

General Election. - Defeat of Christian Social Government. - Resignation of M. Van Houtte. - Socialist-Liberal Coalition Cabinet formed by M. Van Acker. - New Government's Programme. - National Service Period reduced to 18 Months.

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The completion of Parliamentary action on the Bill for ratifying the E.D.C. treaty was followed by the dissolution of the Belgian Parliament on March 12, on which date the treaty had been ratified by the Senate after earlier approval by the Chamber of Deputies. As explained in 13569 A, the adoption of the E.D.C. Bill involved amendments to the Belgian Constitution which, under the Constitution itself, could not be legally carried out except by a Parliament specifically elected for that purpose.

The elections, held on April 11, were for a new Chamber of Deputies (212 members), for 106 of the 175 members of the Senate, and for new Provincial Councils. (Of the 175 members of the Senate, 106 are directly elected, 46 are chosen by the newly-elected Provincial Councils, and the remaining 23 are co-opted jointly by the directly-elected Senators and those nominated by the Provincial Councils.) In the elections to the Chamber of Deputies, the Christian Social (Catholic) Party lost 13 seats and thereby lost their small overall majority, the Socialists gained nine seats, the Liberals gained five seats, and the Communists lost three seats, the composition of the new Chamber (showing comparison with that elected in 1950) being as follows:

[Christian Socials](#)

[Socialists](#)

[Liberals](#)

[Communists](#)

[Others](#)

- A dissident Christian Social member, who was returned in Brussels, and a member of a Flemish right-wing group, who was elected in Antwerp.

In the direct elections to the Senate, the Christian Social Party returned 49 members (a loss of five), the Socialists 42 (a gain of five), the Liberals 13 (a gain of one), and the Communists two (a loss of one). With the subsequent appointment of Senators chosen by the Provincial Councils, and of co-opted Senators, the final composition of the Senate was as follows, showing comparison with the 1950 membership:

Christian Socials

Socialists

Liberals

Communists

Of the Christian Social Senators, 49 were directly elected, 20 chosen by the Provincial Councils, and 10 co-opted, of the Socialist Senators, 42 were directly elected, 20 chosen by the Provincial Councils, and 10 co-opted, and of the Liberal Senators, 13 were directly elected, 6 chosen by the Provincial Councils, and 3 co-opted. The two Communist Senators were both directly elected.

The Christian Social Party polled 2,121,978 votes in the elections to the Chamber (41.4 per cent, against 47.6 per cent in 1950), the Socialists 1,925,620 votes (37.3 per cent, against 34.5 per cent), the Liberals 626,173 votes (12.1 per cent, against 11.3 per cent), and the Communists 184,098 votes (3.5 per cent, against 4.7 per cent.). The total electorate was about 5,860,000. Most of the Christian Social losses occurred in the Flemish-speaking provinces, e.g., in Antwerp Province the party's vote fell from 58 per cent in 1950 to 49 per cent. One Cabinet Minister (M. Dequae, the Christian Social Minister for the Colonies) failed to secure re-election, losing his seat at Courtrai.

As the Christian Social Party had lost its majority in both Houses, the Prime Minister, M. Van

Houtte, tendered his Cabinet's resignation to King Baudouin on April 12. After the King had had consultations with the Christian Social, Liberal, and Socialist leaders, and also with the presidents of the former Chamber and Senate (respectively M. Van Cauwelaert and M. Struye), it was jointly announced on April 19 by the Socialist and Liberal parties that they had reached agreement in principle on a draft programme for a coalition government (as shown in the election results above, no party had obtained an overall majority in the new Parliament). M. Van Acker, a former Socialist Prime Minister, was accordingly requested by the King to form a new administration, and, after accepting this commission, announced the members of his Cabinet---comprising nine Socialist and seven Liberal Ministers---on April 22, as follows:

Socialist
Ministers.

M. Achille Prime Minister.
Van Acker

M. Paul- Foreign Affairs.
Henri Spaak

M. Pierre Interior.
Vermeylen

M. Antoine National Defence.
Spinoy

M. Victor Foreign Trade.
Larock

M. Edouard Communications.
Anseele

M. Edmond Public Health.
Leburton

M. Léon-Elie Labour.
Troclet

M. Léopold Education.
Collard

Liberal
Ministers.

M. Henri Finance.
Liebaert

M. Albert Justice.
Lilar

M. Auguste Colonies.
Buisseret

M. Jean Rey National Economy.

[M. René Lefèvre](#) [Agriculture.](#)

[M. Adolphe Van Glabbeke](#) [Public Works.](#)

[M. Oscar Bossaert](#) [Middle Classes.](#)

[In addition to M. Van Acker, most of the Ministers had held office in previous Cabinets, including M. Spaak \(who succeeded M. Van Zeeland at the Foreign Ministry\) and MM. Troelet, Collard, Buisseret, Rey, and Van Glabbeke. An innovation was the creation of a Ministry for the Middle Classes, headed by M. Bossaert.](#)

[M. Achille Van Acker \(56\), who has represented Bruges---his birthplace---in the Chamber of Deputies since 1927, headed a Cabinet of National Union from February, 1945, to February, 1946, and was also Prime Minister in a short-lived Left-wing Government from March to July, 1946. An expert on economic and social questions, he drafted a social security system inspired by the Beveridge Plan in Britain, and has held the portfolios of Economic Affairs and Labour. He was active in the Belgian Resistance movement during the German wartime occupation.](#)

[In a statement of policy to the new Chamber of Deputies on May 4, M. Van Acker announced that the period of national service would be reduced from 21 to 18 months, this decision being subsequently approved by the new Cabinet on May 14.](#)

[M. Van Acker emphasized, in his statement to the Chamber, that there would be no change in Belgium's foreign policy, which, as hitherto, would continue to be based on full support for the United Nations, co-operation within the NATO, and active participation in the various organs of inter European co-operation After announcing the Government's decision to reduce the period of military service, in conformity with the Socialist Party's election pledges, he pointed out that military expenditure would nevertheless continue to have priority, but that it must be kept within the country's financial means. As regards internal policy, M. Van Acker announced a programme including the reduction of unemployment by new public works, the re-equipment of industry, tax remissions for capital investment in new industry, the granting of credits to encourage exports to new markets, and a pensions scheme for the self-employed. He also promised that a special effort would be made to achieve complete legal equality for women, including equal pay for equal work.](#)

[M. Camille Huysmans \(83\), *doyen d'âge* of the Chamber of Deputies, was elected president of that body on April 27 in succession to M. Van Cauwelaert. A veteran Socialist statesman, a member of the Chamber since 1910, and a former Burgomaster of Antwerp, he was Prime Minister from July 1946 to March 1947, and had held a number of Ministerial portfolios in pre-war and post-war Cabinets. M. Gillon \(Liberal\) was elected president of the Senate in succession to M. Struye.](#)

The new Government was given a vote of confidence by the Chamber on May 6 by 106 votes to 89, with one abstention, and by the Senate on May 13 by 87 votes to 69, with three abstentions.---(La Nation Belge, Brussels - Le Monde, Paris) (**Prev. rep. 1950 Elections, 10814 A; Cabinet, 12629 B; 12477 A; 11955 A; National Service, 12400 A; E.D.C. Treaty, Belgian Ratification, 13569 A.**)