

The First Feminist Wave in Belgium

The RoSa-factsheets aim to familiarise you with the scope of equal opportunities in Flanders. Each factsheet probes the situation in a specific area. Broad themes as well as specific ones are put into the spotlight, depending on the relevance and/or availability of information and numerical data. We do not intend to offer exhaustive information, our primary aim is to sketch the position of women in Flanders in a surveyable and accessible way. Since its founding in 1978, RoSa is the place in Flanders to look for information and documentation about equal opportunities, emancipation policy and women's studies.

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In the year 1830 woman's position in the young country of Belgium isn't really enviable. The Civil Code, based on the Code Napoleon, is downright discriminatory. Women are completely submitted to the husband's marital power. In the political sphere, democracy is limited to moneyed male citizens. Due to the levy suffrage, women, just like men with insufficient income, have no voting right. Working women have to do with considerably lower wages than their male fellow workers. Women's labour is of little consequence, conditions of employment are extremely bad. The uncertain situation of many female workers leads to prostitution and exploitation. Moreover, men are not expected to assume responsibility for illegitimate children. According to the bourgeois ideal that is gaining approval, a married woman's place is at home. Her highest and most natural task is to care for the children.

The pioneers focus on education

GIRLS' EDUCATION

In the years 1830 - 1840, the quality of girls' education is absolutely poor, if it exists at all. It is completely left to private initiative and it is mainly in the hands of the Catholic Church. Continued education for girls is nearly non-existent at that moment. One of the first women in Belgium who takes steps to remedy that situation is Zoé Gatti de Gamond (1806-1854). According to Gatti de Gamond and her kindred souls, such as Zoé Parent, education is the driving force behind woman's liberation. Solid education is believed to eliminate the intellectual gap between man and woman. Mentality will change and equality between men and women will follow automatically. She phrases her ideas in "*De la condition sociale des femmes au XIXe siècle*" underlining that education is vital to improve woman's situation. In 1835 Zoé Gatti de Gamond starts two schools, together with Eugénie Poulet: one to educate adult female workers and the other to train impecunious girls to become a teacher. Her soul mate Zoé Parent also keeps her end up: together with her husband Constantin Héger she develops a famous girls' institute. In 1847 Zoé Gatti de Gamond is appointed the first inspector of the Brussels nursery and primary schools and for the girls' Teachers Training Colleges.

After her mother's death, Isabelle Gatti de Gamond (1839-1905) continues her work. She is the driving force behind the monthly review *Education pour la femme*. By the agency of Isabelle Gatti de Gamond, the first municipal girls' school is established in Brussels in 1864. She is appointed headmistress. The school offers a complete curriculum of lower secondary education, which is quite new. A year later, the first technical school for girls is established in Brussels. The first *Cours d'Education pour Jeunes Filles* is very successful and Isabelle Gatti de Gamond's example is soon to be copied. The founding ladies bring some fresh air into the Belgian girls' schools. There is no religious education, the influence of the Catholic Church is non-existent and, more important, for the first time girls get a full training. Isabelle Gatti de Gamond and her followers take advantage of the liberal government policy. From 1860 onwards liberals establish a network of folk schools attempting to break catholic influence. Liberal city councils all over the country follow the example of Isabelle Gatti de Gamond and decide to establish girls' education as well, with the aim of training good wives and mothers in the first place. At the same time catholic education exerts itself to improve the teaching programmes. In 1892 Isabelle Gatti de Gamond enables girls to attend a pre-university training, by adding an extra department to her school. Only in 1879 and 1881 secondary teachers training and lower secondary state education are provided for by law, to be followed by higher secondary education in 1925.

SITUATION AT THE UNIVERSITIES

Universities remain male strongholds until the late nineteenth century. Brussels opens its doors to female students in 1880, Liège and Ghent follow in 1881 and 1882. In Louvain no women are allowed until 1920. The first female university students are chiefly interested in sciences, medicine and pharmacy. Yet it isn't easy for girls to get a job after graduation. Advanced studies are considered mainly as a way of enhancing one's intellectual substance, not to effectively start working. Two well-known cases illustrate the difficulties. Isala van Diest (1842-1905) graduates in 1877 in medicine at the Bern University after having been refused by Louvain. In order to get her diploma ratified in Belgium, she has to attend extra courses at the Free University of Brussels (ULB). Even that is not enough. Isala van Diest has to appeal to the Law of 20th Mai 1876. According to its Article 43, Parliament may define the conditions for women to be permitted to practice certain branches of medicine. Finally, at the age of 42, she is allowed to practice her profession.

Marie Popelin (1846-1913) graduates in 1888 as the first female lawyer at the ULB. Both the Brussels Court of Appeal (1888) and the Court of Cassation (1889) oppose to female lawyers taking an oath. To their mind, women are not suitable for the lawyer profession, due to their so-called innate weakness, the demands of motherhood and the care for children. According to the judgement, women lack the strength to adapt properly to the specific demands of the bar. Not until 1922 women are admitted at the bar, too late for Marie Popelin, who died June 5th, 1913.

The feminist struggle reoriented

BOURGEOIS FEMINISM

The refusal of Marie Popelin means a turning point in history of the first feminist wave. It has become clear that education will not suffice to eliminate existing inequalities. As a reaction to the new situation, several bourgeois feminist organisations are established as from 1892. The new organisations are pluralist, that is, open to all political tendencies. In fact they are often liberal. They focus on legal emancipation of women, the right to work for women and the equality of women and men in wedlock.

Ligue belge du droit des femmes

Marie Popelin and Louis Frank establish the first feminist organisation in Belgium in 1892. Louis Frank, a lawyer and ardent defender of women's rights, had undertaken Marie Popelin's defence in 1888. Apart from them, Isala van Diest, Louise Popelin (Marie's sister) as well as Henri and Leonie La Fontaine are involved in the creation of the League. Its approximately 300 members mainly belong to Brussels liberal circles. *The Ligue belge du droit des femmes* (Belgian League for the Rights of Woman) protests against marital power of man and attacks existing discrimination in the legislation. Woman's suffrage does not come first for the League. Economic and legal equality take priority. Wives must be on equal terms with husbands. In a moderate way - the League operates through internal committees, conducts lectures and speeches - economic, moral, educational and political reforms are discussed. Sympathizing members of parliament such as Emile Vandervelde and Henri La Fontaine introduce the proposals in Parliament. The periodical *La Ligue. Organe belge du droit des femmes* is the organisation's mouthpiece. Spurred on by the League, an International Feminist Congress takes place in Brussels in 1897 as well as in 1912. The latter devotes a separate section to political emancipation of women and women's suffrage as a social right. From then onwards the League will dedicate itself to obtaining voting right for women.

Société belge pour l'amélioration du sort de la femme

The Belgian Association for the Improvement of the Destiny of Woman, established in 1897, is an explicitly liberal association. Like the League, it fights for legal reforms and equality between men and women to be established by law. Women must have access to all professions and earn the same wages as their male fellow workers. Moreover, female workers must, according to that association, be able to participate in the elections of the advisory councils for the industry, for labour councils and councils of labour judges.

Women's associations against alcoholism

Two organisations, established in 1899, especially focus on alcohol abuse, at the time believed to be a working class problem mainly. Women suffer a lot because of their husband's addiction. By giving them the vote, they would be able to influence legislative power to tackle the alcohol addiction problem. The *Alliance des femmes belges contre l'alcoolisme*, led by Marie Parent (1853-1935), fights alcohol abuse. Louis Frank, also an active member of the Belgian League for the Rights of Woman, takes part in the propaganda committee that organises all kinds of consciousness-raising campaigns. There are other tracks of cross-fertilization: in 1913 Marie Parent succeeds Marie Popelin as chairperson of the League. The second organisation, *the Union des femmes belges contre l'alcoolisme*, wants an absolute prohibition to be endorsed legally and believes in complete temperance.

The following associations may be included in the bourgeois feminist women's movement, all created before World War I:

- 1899 - Alliance belge des femmes pour la paix par l'éducation
- 1906 - Women's Union of Ghent
- 1908 - Lyceum - the first Belgian women's club; members are female scientists, artists, authors, social workers, led by Marie Popelin.
- 1910 - Antwerp Women's Association
- 1912 - Union des femmes de Wallonie

Efforts of various organisations in the struggle for legal reforms start to pay off. By the law of 10th February 1900, married women acquire the right to save money. A month later, women are allowed to conclude an employment contract and collect salaries. By the law of 6th April 1908, men are contributory for illegitimate children in the sense that the law withdraws the ban to track those children's fathers.

SOCIALIST FEMINISM

Just like the international socialist movement, Belgian socialists hesitate for a long time between two opposed points of view concerning women. On the one hand, socialists influenced by Proudhon reject the right of female employment. A woman's place is at the fireplace. A working woman is, according to Proudhon's followers, the cause of the population's illiteracy, of moral degeneration in factories and of all negative aspects in society. On top of that, lower paid women pinch men's jobs. On the other hand, there are socialists defending woman's right to work. They don't blame women for social evils which root in the defective division of labour.

The socialist women's movement considers the economic liberation of woman as essential. Civil and social freedom will only be realized if woman is economically emancipated.

In its Memorandum, the Belgian Workers Party, established in 1885, confirms equality without distinction of race, culture or gender. A year later, spurred by the Ghent socialist Emilie Claeys (1855-1943), the Socialist Propaganda Club for Female Workers is established and immediately joins the BWP. The club fights for woman's financial independence, right to work and "equal pay for equal work". Only then can woman emancipate intellectually and materially. Equal rights in the family, in politics and in the field of employment and pay are the aim. The Propaganda Club makes woman's voice heard within the BWP. Emilie Claeys is the first woman to have a seat on the bureau of the party's General Council, a position she gives up in 1895 because she gets no assistance. Together with Nellie Van Kol she establishes the *Hollandsch-Vlaamsche Vrouwenbond* in 1893. It defends equal treatment for men and women in the same areas as the Propaganda Club. It fights for equality in education and elimination of legal inequalities. In its periodical *Woman*, the Women's Union spreads advice for birth control, thus causing a stir.

From 1900 onwards, following the footsteps of the socialist confederations and corporations, several women's sections are established, uniting in the *Gentse Federatie van Vrouwengroepen*. Just like the First Socialist Feminist Congress held in Charleroi in 1899, and by extension the entire socialist women's movement, the Federation continues to cooperate closely with the socialist men's movement. As opposed to the bourgeois feminist movement (remember Louis Frank and the *Ligue belge du droit des femmes*), the socialist women's affairs were rather looked after by women.

Isabelle Gatti de Gamond, active already in proto-feminism, becomes a passionate socialist at an advanced age. In 1895 she starts up the review *Cahiers féministes* and in 1901 she becomes the first secretary to the *Nationale Federatie van Socialistische Vrouwen* (National Federation of Socialist Women). The Federation was to play an important part in giving women the vote, which made a great fuss in the socialist movement, among women in particular, before World War I. Around the turn of the century, a coalition of liberals and socialists work hard for the universal single vote system (for men). Liberals fear that to give women the vote will boost the Catholics. Women are reputed to be strongly influenced by the parish priest. That is why women's suffrage doesn't appear on the coalition agenda. Lalla Vandervelde summons all socialist women to support the party, which they actually do, until the National Federation decides to postpone the demand for women's suffrage. The decision meets with fierce internal opposition. The following years, socialist women bend their mind to socialism. Co-ops, national health services and trade unions become more important than the struggle for enfranchising women. The periodical *La femme socialiste*, which is much more middle-of-the-road than *Cahiers Féminines*, symbolizes the reversal.

CHRISTIAN FEMINISM

Christian feminism of the First Feminist Wave is fiercely anti-socialist. Social Catholics and Christian democrats want to build a Christian society, which is possible only if women participate in the movement. In order to improve woman's destiny, national health services and women's trade unions emerge all over the country, often created by highborn beneficent ladies and priests.

In 1892 the *Anti-socialistische Vrouwenbond* is established in Ghent aiming to stem the tide of growing socialism. It's an initiative of the Anti-socialist Workers Union. The fact that especially men and clergymen get involved with the establishment of Christian women's organisations is illustrated by the *Ligue des femmes chrétiennes de Bruxelles*, established by the Jesuit Van Langermeersch. The national health services and the co-ops flourish because they improve the actual living conditions of working women. It is again a priest, Rev. Kasseleers, who establishes a national health service in Antwerp in 1897, which is later united together with other national health services into the so-called *Mariakrans*.

The Christian women's organisations take the view that the first task of a woman lies with her family. Unequal power relations between men and women are not questioned then. The actions focus on religious education and on offering "respectable" recreational facilities such as study and theatrical performance. Intellectual development of woman is supplemented with an improvement of her material situation through national health services, co-op shops and savings banks. Many catholic works function on charity by ladies from nobility or bourgeoisie who actively engage in financing and operating the organisations.

In 1902, Louise Van den Plas (1877-1967) establishes a feminist pressure group, *Le Féminisme chrétien de Belgique*, together with René Colaert, a Member of Parliament and René Henry, a journalist. Looked at suspiciously by the catholic majority, the group strives for legal emancipation of woman, equal terms of employment, woman's suffrage and respect for woman's moral integrity. During the catholic congress in Mechelen in 1909, Louise Van den Plas explains the ideas of Christian feminism. Typical for that movement is the fact that Van den Plas defends a rise in women's salaries and professional opportunities for unmarried women, but at the same time she emphasizes that man ranks higher in the family hierarchy. Yet, woman must get more control over her own possessions. The question of unlimited employment for married women remains a tricky one. Preferably they stay at home, and for those women who do go out to work, better conditions of employment are demanded.

In 1912, together with Marie Elisabeth Belpaire and Cyrille Van Overbergh, a member of parliament, Louise Van den Plas buckles down to the *Ligue Catholique du Suffrage Féminin* that fights for enfranchising women. The League is a section of *Le Féminisme Chrétien*, and a response to the new liberal-socialist campaign for the universal single vote system. In an attempt to safeguard the catholic position of power, conservative Catholics as well as Christian democrats support the demand.

In the meantime, the Christian tradition of women's parochial activity brings forth two important characters: Victoire Cappe (1886-1927) and Maria Baers (1883-1959). Maria Baers operates in the Antwerp *Constance Teichmannsbond*, established in 1910 by Marie Elisabeth Belpaire, female exponent of the catholic Flemish Movement. The union wants to educate middle class women so that they can lead working class women. It supports Louise Van den Plas's principles of Christian feminism. Belpaire is also the inspirer of the Belpaire Girls Institute and of the Catholic Flemish High School for Women.

In Liège, Victoire Cappe is building a facilities network of national health services and trade unions for working women. In 1907, *L'aiguille*, women's syndicate for seamstresses is created in Liège. Baers and Cappe were to take charge of the *Algemeen*

Secretariaat der Christene Vrouwenvakverenigingen, an umbrella organisation for existing women's guilds and syndicates, established with the support of cardinal Mercier.

Apart from that, as from 1906, countrywomen unite in farmers' wives guilds. From 1911 onwards, those guilds are coordinated by the Farmers' Wives Union, a section of the Farmers' Union.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Again, Marie Popelin is the driving force behind closer cooperation within the feminist movement. From 1902 onward she organises "feminist diners" attended by representatives of different feminist organisations. The first real umbrella organisation is established in 1905: *the Conseil national des femmes belges - Nationale Vrouwenraad*. The largest input comes from liberal bourgeois organisations such as the *Ligue belge du droit des femmes*, the *Société belge pour l'amélioration du sort de la femme* and the *Union des femmes belges contre l'alcoolisme*. Socialist and catholic feminists distance themselves from the new council. Its attitude is moderate. The National Women's Council enables Belgian associations to make international contacts through the International Women's Council and through meetings it organizes every five years. As we said before, the *Ligue belge du droit des femmes* was internationally active as well: in 1897 and in 1912 it organizes an international feminist congress in Brussels.

LITTLE ATTENTION FOR ENFRANCHISING WOMEN

Compared with feminists in other countries, think of the English suffragettes, Belgian feminists were quite docile in their demands regarding woman's suffrage. When the Universal Plural Vote is ratified in 1893, the regulation only applies to men. As stated before, bourgeois and socialist feminist organisations no longer insist on woman's voting right. On the eve of World War I, the demand flashes up again as a result of the promised constitutional revision. In 1910 there is foundation of the *Union pour le suffrage des femmes*. Shortly afterwards, a special Committee Woman's Voting Right is created within the National Women's council. The *Ligue Catholique du Suffrage féminin*, established in 1912, is extended a year later to the *Fédération belge pour le suffrage des femmes*, spurred by Jane Brigode and Louise Van den Plas. The Federation tries to join different feminist purports around the central issue of suffrage for women. Soon after that, the war would throw a spanner.

Feminist demands crippled by World War I

The outbreak of the war in 1914 pushes feminist struggle into the background. Women return to traditionally acquired roles, charity becomes the central idea. The *Union patriotique des femmes belges*, established by Jane Brigoe, Louise Van den Plas and Marie Parent, is the most important women's organisation during the war. Its activities focus on offering nurses, kitchen personnel or cleaning women to organisations responsible for nursing the wounded or for food supply. Later on it becomes well known as a centre for providing seamstresses with work. It sets up a system of female home workers making clothes for remuneration. Apart from that, a lot of women are active in the *Nationaal Hulp- en Voedingscomité* and the Red Cross as a nurse or an assistant in food supply. Women in exile are employed in the English and French war industry. After the war, national heroines such as Edith Cavell and Gabrielle Petit will be honoured as resistance fighters. Cavell, a matron in a nursing home, had helped to set up escape routes for caught soldiers during the war. Gabrielle Petit was a spy for the allied troops.

THE TWENTIES: FAVOURABLE EVOLUTION IN THE POLITICAL AND LEGAL SPHERE

Women's efforts during the war do not result in more female political participation after the armistice. Just like before 1914, party politics are the big obstacle: Catholics are in favour of giving women the vote, liberals and socialists are against. The compromise of 9th May 1919 satisfies both parties: On the one hand, the single vote system (one man, one vote) is given to all men of 21 years and older. On the other hand, a limited group of women are given the vote with regard to the parliamentary level. War widows, single mothers whose son fell in battle, resistance fighters who had been taken captive may go to the polls from now on. On 7th February 1921, it is stipulated that further enfranchising of women may be fixed through an ordinary law instead of the time-consuming procedure of a constitutional amendment. In 1920 women of age are given the vote on the local level. On 24th April 1921 women go to the municipal polls for the first time. From now on they can stand as a candidate (municipality: 1921, province: 1921, Chamber of Deputies: 1920, Senate: 1921) and the law permits women to hold the office of major, alderman, town clerk or collector. Married women still need their husband's explicit consent. At the municipal elections in 1921, 196 women are elected, being 1% of all local councillors. Six women are appointed as mayor, thirteen women become alderman, 146 municipalities or 5 % count one or more female councillors.

Although the large majority of women are not allowed to vote, they are allowed to stand as a candidate. The socialist Marie Spaak-Janson is the first woman to get a seat through cooptation in the Senate - and in Parliament. The number of female members of parliament remains very low during the whole interbellum period. In the Senate there is the Catholic Maria Baers (1936) and VNV (Vlaams Nationaal Verbond) party member Odile Maréchal-Van den Berghe (1936). In the Chamber of Representatives we have Isabelle Blume for the socialists as from 1936 and Alice Degeer-Adère for the communists. Earlier, in 1929, the socialist Lucie Dejardin is elected a representative of the people.

In the field of civil rights there are some positive changes for women. From now on, women can be called to the bar. Germaine Cooreman is one of the first women in 1922-1923 to seize the opportunity. In 1923 the amount women are allowed to withdraw from their savings account without the husband's consent is increased. In case of a separation from bed and board, women from now on are entitled to full civil competence without the consent of their husband or a judge.

THE THIRTIES: CRISIS, FOR WOMEN TOO

After World War I, more and more women work outside the home as a result of increasing mechanization and shrinking home industry. The number of female factory workers as well as women working in the fast growing tertiary sector is increasing rapidly. Nevertheless, women's labour is still controversial. Housewives are more respected than women who have to work outside the home. Working mothers are believed to have a bad influence on their children. Therefore, socialist associations insist on a solid training for housewives and all kinds of social services for working women. The catholic movement goes further. Led by Maria Baers (1883-1959), secretary-general of the Christian women's unions, she opposes to work outside the home for women. Woman's "natural task" is the role of wife and mother. During the Thirties, things aren't easy for working women legally. Catholic-liberal governments issue discriminating measures. According to the law of 31st May 1933, salaries of female civil servants are reduced with 25% when the husband is a civil servant as well. A year later it is decided that all government places are reserved for men exclusively. In 1934 a Royal Decree permits the Minister of Labour and Social Precaution to define the proportion of married and unmarried female workers in different branches of industry. Two successive laws, in 1935, reduce salaries of female teachers and female civil servants.

Feminist resistance was bound to come. The 1935 laws were cancelled but government persists in its global policy. Protests are led by the association *Porte Ouverte*, established in 1929 on the initiative of Louise De Craene-Van Duuren, as a subsection of the international association *Open Door International*. In 1934 appears for the first time the magazine *La travailleuse traquée* in reply to the bill of the catholic senators Father Rutten, Paul Segers and Cyrille Van Overbergh. The senators try to exclude by law women from mining and working in offices and workshops. Step by step women find an audience, with premier Paul Van Zeeland to whom women's organisations make known their demands for the right to female employment in 1935. The meeting leads to the creation of the Committee for Female Employment (with among others Maria Baers, Isabelle Blume, Georgette Ciselet and Jeanne Emile Vandervelde). Gradually the discriminating measures regarding women and employment are withdrawn.

CHRISTIAN FEMINISM

The exponent of Christian feminism during the interbellum period is Maria Baers, chairperson of the *Algemeen Secretariaat van de Christelijke Sociale Vrouwenwerken*. This umbrella organisation unites the different Christian trade union federations for women, the *Nationale Verbond der Vrouwengilden*, the *Verbond der Studiekringen* and the *Katholieke Sociale School*. Around that same time, in 1920, the KAV (Catholic Labourers' Women) grew up as a socio-cultural formation organisation for working class women. As from the start, the *Algemeen Secretariaat van de Christelijke Sociale Vrouwenwerken* wants to pursue an independent line and be an all-embracing women's movement. Yet, the national health service soon merges with the *Christelijke Mutualiteit* while the trade union activities are assumed by the *Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond* (ACV). The independence Maria Baers keeps hammering at, is maintained, even when the association closes a deal to cooperate with the *Algemeen Christelijk Werkliedenverbond* (ACW) in 1924. From then on KAV-committees are allowed to send representatives to the ACW. From the start KAV is strongly influenced by church authorities, just like the organisation of the Christian middle class and bourgeois women, the *Christelijke Middenstands- en Burgersvrouwen* (CMBV), founded in 1952. The "female" part of the catholic segment is supplemented with the KVLV, a continuation of the female farmers union, created in 1911. That organisation largely depends on the *Boerenbond* (Farmers' Union) for its activities.

The *Vrouwelijke Katholieke ArbeidersJeugd* (VKAJ) educates youth according to Christian principles, strongly directed towards "Kitchen, Church and Children". Not the working woman but the good housewife and mother are the shining example of female catholic youth. Catholics join the church doctrine saying that man and woman each has a proper task to fulfil in society: woman looks after a - large - family while man earns the daily bread. Women's suffrage remains a point at issue. Louise Van den Plas especially continues her fight for women's suffrage with *Le Féminisme chrétien*.

THE SOCIALIST WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Two major pillars sustain the socialist women's movement during the interbellum period. On the one hand, there is the *Socialistische Vrouwen*, an association dedicated to obtaining equal political, civil and economic rights. During the 1920's and 1930's they also strive for more and better social services for working women: nurseries, laundries and people's kitchens, school meals etc. in order to make life easier for working women. Women's education is considered to be very important. Socialist women give lectures and in 1921 a school for propagandists is founded. One year later, socialists create an organisation that during the years to come will count hundreds of women members: the *Socialistisch Vooruitziende Vrouwen*. They are independent from the Church, but they do depend from socialist men's organisations. Material help in the form of a national health service is combined with education and consciousness-raising of socialist women. As to politics, municipal politics are considered to be a good field of activity for woman. Socialists think that women can perfectly well devote themselves to sectors like education and social affairs (children's well being, public housing, organisation of vocational training) on the local level. Apart from that, municipality is

considered to be the ideal field of activity for women, not only by socialists. "The municipal household" is seen as a continuation of the family. Socialists remain unwilling to women's voting right because they fear women will vote for the conservatives.

THE LIBERAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

During the interbellum period liberal women's organisations grow up all over the country. They either operate autonomously or they form a section of an existing liberal political association. In Brussels, for one, there is the *Société féminine de l'association libérale de l'arrondissement de Bruxelles* and the *Vrouwenafdeling van de liberale Vlaamsche Volksbond*. Just like the socialists, the women's sections are stimulated to deal with the "soft" divisions education and social matters.

After the Second World War: full voting right at last

During 1940-1945 women's demands are necessarily kept simmering. After the war the vote is given to women by the law of 27 March 1948. In 1949 the first legal elections take place in which women are allowed to take part. It is not an overwhelming victory for women: only six women are elected for the Chamber of Representatives, seven for the Senate. It would last until 1965 before Belgium has its first female minister: Marguerite de Riemaecker-Legot.

For the evolution of women's movement after 1950, we refer to the RoSa Fact Sheet nr. 3, "The second feminist wave in Flanders".

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