept of nationality is thus based on the 'biological bloodtie'. Because the structure of the state should follow the 'natural ethnic structure', there is a wish for an organic and hierarchically ordered Flanders. The emphasis on an ethnic-nationalist statehood also implies that this should be mono-cultural and mono-racial. Political or ideological pluralism cannot be reconciled with this. Only ideologies which do not hinder 'the development of a constructive ethnic unity' are accepted by Vlaams Blok. Liberalism and Marxism are therefore rejected as ideologies reflecting ideas that oppose the interests of the ethnic group. Members of the community should accept that the ethnic interest has priority over all other interests. Political and civil liberties are limited by the principle of ethnic duty, which includes such duties as socio-economic productivity, child bearing in a monogamous marriage, and loyalty to the Flemish ethnic community. The rights of the individual are thereby 'subordinated to the primacy of the organic whole' (i.e. the 'ethnic community'). At a political level this view leads to the rejection of the existing parliamentary system, because this represents various interests which oppose one another and damage the general interest of the nation and loyalty to it. There are also signs of biological racism in Vlaams Blok publications. At a conference on immigrant workers in 1984 the concept of race was central, and among other things there was a call for 'a racism of mutual respect. This is not racial hatred, but the recognition of race'. In later publications this explicitly biological racism was exchanged for a 'cultural' racist discourse (see below).

The ideology and the links of extreme right-wing parties in Wallonia have so far been less studied. There are, though, a number of scientific studies dealing with the extreme right-wing movement from before the mid-eighties (see e.g. Verhoeyen, 1974 & 1975; Balace et al., 1994). Parties such as the Front National and Agir are, however, of fairly recent origin (founded in 1985 and 1989 respectively), so that they have so far not been as thoroughly analysed. In one study the ideology and the links of both parties were sketched (Brewaeys et al., 1992). This showed that the activists in both the Front National and Agir had previously been active in a variety of extreme right-wing organisations. Walloon extreme right-wing parties, like Vlaams Blok in Flanders, thus also have clear links to the extreme right-wing activism of the sixties and seventies. The analysis of the ideologies of both parties also leads to similar conclusions. The Front National concentrates on two kinds of themes in its programme and propaganda. Firstly 'classic' extreme right-wing themes are developed, such as racism (anti-immigration), extreme nationalism, anti-communism and anti-socialism. Furthermore, a number of 'poujadist' topics are touched on, such as anti-stateism and resistance

to taxation. The Front National is strongly in favour of a unified Belgium, the greatest point of difference with the smaller grouping Agir, which supports a more independent Wallonia. Furthermore, Agir appears to be more strongly influenced by the concepts of the French 'New Right' (la Nouvelle Droite).

We can thus conclude that Vlaams Blok as a party (and also the central leadership of the party) can indeed be seen as an extreme right-wing formation. With some reservations this can also be said of the Walloon parties Front National and Agir, despite the relative lack of research concerning these two. But to what extent can those who vote for such parties also be considered to be extreme right-wing oriented?

### III. Are those who vote for these parties an extreme right-wing electorate?

A number of studies have mapped the ideology of Vlaams Blok voters and the reasons for their voting behaviour. A first series of studies examined the aspect of 'racism', since it is one of the key concepts in extreme right-wing ideology. In a second study the whole spectrum of extreme right-wing attitudes was operationalised. We will look at the findings which emerged from each of these studies. Finally, we will analyse the attitudes and motives of the Front National voters.

#### A. Voters for Vlaams Blok: racists or apathetic?

##### a. Motivation for their voting behaviour

In the research literature concerning the significance of a vote for an extreme right-wing party, two broad schools can be discerned (Van Holsteyn, 1990; Billiet & De Witte, 1995). The first of these states that the choice for an extreme right-wing party is based on political-ideological considerations: the voter knows the views of such a party and expresses his or her *preferences* for such views. The second tendency, on the other hand, emphasises that the choice for such a party is an expression of *protest*: one does not choose for that party, but against all the others. Thus revulsion with the political system, rather than an agreement of views, is central in this view.

In order to investigate the extent to which voting for Vlaams Blok expresses a preference or a protest vote, a secondary analysis was carried out (De Witte, 1992a) on the data of a study concerning the attitudes of Belgians towards immigrants (Billiet et al., 1990), which were collected in 1989. Given the time at which data-collection was carried out, the main concern was with voting in the 1989 European elections. Which attitudes best statistically discriminated Vlaams Blok voters from voters for the other parties, was investigated by means of discriminant analysis. The selection of these attitudes was limited to those views included in the original study. Three sorts of attitudes were included in the analysis as possible expressions of a preference for Vlaams Blok: a moderate form of nationalism (typifying item: 'I am proud of my own ethnic group'), a negative view of immigrants because one perceives them as a socio-economic or cultural threat, and biological racism, which was already described as an aspect of extreme right-wing ideology. In order to investigate the extent to which voting for Vlaams Blok can be considered a 'protest vote', a measurement of 'anomia' and 'political powerlessness' were added to the analysis. 'Anomia' refers to feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness and social isolation (Srole, 1956) and can, together with



'political powerlessness', be taken as an indication of (political and social) dissatisfaction and revulsion.

The results of the analysis revealed that a negative view of immigrants formed the *chief motive* for voting Vlaams Blok in 1989. Nationalistic or racist (extreme right-wing) considerations played no significant part in motivating such voting. Nor was a vote for Vlaams Blok a protest vote, although feelings of political powerlessness were of limited influence in deciding on this party as against the larger parties (Christian Democratic Party, Socialist Party, liberals). The choice of Vlaams Blok in 1989 thus reflected a choice in favour of an anti-foreigners position. At that moment voters for this extreme right-wing party were not voting from racist or extreme right-wing considerations, and could thus - as a whole - not be characterised as an extreme right-wing electorate.

Soon after the 1991 elections the Flemish Interuniversity Centre for Political Opinion Research (ISPO) interviewed a representative sample of about 2,700 Flemish voters with an extensive questionnaire (Carton et al., 1993). Among them were about 230 Vlaams Blok voters. Subsequently, the motivation of their voting has been investigated in two ways. In a first study the answers to the open question 'Why did you vote for this party?' were analysed (Billiet et al., 1992). The results of this analysis confirm the findings of the study of the European elections. In 1991, as in 1989, voting Vlaams Blok was inspired by a negative attitude towards immigrants with undertones of political protest. There were no explicit references to aspects of extreme right-wing ideology set out above. For 60 to 70% of Vlaams Blok voters, an anti-immigrant attitude was the motive for their vote. For about 40% political dissatisfaction and mistrust of the established parties were relevant. The researchers also found that the two motives are correlated: for a section of Vlaams Blok voters, references to immigration were coupled with expressions of disappointment with politicians and the political system. A significant number of them seems to have channelled resentment about the way politics works into a rejection of immigrants.

Asking about the reasons for voting behaviour by means of an open question does, however, have its drawbacks. In answering this question the voter can be influenced by the discussion of voting behaviour in the media, which can lead to the reproduction of 'standard answers' which have little to do with the 'real' motives for the vote. That is why voter motivation in the 1991 elections was also analysed indirectly. Discriminant analysis (De Witte & Billiet, 1993a) and logistic regression analysis (Billiet & De Witte, 1995) were used to compare the attitudes of Vlaams Blok voters to those of voters for the other parties. This time a much more extensive set of opinions could be tested, including authoritarianism, socio-economic conservatism and aspects of socio-cultural conservatism (e.g. rejection of the liberalisation of abortion and emphasis on traditional sex-roles). As previously, right-wing extremism was not explicitly mentioned. The survey only included a scale for (biological) racism. The results of these analyses again confirmed that voting for Vlaams Blok was chiefly determined by a negative attitude towards immigrants. All other opinions - including the extreme right-wing aspect of 'racism' - were of subordinate or negligible importance. The earlier findings with regard to the European elections thus seem to hold for the parliamentary elections of 1991. At the time of writing there are no research findings concerning the 1995 parliamentary elections yet available. It is thus not yet possible to check these findings against the most recent national elections in Flanders.

b. How homogeneous is the Vlaams Blok electorate with regard to their attitudes?

All the studies of the reasons for voting Vlaams Blok mentioned above have the important disadvantage of not distinguishing *within* the electorate of each of the various parties. After all, there could be some right-wing extremists among Vlaams Blok voters. By analysing this electorate as a whole, we lose sight of these internal differences. For this reason a typology has been developed concerning the attitude which can be adopted towards one's own and other peoples (De Witte & Billiet, 1990; Billiet & De Witte, 1991). Three sorts of attitudes were brought into the typology: moderate nationalism, a negative attitude towards foreigners, and (biological) racism. Again, only one aspect of extreme right-wing ideology was involved in the analysis. It appeared to be possible to order the three attitude scales cumulatively: only those in favour of their ethnic group adopted negative attitudes towards foreigners. Both attitudes were held by racists. Thus four types of respondents were distinguished. The *cosmopolitans* (17%) reject all three views. They do not feel (strongly) attached to the Flemish people, do not take a negative view of immigrants and reject racism. The *'nationalists'* (about 29%) adopt a positive attitude towards their own ethnic group, and combine this attitude with a positive view of immigrants and a rejection of racism. The next type (about 25%) goes a step further: they combine a positive attitude to their own people with a negative view of other peoples, although without adopting racist views. They can be considered *'ethnocentrists'* in the double sense given to the term by Sumner (Scheepers et al., 1989). The *'racists'* (roughly 18%) take the final step: they combine the views of *'ethnocentrists'* with racist attitudes. Their rejection of immigrants is thus supported by a belief in the genetic superiority of whites relative to non-whites. Finally there was a small group of *'indetermined'*, whose profile could not be determined because of lacking data or inconsistencies. This group will be left out of the further analysis.

Table 1

Distribution of the voters (European elections in 1989) according to the four 'ethnic types'

Ethnic type	Agalev (Green party)	SP (Socia- lists)	VU (Flemish Natio- nalists)	CVP (Christian Demo- crats)	PVV (Liberal party)	Vlaams Blok (Extreme right-wing)	Blank or invalid	All respon- dents
1. Cosmopolitans	45,3	15,9	5,8	11,1	20,2	6,3	14,7	17,0
2. Nationalists	34,7	18,3	26,9	41,8	15,5	9,4	29,4	28,8
3. Ethnocentrists	12,0	28,6	30,8	20,2	26,2	46,9	29,4	24,5
4. Racists	1,3	23,8	21,2	18,8	19,0	31,3	11,8	18,5
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Note: The percentage of the 'indetermined' is not mentioned in this table. The sum of the (column) percentages therefore does not amount up to 100%.

This typology and voting behaviour in the 1989 European elections were cross tabulated against one another (De Witte & Billiet, 1993b). Data concerning voting behaviour in 1991 is, unfortunately, not available, because the typology was not used in the ISPO study mentioned above. A cross-table can, of course, be read in two directions, both of which will provide us with relevant information. Firstly, we will examine the extent to which the various party electorates divide themselves among the four types. This gives us an idea of the ideological composition of the various electorates in 1989. Table 1 contains this information.

Voters for the ecological party Agalev were largely cosmopolitans (45.3%) and nationalists (34.7%). The electorate of the Christian Democratic CVP were characterised by an over-representation of nationalists (41.8%). Among voters for the social democratic SP ethnocentrists (28.6%) and racists (23.8%) were marginally over-represented. The same was true for voters for the moderate Flemish-nationalist VU (30.8% and 21.2% respectively). Voters for the right-wing liberal PVV and those whose votes were blank or invalid, were fairly evenly spread among the four types. Vlaams Blok voters were the opposite of Agalev voters. Almost half of the Vlaams Blok voters (46.9%) showed to be 'ethnocentrists', while something under a third (31.3%) belonged to the 'racist' type. This implies that almost 80% of them held negative views of immigrants. Further, a very small number of cosmopolitans and nationalists were found among them. Despite a certain differentiation among Vlaams Blok voters, these findings confirm that the majority of Vlaams Blok voters cannot be considered extreme right-wing voters.

The 'racist' type can be taken as a partial indicator of an extreme right-wing electorate, given that 'racism' was used as a - limited - operator of right-wing extremism. The actual number of right-wing extremists is probably much lower, since this would need agreement with all the other aspects of extreme right-wing ideology set out above. Estimates using the Eurobarometer polls lead us to believe that only 1.6% of Europeans can be regarded as right-wing extremists (Falter & Schumann, 1988: 96-110). Nevertheless, investigating the voting behaviour of the 'racists' can give us a first indication of the degree to which right-wing extremists (here operationalised as 'racists') vote for extreme right-wing parties such as Vlaams Blok. The findings of this analysis show that the largest proportion of the 'racist' group voted for the Christian Democratic CVP and the social democratic SP in 1989: 35% and 27% respectively. A smaller proportion voted for the right-wing liberal PVV (14.4%) or the moderate Flemish-nationalist VU (9.9%). Only 9% of them voted Vlaams Blok. Of the rest, 3.6% gave blank or invalid votes, while only 0.9% voted for the ecological party 'Agalev'.

We can therefore conclude that Vlaams Blok voters, in both 1989 and 1991, did not vote because of (biological) racist motives, and that - seen the other way - only a limited number of racists appears to have voted Vlaams Blok in 1989.

### *B. Vlaams Blok voters: an extreme right-wing electorate?*

In all the studies mentioned thus far, only (biological) racism was used as an indicator of extreme right-wing views. But to know for certain whether or not Vlaams Blok voters should be regarded as right-wing extremists, the entire range of extreme right-wing ideology should be brought into the analysis. This has only been done in one study (De Witte et al., 1994). The various parts of extreme right-wing ideology were operationalised by means of six items, given to respondents as part of a follow-up survey in early 1991. The results of this explorative study confirmed the findings of the earlier studies.



First of all it became apparent that Vlaams Blok voters in the 1989 European elections did not score highest on the scale of right-wing extremism, although they did concerning their voting intentions at the moment of the interview in late 1989. At both times, however, Vlaams Blok voters as a whole scored below the neutral midpoint of the scale, so that they cannot be viewed en masse as right-wing extremists. About 20% of them scored above the neutral midpoint, and can thus - to a certain degree - be seen as holding extreme right-wing views. This percentage was, however, just as high in most other electorates - with the exceptions of Agalev and the SP.

In a second stage the entire group of interviewees was divided according to their score on the right-wing extremism scale. Those who scored above the mean (about 20% of those interviewed) were analysed separately and asked what party they had voted for in the European elections of June 1989. This second analysis showed that the majority of them had voted CVP (38.6%) or PVV (20.5%), while fewer than 5% of them had voted Vlaams Blok. Another 13.3% voted SP, 10.8% VU, 6% Agalev en 6% blank or invalid. A more stringent selection of those with extreme right-wing views, including only those who agreed with at least 5 of the 6 statements, led to the same conclusions.

This last study allows us to conclude definitely that Vlaams Blok voters are not right-wing extremists, while extreme right-wing voters largely vote for parties other than Vlaams Blok. A certain degree of caution is, however, necessary, since the number of Vlaams Blok voters in the study just discussed is very small (only about 20), while the voting behaviour discussed is that of 1989 rather than 1991 or later. More recent data concerning extreme right-wing attitudes is not, however, available.

### *C. Are Front National voters an extreme right-wing electorate?*

As mentioned in the introduction, little research has yet been done concerning the attitudes and motivation of voters for extreme right-wing parties in Wallonia. The research available only allows conclusions to be drawn with regard to Front National (FN) voters. In the studies carried out by PIOP, the Walloon opposite of ISPO, after the 1991 elections, thirty FN voters were interviewed. The limited number of this sample clearly allows provisional conclusions only, but the available material does seem to lead to conclusions parallel to those for Flanders.

Firstly, FN voters reject foreigners to a far greater extent than any other electorate (Aish-Van Vaerenbergh, 1994: 229-230 & 236-237). The analysis of open questions concerning voting behaviour further shows that a majority of these voters explain their vote for the FN from a negative attitude towards immigrants (Frognier, 1994: 240). A slightly smaller group does so from political protest. These motives and their proportions agree fairly closely with those presented in studies of Vlaams Blok voters. They do not, however, show that FN voters do not have extreme right-wing attitudes or motives for voting. This question can only be answered by analysing where the respondents place themselves on a 'left-right' axis (Claeys & Desmarez, 1994: 136-137). This shows that only a minority of FN voters describe themselves as 'extreme right-wing', although a small majority (55%) describe themselves as 'right-wing' (including the category 'extreme right-wing'). When all respondents who consider themselves to be 'right-wing' are taken together, it appears that only a minority of them (a mere 12.5%) voted FN. Most voted for the Christian Democratic PSC or the right-wing liberal PRL. Altogether these findings thus suggest that also FN voters should not be consi-

dered right-wing extremists, although this conclusion - given the slender basis of the findings - should provisionally be treated with the necessary caution.

#### IV. The strategy of the 'two faces' bridges the gap between voters and party

The contrast between the ideological views of Vlaams Blok and the views of its voters partially explains the confusion in public opinion concerning the significance of (the electoral advances of) the far right. It is, after all, an essentially ambivalent phenomenon. The huge gap between the extreme right-wing ideology of Vlaams Blok and the more moderate opinions of its voters naturally leads to the question: how can an extreme right-wing party attract voters who do not themselves hold extreme right-wing attitudes? In answering this question we will base ourselves on the insights of Van Donselaar, who has analysed the development of extreme right-wing parties in the post-war Netherlands, and the adaptive strategies which they used (Van Donselaar, 1991). His analysis has implications wider than the situation in the Netherlands and can be used to explain the ideological gap between Vlaams Blok voters and 'their' party as well. After sketching the central findings of Van Donselaar's research, we will attempt to apply his analysis to the Belgian situation, or more specifically to the case of Vlaams Blok in Flanders. Studies of the strategies used by the Front National or Agir in Wallonia have not been carried out as yet.

##### A. *The strategy of the 'two faces'*

Van Donselaar's analysis leads to two important conclusions. Firstly, he shows that also the post-war extreme right-wing parties in the Netherlands developed fairly directly from the extreme right-wing organisations which were active in that country before, during and immediately after the Second World War. Since the Second World War, however, extreme right-wing parties have operated in a social climate which is deeply hostile to their ideology and action. This forces them to adopt the strategy of the 'double face'. In order to continue in existence and - a fortiori - to grow, a political movement needs two groups: voters and activists. Without voters a party can gain no position of power, while without activists the party cannot carry out its ideological goals or convince voters to vote for it. Once in power a party without activists also lacks the people to put its ideology into practice. The hostile post-war social climate confronts the contemporary extreme right with an important dilemma: how to reconcile appeal to the voters with mobilising the activists? In order to attract voters these groups have to avoid any reference to their ideological background. Identification with fascism or Nazism would discredit the movement and scare off voters. Being associated with the occupation, collaboration and the persecution of the Jews would lead to pronounced revulsion and antipathy. It is thus in the interest of organisations on the far right to appear moderate to the voters and to make an impression of decency.

The reverse of this moderate profile is, however, that a too far-reaching denial of the ideological principles would disillusion the activists. These would lose interest if a movement or party became too 'respectable' and lost its radical attraction. In order to keep such supporters, and because they also want to achieve their ideological goals, extreme right-wing organisations must show their real, radical face to their members.

The way in which extreme right-wing organisations present themselves is thus dependent on the audience to whom they are speaking. In this context Van Don-

selaar speaks of the difference between 'front-stage' and 'back-stage'. A moderate, respectable face is shown to the electorate ('front-stage') in order to win votes, while the torch of pre-war fascism is passed on and kept burning within the party ('back-stage'). This 'two-face' strategy makes it clear that the meaning of an extreme right-wing party can only be understood when one also looks 'behind the scenes'. The 'public face' of party spokesmen and the party's media profile only give one side of the story. Studies of the attitudes of those who vote for the party also give no relevant information on the ideology of such a party, since the electorate has not been attracted by a consciously extreme right-wing campaign. A party such as Vlaams Blok deliberately seeks to take a more moderate, non-aggressive stance in public, and a central concern is with producing an acceptable, respectable image.

The strategy behind this 'charm-offensive' is, however, more complex than at first appears. In order to attract voters certain aspects of extreme right-wing ideology set out above are reformulated in popular terms. The ideology as a whole is, after all, hard to 'sell', especially in its extreme form. Facets of it can, however, appeal to sections of the electorate, if they can be 'translated' into concepts which are closer to opinions already current in large sections of the population. In this way extreme right-wing parties can create an image of being populist parties 'who say what you think'. The populist themes chosen are not, however, coincidental: those themes are chosen which can still be seen as watered-down symbols of extreme right-wing ideology. This can be shown with the two aspects of extreme right-wing ideology around which Vlaams Blok has successfully created a populist image: racism and anti-parliamentarianism.

### B. From 'everyday' racism to 'cultural' racism

The electoral research discussed above shows that Vlaams Blok chiefly attracts voters through its negative attitude towards immigrants. This sort of 'everyday' racism should not be confused with 'biological racism', since it is much vaguer and more general in content, and sees no biological, and unchangeable, basis for the inferiority of other peoples. This 'everyday' racism was not invented by Vlaams Blok. In the West the assumption of white superiority to other races is several centuries old (see e.g. Nederveen Pieterse, 1990). It is therefore hardly surprising that opinion polls from the sixties show that the cultural difference of immigrants causes resentment in some sections of society, such as blue collar workers (De Witte, 1990: 58-61; De Baets, 1994). The economic crisis of the seventies and eighties was an additional factor that reinforced the feeling of being in competition with immigrants among the same groups in society (De Witte, 1992b).

The theme around which Vlaams Blok could build its image was thus 'there for the taking' on its entry into the political forum. The party could take advantage of already existing feelings among broad layers of the population. However, in the early period this was only done lightly. Only one paragraph of the party's statement of principles mentions immigration. Only in 1984, when Le Pen in France showed how electorally viable this theme could be, did it become the keynote in the image of Vlaams Blok (Gijssels, 1992: 202 & 266). But taking up 'everyday' racism does not imply a belief in 'biological' racism. That is why the far right in Europe created '*cultural racism*', in which an element was added to the cultural aspects of everyday racism. In this view different peoples are characterised by *distinct* and *immutable* cultures, which are mutually *exclusive*. Central to cultural racism is the idea that culture is the essence of ethnic identity, and must thus be maintained unchanged, since the ethnic community would otherwise lose its iden-

tity. Any form of cultural pluralism is thus seen as threatening, not only for one's 'own' culture, but also for the 'foreign' culture, which would similarly lose its individuality. This attempt to maintain the people's cultural identity is put in fairly absolute terms: differing cultures are seen as *irreconcilable*. This is especially claimed with respect to Islam. It is claimed that those who grow up in an 'Islamic culture' are by definition unsuited to integration in a non-Islamic culture, such as our own. Their removal is thus seen not only as necessary to maintain the Flemish identity, but also in the interests of the immigrants themselves. These 'culturally uprooted people' are seen as only able to find a home in the culture of their country of origin. In this way the far right also presents itself as the defender of the rights of the immigrants themselves: 'only we take their real needs into account'.

It is the addition of the static idea that cultures are immutable and irreconcilable that gives this form of cultural racism a more ideological character. By the addition of this aspect, cultural racism becomes a bridge between 'everyday' and 'biological' racism. The positions of biological racism can now even be put in a cultural cover, which makes this ideology seem less extreme and less 'unsellable'. The emphasis on the biological, and thus inherited nature of differences between races only needs to be shifted to 'unbridgeable' cultural differences. Such cultural racism furthermore links up with the emphasis on the homogeneity of the ethnic community, as is the case in extreme nationalism (see above). Vlaams Blok proposals and the statements of leading members of this party contain fairly explicit cultural racism. Thus proposal 6 ('rejecting integration') of the '70 proposals for the solution of the problem of foreigners' contains just about all the elements outlined above (De Winter, 1992: 7-9). Also arguments in favour of withdrawing recognition from Islamic worship ('In recent years it has become clearly apparent that there is a fundamental and unbridgeable contradiction between Islam and western values'), and in favour of setting up a separate educational system for the children of 'non-European foreigners', show aspects of such cultural racism.

The emphasis on cultural racism does not mean that biological racism has died out among Vlaams Blok activists. References to such biological racism seem to be avoided largely because of tactical considerations. In 'branch organisations' Vlaams Blok gives a much clearer view of its intention. In the eighties, Karel Dillen's son Koen wrote in the then NSV (Nationalistic Student Movement) periodical *Signaal*: 'In order to guarantee the continued existence of our culture and our people as an organic unity, we must keep the race pure (...). In a pure and self-conscious Germanic people, peace, loyalty and honour will live again, for once the influences of Eastern decadence have disappeared, the people will automatically return to their true nature (...). That is why our nationalist struggle is a struggle against foreign influences (...) in which no mercy is possible, for it is a life or death battle (...).' (Gijssels, 1992: 206 & 279). Koen Dillen still works on the Vlaams Blok party periodical and - as far as can be discovered - has never distanced himself from the views he expressed earlier. Furthermore, Vlaams Blok also took up biological-racist positions during its conference on immigration in 1984 (see above).

### C. *Political dissatisfaction as a 'translation' of anti-parliamentarism*

The electoral studies, as stated above, reveal both a negative view of immigrants, and, as a secondary reason for voting Vlaams Blok, a *negative attitude towards politics*. This undertone of political protest also has a long history. For

decades there has been a popular discourse in our country which involves being dismissive of 'politics' and politicians (see e.g. Huyse, 1969). Politicians are dismissed as 'in it for the money' and nepotists 'all tarred with the same brush', while politics is portrayed as discreditable, 'a dirty business' and 'six of one and half a dozen of the other'. By taking a stand on this issue Vlaams Blok was thus able to feed on a phenomenon which again already existed among broad sections of the population. This led to the much-repeated slogan 'This can't go on' and to the powerful motto 'Punishing the political mafia' in the campaign for the 1991 elections. The traditional parties were repeatedly described by Vlaams Blok as a 'gang' and the *Wetstraat*, on which the parliament-building in Brussels is situated, was described by Vlaams Blok member Dewinter as a brothel (De Moor, 1992: 59).

Political protest does not, however, amount to anti-parliamentarianism, even though the one can be an extension of the other. In its proposals however, Vlaams Blok constantly presents itself as a limited advocate of existing democratic institutions. That this goes further than criticising abuses of the existing democracy, is apparent in the model constitution which this party presented for a future 'Flemish Republic' (Van Hauthem & Verreycken, 1990: 106-132). A central feature is the concentration of power in the hands of a small group of administrators, and the limitation of the influence of parliament, the political parties and the unions. At a party conference in 1985 Vlaams Blok, in the person of De Lobel, then head of the party's research service, made its point of view even clearer (Gijssels, 1992: 229). It was stated that: 'Our choice is for a real democracy: a democracy in which participation in power is open to all according to their capacities and competences. Participation must be (...) in proportion to competence. If this is not the case, participation is itself the greatest threat to the common good (...). Out of ignorance, voters will endanger their own safety.' And in the brochure 'Liberty and Security' the same author shows himself to be in favour of introducing a voting qualification and repealing compulsory voting, arguing that 'responsibility is being passed on to those who have as much understanding of politics as a cow has of computing' (Vander Velpen, 1992: 152). This explicitly anti-democratic and elitist view clearly refers to the extreme right-wing concept of inequality.

This elitist, anti-democratic view still does not show the extreme anti-parliamentarianism so characteristic of the fascist-like VMO in the seventies. In the past decades, Vlaams Blok does not appear to have been guilty of explicit anti-parliamentarian statements. This is probably again a tactical decision. It is, after all, remarkable that Karel Dillen himself was in 1981 described by far-right-spotter Verlinden as one of the pioneers of the increasing anti-parliamentarianism of the extreme right-wing organisation *Were Di* (Verlinden, 1981: 385). Hans Carpels, director of Vlaams Blok's Nationalist Training Institute, and Edwin Truyens, who ran the Vlaams Blok research service in the early eighties, at that time also left little room to doubt their anti-democratic and anti-parliamentarian attitudes. 'It is simply the case that people are unequal and shall remain so, so that one cannot design and prefer a form of state organisation based on equality, such as democracy', Carpels wrote in 1981 (Vander Velpen, 1992: 109). Truyens' statement is even more explicit: 'Parliamentary democracy and democracy as such are evils which we must continue to suffer for a while, but which should be replaced as soon as possible by the efficient government of specialists' (Gijssels & Vander Velpen, 1989: 94). Certain key elements of the extreme right-wing ideology set out above are present in this statement: anti-parliamentarianism, the principle of inequality and the resulting elitism referring to the 'leadership principle'. Behind Vlaams Blok's position as a 'party of protest' there is, then, a much stronger and ideologically based anti-parliamentary position.



## V. Conclusion

The comparison of the ideas of Vlaams Blok as a party with those of its voters leads to a remarkable contrast. A chasm yawns between them, which far exceeds the infamous 'chasm between politicians and voters' about which so much has been written since the elections of November 1991. The studies discussed show that Vlaams Blok voters - in general - cannot be viewed as right-wing extremists. Journalistic and political research does, however, show that the party itself and its leaders are clearly extreme right-wing. The cause of this chasm is largely the strategy which typifies extreme right-wing parties in post-war Western Europe. The unpopularity of extreme right-wing ideology since the Second World War has forced Vlaams Blok to cultivate two faces: a civilised, decent face for the outside world, and a radical, extreme right-wing face for the members, for whom extreme right-wing ideology remains the basis of their political action, and is passed on to new generations of militants. When presented to the voters, aspects of this extreme right-wing ideology are translated into popular terms, so that they connect to concepts held by the population. The success of this strategy can be read from the motives given by Vlaams Blok voters for their electoral behaviour. They refer to 'watered down' aspects of the extreme right-wing ideology: a rejection of immigrants (rather than biological racism), with an undertone of political protest (rather than antiparlamentarianism).

The conclusion of this article is, therefore, that Vlaams Blok poses a threat to our democracy. This conclusion is hardly new. Others have already indicated how this party's position on immigration threatens the constitutional state (De Verontruste Juristen, 1992; Vlaamse Raad, 1992), while the occasional riots in which the party has been involved threatened to disrupt democratic processes. But the analyses presented in this article add two new elements to these findings.

Firstly, the ideology of the extreme right, due to its emphasis on the basic inequality of individuals and peoples, is in conflict with democracy, in which the principle of legal equality is fundamental. The principle of equality has an important place in the Belgian Constitution, in the European Convention on Human Rights, and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This principle of equality refers particularly to the necessity of treating individuals and groups on equal terms, and is thus foremost 'non-discrimination' (Rommens & Jossart, 1992; Vermeire et al., 1992). The extreme right-wing principle of inequality is, primarily, ideological. This ideological principle of inequality leads, however, to proposals of discriminatory measures (cf the '70-point programme', which calls, among other things, for the setting up of a separate education system and a separate social security system for immigrants), so that we may conclude that this principle of inequality is indeed contrary to the democratic principle of equality, and thus poses a threat to democracy.

Vlaams Blok (and its ideology) not only threaten democracy, they also *deceive* it. This party, from tactical considerations, does not show its true face. The way in which Vlaams Blok presents itself, the party keeps silent about an important part of its message and goals. This makes real dialogue with this party and its leaders impossible. Instead, Vlaams Blok abuses the trust of the voters and their powers, which leads to the danger that this party will use the votes it gains for other ideological goals than the voter envisaged. It could be argued that there is in every party a gulf between the ideas of the party leadership and the electorate, but the attitudes of one are, in the other parties, simply an extension of the attitudes of the other. There does appear to be a difference in intensity: the voters probably subscribe to (one of) the basic principles of the party, while party leaders inte-



grate these principles into a logically coherent ideology and subscribe to them more fully (see e.g.: Middendorp, 1991: 237-255). With an extreme right-wing party such as Vlaams Blok there is, rather, a division between the voters and the party management. While the voters find themselves, ideologically, largely at the 'democratic end' of the political spectrum, this is no longer the case with the party leadership. This is a result of a strategic choice, whereby the undemocratic ideology is fearfully kept from the common gaze. Simply stated, the motto of a party on the extreme right wing, since the Second World War, thus amounts to: 'In public we say what the voters think, while in-house we think what cannot be said anymore'.

### *Abstract*

*In this article, we analyse the ideological differences between extreme right-wing parties and their voters in the Flemish and Walloon part of Belgium. Extreme right-wing ideology consists of five core elements: (biological) racism, extreme ethnic nationalism, the leadership principle, anti-parliamentarianism and an anti-leftist attitude. All these attitudes refer to the basic value of right-wing extremism: the belief in the inequality of individuals and (ethnic) groups. An analysis of the ideology of the Vlaams Blok in Flanders shows that it adheres to these core elements of extreme right-wing ideology. An analysis of the attitudes and motives of the voters of this party, however, shows that they cannot be considered as right-wing extremists. The ideological gap between the Vlaams Blok and its electorate is due to the strategy of this party, since it cultivates 'two faces': a populist, moderate face in order to attract votes, and a radical extreme right-wing face in order to recruit and motivate militants. In Wallonia, less is known about the ideology of right-wing parties and that of their voters. Current research however, suggests that the conclusions from Flemish research may very well be generalized to Wallonia as well.*