

The PTB metamorphosis

Ligue Communiste des Travailleurs

2014 / 2019¹

Prologue

This text originated in a discussion about the PTB within the *Ligue Communiste des Travailleurs* (LCT - Communist Workers' League, the Belgian section of the International Workers League - IWL), a discussion that was formalised as an internal document in the aftermath of the triple elections (federal, regional and European) on 25 May 2014, in which this party won its first two seats at federal level.

The **PTB-Parti du travail de Belgique** - **PVDA-Partij van de Arbeid van België** (Belgian Labour Party)² has its origin in the 1960s when students at the *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven* (KUL - Catholic University of Leuven) had the commendable desire to get closer to the labour movement. They wanted to “*learn from the workers what the university did not teach them*”, because the university only taught them “*how to play the boss of the workers later on*”.

In the late 1960s, the young *Studentenvakbeweging* (SVB - Students Union Movement -§ 1.4.1.) was enchanted by Mao Zedong's *Cultural Revolution* and sought inspiration from Stalin for a change in society towards socialism.

In the late 1980s, the capitalist restoration in the USSR shook many parties in different countries, and the PTB was no exception.

A renewal at its 8e Congrès (2008) was welcomed by a whole sector of the extra-parliamentary radical left, which congratulated it for ‘abandoning Stalinism’; while the bourgeois press congratulated it for ‘being now respectable’.

The party has experienced significant growth since then, to say the least. An assessment of the PTB's evolution, his metamorphosis, is therefore necessary. The text published here dates from 2014, In 2020, the PTB has 12 members in the federal parliament, to compare with the long-standing social democratic presence in the chamber (9 for the SP and 20 for the PS). However, we are publishing this 2014 version without updating. Subsequent changes until 2019 are taken into account only in a final chapter, as an Epilogue.³

Can we conduct an impartial study? It would be hypocritical of us to ignore our long-standing profound differences with the PTB's policies, and these will inevitably come through in this analysis. But we have tried to scrutinise the facts, the reality manifested in the PTB's activities and writings, scrupulously. We want to understand what has happened, based on a scientific analysis of the facts, before passing judgement.

1 Translated in English from <http://lct-cwb.be/images/pdfs/LCT/PTB_metamorphose.pdf>

2 In this English language translation, we use the acronyms PTB and PVDA as in the source-text, both referring to one and the same party, the *Belgian Labour Party*. Translating them would hide the different uses of both acronyms, as explained in chapter 2. Moreover, the 19th century predecessor of the actual social-democrat Socialist Party was the *Parti Ouvrier Belge* - POB, *Belgian Workers' Party*. And there is a subtle difference between ‘Workers’ Party and ‘Labour’ party.

By the way, in footnote references, we use also the original acronym LCT for the *Ligue Communiste des Travailleurs*,

3 For publication of the “internal” 2014 document, - the present text - only minor editorial and style corrections were made. In particular, many references to the PTB website became obsolete after 2014, and in some cases, an alternative reference elsewhere was found.

In this English translation also no “updating” was made.

1. Origins

1.1. The international context

The 1960s saw the independence of Congo (1960), followed by the assassination of Lumumba, King Baudouin's friendship with the dictator Mobutu, and Désiré Kabila's guerrilla fight against this dictator. There was the victory of the Cuban revolution (1959) with the establishment of a new workers' state. It marked the beginning of a thaw in the Cold War between the United States and the USSR, which in turn consolidated the Sino-Soviet split (1959-60).¹ In October 1962, Khrushchev withdrew his missiles from Cuba and Kennedy withdrew his from Turkey, and in August 1963, the two agreed on a partial ban on nuclear testing. On the other hand, there was the escalation of the United States in Vietnam (1964) and the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Red Army (1968). There was also the Prague Spring and the affirmation of a "third" world.²

The Sino-Soviet split, a corollary of the détente between the United States and the USSR, was in fact an opportunity for Mao Zedong to secure an autonomous role on the international stage. In this context, he implemented a "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (1966-69) in which he mobilised young people in order to consolidate his power. This was also an opportunity to formulate a "new theory". He replaced Marx's analysis in *The Communist Party Manifesto* (1848), which emphasised the structural contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie inherent in the capitalist mode of production, and Lenin's update of this in *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), which highlighted the importance of financial capital beyond national borders, with the 'theory' of the **four contradictions** that govern the world, where analysis in terms of social classes is diluted in an approach based on *blocs* or *camps*:

1. The contradiction between the socialist camp and the imperialist camp;
2. The contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie within capitalist states;
3. The contradiction between oppressed countries and imperialism;
4. The contradiction between imperialist states and between monopoly groups.

From 1970 onwards, the Sino-Soviet split deepened, and Mao reformulated his theory, in which social classes disappeared completely and the United States and the USSR were seen as a single bloc, the "enemies of the people". This was the **Three Worlds theory**:³

1. The superpowers (the United States and the USSR);
2. Their allies;
3. The non-aligned countries.

Mao Zedong's consolidation of power in China was closely followed in Latin America, with a proliferation of guerrilla movements based on the Maoist model of seizing power from the countryside. Similarly Kadhafi, on power in Libya since 1969, organises guerilla training camps.

1 On 15 September 1959, Khrushchev, proud of his technological achievements with the launch of the first artificial satellite the day before, met his counterpart Eisenhower in Washington. And on 22 April 1960, People's Daily began to make Mao's criticisms of the USSR's policy public, with a series of articles entitled *Long Live Leninism*. In July 1960, the USSR ended all technical assistance to China, abruptly withdrawing more than a thousand technicians.

2 The Bandung Conference had already brought together 29 non-aligned countries in 1955. The Non-Aligned Movement was formalised in 1961 at the Belgrade Conference. In 1966, the Tricontinental Conference was held in Cuba.

3 At the 1973 Algiers Conference, the Non-Aligned Movement proposed a "*new international economic order*" to replace the one governed by the post-war Bretton Woods agreements. And during the discussion of the topic at the UNO in 1974, China's Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping defended this Three Worlds Theory.

1.2. The Belgian context: a decade of struggles

After the defeat of the great insurrectionary strike of 1960/61 and the betrayal of André Renard and the Socialist Party (PSB), the Belgian bourgeoisie was able to impose its *Loi Unique* (Single Law), responding to the crisis that was beginning to manifest itself with the loss of the colony and the end of the *Old time capitalism*.¹ But just a few years later, the labour movement returned to the fray, this time mainly in Flanders, where Renard considered the workers too backward to take them into account in the struggles.

The coal crisis now affected the **mines in Limburg**, which the government decided to close.² The closure of the Houthalen mine in 1964 took the workers by surprise, but when the closure of the Zwartberg mine was announced on 22 December 1965, the 4,500 miners resisted. They had no confidence in the trade union bureaucracy. During a demonstration on 22 January 1966, the miners sang: *Syndicaatje, syndicaatje / Slaapt gij nog, Slaapt gij nog / ...* (Union, union, are you sleeping - to the tune of '*Are you sleeping, / Brother John?*...').³ From 27 January 1966, they began a very tough strike, occupying the mines, a form of protest that was unprecedented in Limburg. During the negotiations, they formed an *Aktiecomitee der Mijnstreek* (Action Committee of the Mining Region) that should accompany the union leaders.⁴ Thousands of Walloon miners came to show their solidarity and the repression resulted in two deaths. An agreement was reached on 2 February with the guarantee that the Zwartberg mine would only be closed after all the workers had found work elsewhere (Herklasseringsakkoord - Redeployment Agreements).⁵

On 21 October 1968, the 7,000 workers at **Ford** factory in Genk went on strike, demanding, among other things, the same conditions as their colleagues at the factories in Antwerp. After five weeks of strikes and fairly harsh repression by the police, the Unions signed an agreement that only partially met their demands, an agreement that was finally accepted after a rather heated meeting.⁶

Two months later, on 27 January 1969, **textile workers in Ghent** began a memorable strike that spread to other sites in the industry.

On 5 January 1970, miners at the Winterslag mine rejected an agreement proposed by the trade unions and began a spontaneous strike that quickly spread to other mines still in operation, mobilising 23,000 miners to demand a 15% wage increase. On 20 January, miners in Charleroi and Liège joined the strike movement. An agreement put to a referendum on 9 February (51.53% in favour), granting some concessions but not the 15% increase, ended the strike.

On 29 January 1970, a new strike broke out at Ford-Genk. Partial and spontaneous at first, it quickly spread throughout the company, and solidarity was established with the striking miners.

On 6 February 1970, a strike broke out at Michelin (Woluwe St-Pierre, 1,300 workers) and at an electricity company in Genk (1,000 workers), as well as among some of the miners at the *La Grande Bacnure* mine in Liège.

1 *Capitalisme de papa* See the brochures

The Belgian Institutional Crisis, <http://lct-cwb.be/images/pdfs/Autres/crise_institutionnelle.pdf>

The Strike of the Century <http://lct-cwb.be/images/pdfs/LCT/20150225_greve_1960-61.pdf>

2 See Tielens and Iven, *De staking van 1970 in het Kempisch steenkoolbekken*, 1976, a well-documented master's thesis on the coal mines of Limburg and their struggles, including day-by-day accounts of the strikes. www.npdcc.be/Iven-Tielens/Iven-Tielens.htm We cite it as Tielens and Iven, op. cit.

3 Tielens and Iven, op. cit., § 1.3.3.0.

4 Tielens and Iven, op. cit. § 1.3.2.1 and § 1.3.3.0

5 The last strikers returned to work on 8 February. 1966 The mine was finally closed in October 1966.

6 See below, § 1.5. the a brochure published at the time by students who supported the strike, *Ford-Genk '68: begin- of eindpunt?* p.39.

A strike from January to March 1971 at the Vieille Montagne zinc factory in Balen led to a protest play, then a film, *Groenten uit Balen*.

On 13 September 1971, workers at **Boel-Temse** went on strike, which lasted until 1 December. Repression intensified, with, among other things, *Law 430*, which severely punished "disturbances of public order".¹ 10 P

On 6 April 1973, **dockworkers in Ghent** went on strike. Three days later, the strike spread to Antwerp and did not end until 6 June.

The Belgian bourgeoisie struggled to control the situation. Ten governments succeeded one another between 1966 and 1979.

And on the other hand, in 1970, the end of the unitary Belgium of the good old days was announced.²

1.3. Internationalist protest

On Sunday 10 April 1960, the first anti-nuclear march against the deployment of nuclear weapons in Belgium was organised, bringing thousands of people together in Brussels.³ It was repeated for years. In October 1966, an international demonstration in Liège denounced the war in Vietnam. And when, in 1967, General de Gaulle slammed the door on NATO command and the NATO headquarters was transferred to Belgium, it gave rise to a huge

wave of protests: "*Belgium out of NATO; NATO out of Belgium!*"



The "revolutionary" *Third World* movement denounces contradictions between 'rich countries' and 'poor countries', supports national liberation movements, and denounces the "paternalist" campaigns like 11.11.11 by Caritas Catolica. The protest is formalised in a *Derde Wereldbeweging* (DWB -Third World movement) that supports National Liberation Guerrilla organisations.⁴

A Brazilian initiative to organise a global exhibition, *Brasil Export*, in Brussels in October-November 1973 provided an opportunity to launch a campaign against the dictatorship in that country, a campaign that soon denounces also the Pinochet's 11 September coup in Chile, culminating in a demonstration of more than 10,000 people in November, supported by Maoists and Trotskyists, as well as trade union sectors.⁵14

1 A bill presented to parliament on 3 November 1972 by former Prime Minister Paul Vanden Boeynants, who became Minister of Defence on 20 January 1972, and which took shape on 18 November 1972 in a plan to strengthen the gendarmerie.

2 "The unitary state, as still governed by law in its structures and functioning, has been overtaken by events. The Communities and Regions must take their place in the state's renewed structures, which are better suited to the country's specific circumstances." - Gaston Eyskens, Prime Minister. February 1970. (See X. Mabille - *Histoire politique de la Belgique* - CRISP, 1992, p.350)

3 This location, including the aircraft to transport the weapons to a target, was decided in 1958 but only implemented in 1963. See the Chamber session of 21 March 1963, where Minister Segers defends the possible 'defensive' use of these weapons.

4 A member of the PTB's leadership took part in Gaddafi's training camps, see § 1.1.

5 See André Renard's magazine *Combat*, dated 18 October 1973 and 13 November 1973.

1.4. The university protests

1.4.1. From the Meirevolte to the Studentenvakbeweging (SVB).

In this turbulent world, young university students rebelled. In Leuven, the bishops' decree of 13 May 1966 on the bilingual and indivisible status of the *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven* (KUL Catholic University Leuven), "*founded in 1425 with the approval of Pope Martinus V*", sparked community protests: 'Leuven Vlaams - Walen buiten' (Flemish Leuven, Walloons out).¹

In this May 1966, anticipating the legendary May 1968, thousands of students from the KUL took part in *avondwandelingen* (evening walks). Shouting "À bas la calotte". (.)down with the clergy.), they occupied churches and fought against harsh repression by the gendarmerie, forcing the academic authorities to declare an early end to the academic year. This mobilisation from 15 to 20 May is known as the **Meirevolte 1966** (May Rebellion of 1966). The undisputed leader was Paul Goossens, a student at the KUL²

Students enrolled as Dutch speakers at any university in Belgium were automatically members of the *Vereniging der Vlaamse Studenten* (VVS - Association of Flemish Students), which at the KUL operated under the name *Katholiek Vlaams Hoogstudentenverbond* (KVHV - Catholic Flemish League of University Students).³ And from the 1966-67 academic year onwards, a new student leadership emerged at the KVHV, born out of the *Meirerevolte*, which confirmed the increasingly anti-clerical and anti-authoritarian nature of the protest movement, rather than its communitarian orientation. A certain Ludo Martens, then aged 21, a medical student who was passing with success his exams, was one of them. They replaced the slogan "Walen buiten" (Walloons out) with the demand that "students have a duty to demand a university of their own for Wallonia".⁴ and by the bilingual cry "Bourgeois buiten / Bourgeois out".⁵



Ludo Martens at Ghent University.

The KVHV newspaper, *Ons Leven* (circulation 4,000 copies; editor-in-chief: Ludo Martens) did not spare its criticism of *the elite* and defended *the common people*. This led to a crisis within the KVHV, and a section of it set up a working group, initially within the organisation, but which became a separate body on 5 June 1967, the *Studentenvakbeweging* (SVB -Students Union Movement)⁶ under the leadership of Ludo Martens and modelled on an organisation of the same name, created in 1963 in the Netherlands. The SVB also presented itself as a free alternative to automatic enrolment in the VVS/KVHV.

1 Until the separation of KUL and UCL in 1968, the rector of the single university was Monsignor Van Waeyenberg, a bishop who, during Lumumba's famous speech on 30 June 1960, was outraged by Lumumba's "criminal appearance" and advised that he be put in prison. (African Journal of International Affairs, vol. 2, no. 1, 1999).

2 In 1978, Ludo Martens and Kris Merckx published a report on the decade following this revolt, entitled *Dat was 1968* (That was 1968). This text was republished in 1993 by Jan Savels (editorial EPO of the PTB) under the title *Een kwarteeuw - Mei 68* (A Quarter Century - May 68), incorporating, in addition to technical corrections, excerpts from interviews with Ludo Martens and Paul Goossens published in a 1968 book, *Het gevecht met de Mammon* (The Fight with Mammon), by Jos De Man. The new version therefore rightly credits Martens and Merckx as authors, either from 1978 or from 1968. <<http://www.npdoc.be/Martens-Ludo-Merckx-Kris/>> We cite it as *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. (II.2., e.g., indicates Deel twee, subtitle 2.)

3 http://www.thesis.net/vlaamse_studenten/vlaamse_studenten_hfst_1.htm

4 Editorial in *Ons Leven*, October 1966, cited in *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. I.3

5 *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. I.2

6 Tielens and Iven, op. cit. § 4.1.1.1.

Repression was not long in coming. The rectorate censored *Ons Leven*.¹ Ludo Martens resigned from the magazine and was expelled from the university for the 1967-68 academic year, and then enrolled at Ghent University. Paul Goossens, who had joined the SVB, agreed to become the new editor-in-chief of *Ons Leven* from the 21 February 1967 issue.²

On 20 October 1967, the SVB published the first issue of its own publication under the title 13 Mei (the date of the bishops' decree on the KUL), devoted to student housing issues, which aimed to *provide information about the KUL, what the student union is doing and our democratic country*.³

In January 1968, the Meirerevolt of May 1966 was repeated, with equal decisions and equal repressions.⁴ But in the end, on 2 February 1968, the bishops reversed their position on the KUL, and on 7 February 1968, the Vanden Boeynants government fell. The university was formally split on 18 September 1968. And the secular Catholic party split into the CVP and the PSC.

1.4.2. Reform or revolution

Meanwhile, at the start of the 1968 academic year, a crisis arose within the SVB, with discussions between reformists and revolutionaries.⁵ Kris Merckx was president of the Circle *Geneeskunde*, and said: *"thanks to my reformist position, I was elected president of the Faculteitenconvent (FK), the highest authority of all the Circles."*⁶ He summarises his views in an open letter published in the FK's newspaper *Rerum* in September 1968. He proposes homogeneous study circles: *"It is obvious that 'revolutionaries' (or those who present themselves as such) and 'reformers' cannot work together on a study project."* And he proposes *"the organisation of a progressive reformist party, [given that] the SVB, consistent with its current ideology, is revolutionary. There is therefore a need for an organisation which, in the same efficient and attractive way as the SVB (openness, commitment, study work and free discussion, training of activists, action), tries to set up a universitarian and social alternative on the basis of a progressive reformist position."*⁷

Two issues of *Rerum* later, Ludo Martens responds to Kris Merckx: The qualities of the SVB, appreciated by comrade Merckx, *"stem from our understanding of revolution, faith in the working*

1 The specific occasion for the censorship was the publication of an accusation of paedophilia in the clergy in issue 18 of *Ons Leven*, dated 3 February 1967. Subsequently, there was talk of the sexnummer, the article in question and the cover of which were reproduced in *Solidaire* in November 2010. This detail overshadowed the much more important publication of the ideological basis for the SVB option in the same issue. But in 2008, Herwig Lerouge still claimed that Ludo had been fired because of an issue of *Ons Leven* "that dealt with sexuality". (*Solidaire* 30 April 2008).

2 Goossens later became the founder and editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *De Morgen*, maintaining good relations with Martens.

3 See Segers, W., *Alle Macht Aan De Arbeiders '1968' en de inzet voor de arbeiders*. 1966-1979, Bachelor's thesis in History, KUL 2004. I.2.. <<http://www.npdoc.be/Segers-Ward>> We cite the thesis as Segers, op. cit. (I.2. refers to Chapter 1, subheading 2)

4 Posters written in French invite Walloons to join the struggle. Students speak in French at assemblies. See *Verjaardag studentenrevolte, January 1968*, a series of four articles published in *Solidaire* in 2008, which we refer to below as Verjaardag, op. cit. Until early 2013, this text was available on the PVDA website (www.pvda.be/nieuws/artikel/verjaardag-studentenrevolte-januari-1968-1-mei-68-begon-niet-in-mei.html).

5 This is the first of the six "struggles between two lines", see § 1.8.4. "In 1967-1968, the struggle was to create an independent mass student organisation led by a Marxist-Leninist core."

6 Merckx in *De Standaard*, 3 May 2008 www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=FH1RG7HH#

7 A reference to this conflict between "establishing new strike committees everywhere" and "a workers' party, the fusion of the labour movement and the movement of committed students" can be found in In Memoriam by Ludo Martens, published by the PTB Bureau following his death (5 June 2011 - see § 5.3.2.). See *Solidaire* 9 June 2011. The text was available in the PTB archives (<http://www.ptb.be/nieuws/artikel/en-memoire-de-ludo-martens-19462011.html>) until early 2013. There is a copy at <http://www.reveilcommuniste.fr/article-ludo-martens-1946-2011necrologie-du-ptb-76189358.html>. [This copy no longer exists in 2019.] Hereafter, we cite this text as In Memoriam, op. cit.

class and revolution." After summarising his position in four points, he concludes that "*it is not a matter of talking about commitment and activity, but of choosing. There are two paths. [Kris] can try to accompany us on the path of the workers and the people. But he can also take the leap towards a dazzling seat in Parliament, which stands above the fray.*"¹ However, this does not prevent the SVB from undertaking joint actions with the FK.

On 15 October 1968, the SVB published the first issue of a short-lived theory journal, *Genster*.² Conclusion is that an avant-garde party must be built, "*a core of about fifty hard-working, educated and idealistic people*".³

1.4.3. The Gentse Maartbeweging (1969)

In 1967, an SVB-branch was also created at the Ghent University (Rijksuniversiteit Gent – RUG), under the leadership of Renaat Willockx, where students break away from the VVS and mobilise for "democratic education". On 23 January 1968, 4,000 students demonstrate their solidarity with the students of Leuven.

The following year, on 12 March 1969, a conflict at the RUG, with Ludo Martens already present, concerning censorship,⁴ spilled over into a broad anti-authoritarian protest, which led to the occupation of the university, followed by violent repression and the struggle for the release of imprisoned comrades. In the meantime, they too had witnessed a heavy-handed intervention by the gendarmerie on 9 March 1969 during an antinuclear march supervised by 2,500 gendarmes. And on 13 March, these angry students took over the closing session of a national congress organised by the VVS at the RUG on 11 and 12 March. On the 17th, Willockx was put in prison. On the evening of the 19th, two hundred students went to the factory gates to ask for solidarity. Students in Secondary courses and non-university higher education were also mobilised.

On 20 March, a *People's Assembly* defined a five-point programme for university reform. The two weeks of rebellion go down in history as the **Gentse Maartbeweging** (GMB -Ghent March Movement), which later gave rise to a *Gentse Studentenbeweging* (GSB -Ghent Student Movement) under the leadership and guidance of Willockx and Martens, with its own publication, *Beweging*.⁵

1.5. Workers and students: one fight

A sector of this protesting youth, born after the Second World War, turned very concretely towards involvement in the labour movement. During the *Zwartberg strike* (January 1966), there had already been student support with the miners.⁶



Limburg students in Ghent, in solidarity with Zwartberg

1 L. Martens, *Een beetje revolutie, een beetje reformisme*, October 1968, quoted in *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. II.2

2 The journal will only have four issues. The name (spark) is a reference to Iskra, the early 20th-century publication of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, edited by Lenin, among others.

3 *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. II.1. and III.2.

4 During a debate organised by Prokus (Progressieve Kultuur) on pornography, it was forbidden to use images other than erotic works of art from Greek and Roman antiquity.

5 There is a detailed report on the *Gentse Maartbeweging* in *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. I.3. See also 20 jaar RUG-studenten in actie 1968-1988 <http://lib.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/000/168/074/RUG01-000168074_2012_0001_AC.pdf>. An interview with Renaat Willockx dated 28 June 2008 can be found at <<http://www.skolo.org/nl/2008/06/28/mei-68-arbeiders-studenten-een-front/>>, which we cite as Willockx. op. cit. See also a clip at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0eyj012Nl8>>.

6 Tielens and Iven, op. cit. § 1.3.3.2 - The photo is from *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. I.1

From the first week of the strike at Ford-Genk, a dozen of students from the SVB in Leuven reported day after day, five weeks along, at strike piquet's, guided by Cris Hertogen. They "*armed themselves with pen and paper, recording all*". After which they systematised their investigation in a book, *Ford-Genk '68: Begin of eindpunt?* (Ford-Genk, Start or finish?),¹ printed in 3000 copies, in which they questioned the continuity of their commitment.²

The Communist Party appreciated the brochure.³ The students were respectful of the union leadership: it was up to the workers to judge them.⁴ These unions will thank the students for their collaboration... after the strike.⁵ The students create a specific Task Group at the university and hold support meetings with a thousand students under the slogan "Ford workers – students: one fight. struggle". The student wanted "*to learn from the workers what the university did not teach them*". The leaflets said that "*the workers know what it means, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie,*" and they denounced the fact that the university taught them only "how to play boss to the workers later on."⁶

During the textile strike in Ghent in January 1969, some 70 students from the RUG went to the picket lines to support the strikers. They were subsequently called to account by the police. It was this involvement in the struggles that ultimately set the tone for the *Gentse maartbeweging*.(\$1.4.) beyond the specific incident of the study day: "*How can we come out of our ivory tower and reach out to the population?*"⁷

In the heat of their participation in the struggles of the labour movement, several of these young people responded in 1969 to the SVB's call to go and work in factories during the holidays, in order to study working conditions on site.⁸ Some stayed on after the holidays, including two in the mines of Zolder and Waterschei.

1.6. Mijnwerkersmacht

The SVB was very active in the miners' strike in Limburg in January 1970. November 1969, the ACV union (the CSC in Flanders) announced actions for a 15% increase, and on 11 December a leaflet appeared in six languages, written by SVB students and miners, demanding that the unions organise meetings to discuss the demands and decide on the measures to be taken, including strike action. On 15 December, the trade unions concluded a two-year agreement with a 10% pay rise,⁹ which was denounced in a new leaflet, paving the way for the spontaneous strike that began on 5 January 1970. On 6 January, a *Permanent Komitee van het Kempisch Bekken* (P.K. - Permanent Committee of the Campine Basin) was created under the leadership of Gerard Slegers, a foreman at the Winterslag mine, activist (and later member of parliament) of the Volksunie. This was an

1 The booklet is about the Miners strike, the strike at Ford-Genk, and the Textile Strike in Ghent. We cite this brochure as *Ford Genk*, op. cit.

2 *Ford-Genk*, op. cit. See a commentary, 40 years later, in *Verjaardag*, op. cit. Part 3.11

3 "*The result of eight weeks of teamwork: five weeks of uninterrupted presence alongside the struggling workers at Ford-Genk and three weeks of study [...] a very interesting brochure.*" - *De Rode Vaan* 30.1.1969

4 *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. II.4. The press had published a false accusation that the students were inviting the workers to occupy the factory, with a leaflet.

5 *Ford-Genk*, op. cit. p.68

6 Segers, op. cit. I.4.

7 Willockx, op. cit. Forty years later, Willockx was still an activist in the PTB and a fervent advocate of 'renewal' within the party: '*Forty years after May 1968, the world has changed, and so has the PTB. Let's move away from lecturing and dogmatic truths.*' *Solidaire* No. 18 - 07.05.2008

8 Segers, op. cit. I.6

9 The first leaflet proposed a 70 FB increase for everyone, instead of a 12 or 15% increase spread over two years.

expression of the workers' mistrust of the union leadership.¹ On 8 January, around thirty students from the SVB, together with a few young miners and students from the Gentse Studentenbeweging (see § 1.4.3) and the Derde Wereldebeweging (§1.3.), created **Mijnwerkersmacht** (Miners' Power) under the leadership of the psychology student Kris Hertogen. Students also organised demonstrations in Leuven under the significant slogan: "Eyskens in the mine, miners in power."²

They were champions in stimulating solidarity among the miners on strike with those at Ford in Genk at the same time, where they similar organism: **Arbeidersmacht** (Workers power). They promoted to maintain the strike, after the referendum they denounced to be a fraud. In the manifs, their banner went along that of the of Italian workers denouncing the "*sindicati venditi*" (corrupted unions).³



Mijnwerkersmacht achieved a great victory when, following the dismissal of three of their members (and two from the Permanent Komitee - PK) after returning to work, all the miners went back on strike, forcing the bosses to reinstate their dismissed comrades. After the strike, however, the leaders, particularly Hertogen and Slegers, were brought before the courts and given suspended prison sentences for *disturbing public order*.⁴ The PK was the undisputed leader of the strike, but the intervention of Mijnwerkersmacht – which was not without a fair amount of improvisation – and its constant pressure on the PK had an objective impact on the conflict.⁵

These young people also managed to obtain the support of foreign delegations, in particular the *Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund* (SDS), four of whose members were arrested by the police on 9 February 1970. Trotskyists from the Fourth International also participated in the leadership of the strike. These were mainly young people who had been formally expelled from the *Socialistische Jonge Wacht* (SJW) in 1964.(see.§ 1.7.4.) On the other hand, the Communist Party, which had "played no role in [the revolt of] 1968",⁶ maintained his confidence in the union leadership and denounced the Permanent Komitee and Mijnwerkersmacht in *De Rode Vaan* as "*small groups alien to the miners*".⁷

The discussion in September 1968 between Kris Merckx and Ludo Martens concerning Reform (Kris) or Revolution (Ludo) (see § 1.4.2.) became more concrete after their participation in the picket lines of the Ford Genk strike in October of that year. And during the 1970 strike, the discussion raged within Mijnwerkersmacht between those who only wanted to "put themselves at

1 Tielens and Iven, op. cit. § 4.2

2 *Eyskens in de mijn, arbeiders aan de macht* - After the great strike of 1960-61, Gaston Eyskens returned to government in July 1968 and remained there until 1973.

3 The photo is from Rik Hemmerijckx, *In the spirit of May 68 - Workers' protests and radical militancy in Belgium*, 2005 - www.cegesoma.be/docs/media/chtp_beg/chtp_18/chtp18_007_Hemmerijckx.pdf

4 See some details of the trial in Tielens and Iven, op. cit., chap. 3.4

5 A quarter of a century later, Ludo Martens recalls: "*Since the union leadership opposed the strike, we, as inexperienced students, had to take part in leading the struggle, organising meetings, writing and distributing leaflets to the miners. It was an extremely enriching experience, carried out at the very heart of the class struggle.*" See, *The Party of Revolution*, ch. 1, § 4.1. We will refer later (§3.3) to this fundamental programmatic book by Martens, written for the 5th Congress of the PTB (1995), but we will quote some retrospective remarks from it now. The book is available in Spanish translation at <http://archivo.juventudes.org/textos/Ludo%20Martens/Ludo%20Martens%20-%20El%20Partido%20de%20la%20Revolucion.pdf>. We cite it as *Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit.

6 Jef Turf, former political director of *De Rode Vaan*, in an interview in *Humo*, 16 February 1978. Quoted in *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. II.5.

7 Segers, op. cit. II.2

the service of the people" without imposing themselves, and the "revolutionaries" who "dare to take initiatives" and advance the political discussion.¹ Is there a need for a "struggle committee" or "the nucleus of a revolutionary party"?

Ten years later, Ludo and Kris would agree that at that time, *"the SVB cadres, educated in Catholic youth organisations, quickly discovered the importance of a solid organisation"*.² Kris revisited this discussion on the 40th anniversary of the 1970 strikes: *"Some, myself included, concluded that our work to build a new party should instead focus on setting up workers' committees, on economic struggle, and on taking the place of the trade unions. Ultimately, this did not happen, thanks to the study of Lenin's book What Is To Be Done?"*³ Boudewijn Deckers, one of the first leaders of the PTB, later also thought that the intervention in Mijnwerkersmacht was somewhat sectarian in relation to the trade unions. *"We should not have competed with the trade unions, but support them."*⁴

*"The people of the SVB helped their comrades of the Faculteitenconvent (FK - § 1.4.2) to deepen their experiences, talked to them about communism and the example of socialist construction and the Cultural Revolution in China. [...] Direct contact with the struggle activity and needs of the working class resulted in former 'reformers' from the FK deciding to collaborate definitively in the construction of AMADA."*⁵ This was particularly the case for Kris Merckx, (§ 1.8.1)

1.7. A rebellious youth in search of guidance

1.7.1. The Catholic heritage

Most of these young people who were discovering the world of labour had been educated in Catholicism, which was Flemish-sectarian in the post-war period in the north of the country. A relative revival was then underway in Catholic circles with the Second Vatican Council (1962-65)⁶

Ludo Martens, born in 1946, had been a member as a teenager of the *Katholieke Studentenactie* (KSA, Catholic student action, the youth movement of the Catholic Church in Secondary schools for boys), where he organised with others *"ABN-kernen"*, nuclei for the promotion of *Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands* (standard civilised Dutch), which was intended to contribute to the cultural emancipation of children who spoke a local Flemish language.⁷ His father was a furniture manufacturer who went bankrupt and then became a furniture salesman.

Kris Hertogen was a leader of the KSA in Hasselt. In girls' schools, there was the *Vrouwelijke Katholieke Studentenjeugd* (VKSJ Catholic Female Student Youth), and at the time, Hasselt was a pioneer in bringing the KSA and VKSJ closer together.⁸ His father was a trade unionist and executive member of the ACV (CSC).

1 This is the second of the six 'struggles between two lines', see § 1.8.4. "In 1970-1971, the struggle was to integrate ourselves into the working class, found a communist organisation and begin political propaganda and agitation among the masses."

2 *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. III.2

3 *Solidaire* 14 January 2010

4 *"Dertig jaar geleden..."*, a retrospective published on the PVDA website. [Reference no longer valid in 2019.]

5 *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. II.2

6 Paul Goossens later recalled that, during his first meeting with Martens in January 1966, "everything revolved around the Second Vatican Council Vatican II." See Goossens' recollections on Martens' death in June 2011, at <http://kameraadharko.blogspot.be/2011/06/ludo-martens-enkele-reacties.html>

7 *In Memoriam* op. cit.

8 See www.hertogen.be/hertogen-robert/Doc/KSA/Reactie-9-09-78-jh-kh.htm

During a demonstration in May 1966 in Leuven, Kris Merckx, future founder of *Medicine for the People* (§ 1.8.1.), could be seen holding a placard that read: "Moeder, waarom zijn we katholiek?" (Mum, why are we Catholic?).¹

Dirk Van Duppen, the campaign specialist for the Kiwi Model (§4.2.1.), born on 2 August 1956, had already read Marx's *Capital* at the age of 15. He was an activist in the *Chiro*, a catholic organisation serving the Pope. But he put up posters against the Vietnam War in the Christmas crib set up in the centre of the village. After his Secondary school studies, he went working in a factory, before starting medical studies, motivated by the activities of Kris Merckx.²



1.7.2. *The search for a coherent theory*

The 1966 revolt in Leuven (§ 1.4.1.), marked by very harsh repression, already revealed to these students 'the true face of the police behind the fig leaf of democracy', which led to critical reflection during the academic holidays. "We arrived at themes such as workers and democratisation. These were very general and abstract concepts for us. [...] Does the Flemish people also include bankers? We formulated theoretical texts on a system that should serve workers, put them first, and destroy all powers. That was the first ideology. It was very beautiful and idealistic, but it was actually a bit off the mark. It is often presented now as if it had been found in Marx, but no one had read anything by Marx or Lenin. It was only after being labelled Marxists and Leninists that they went to see "what this Marx had written. [...] In the labour movement, we saw the work of revolutionary leaders such as Marx, Lenin and Mao Zedong. We saw that the problems we were facing had already arisen in Germany at the beginning of this [20th] century, in France in the 1870s; and that all this had been analysed. So we went to see how they had solved these difficulties."³

During the 1967 holidays, a group from the SVB took part in an international student meeting in Berlin,⁴ where they were "bombarded with all sorts of complicated left-wing discussions". Among other things, they received Mao Zedong's text on *The Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* (1957) and Lenin's text on *The State and Revolution* (1917). Back in Belgium, they came into contact with the *Circle of Foreign Students*, students from Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia and Chile, who explained to them that "Trotskyism blocks the path to revolution, and that another path has been tried, that of Mao [...] with the patient construction of a Marxist-Leninist party preparing for a long people's war, with a united front targeting the main enemy: imperialism and feudalism."⁵

The repetition of the revolt in Leuven in 1968 (§ 1.1.1.), with as many heavy-handed interventions by the police, as well as May 1968 in France, reinforce the interest in studying *The State and Revolution*, written by Lenin on the eve of the October Revolution of 1917, when "the question of the state is of particular importance from both a theoretical and a practical political point of view".

1 The photo is from *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. I.1.

2 The name Chiro is derived from the initials of the Greek word Χριστός, Christ. See the interview of 17 October 2007 in Knack. <<http://www.janvanduppen.be/?p=360>> hereinafter cited as Knack-Van Duppen, op. cit.

3 *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. II.1

4 The meeting was organised by the *Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund* (SDS), a league founded in 1946 as the youth wing of the SPD student movement. In 1961, this faction criticised the SPD for 'supporting socialism, except in socialist countries' (particularly East Germany – the GDR). Excluded from the party, the league nevertheless tried to resist under its name SDS, through which it maintained contact with the PTB. It eventually formed the *Assoziation Marxistischer Studenten*, which later became the *Spartakus group*.

5 *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. II.1

1.7.3. A strategic choice: Mao and Stalin

In July-August 1968, a group of 30 activists spent a week studying, among other things, Lenin's pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* This study led to the publication of a book recounting the *Experiences of two years of struggle in Leuven*.¹

Sympathy for the *Cultural Revolution* in China was at its height, and these studious students drew inspiration for the first time from Mao Zedong's *Four Contradictions* (§ 1.1.). "The book was intended to 'lead student unionism towards new methods and visions'. The vision of the major movements and forces in the world had taken shape, not without difficulty, in the analysis of the 'four contradictions'".²

The following year, they resolutely pursued a "search for a coherent theory", to pave the way through "the jungle of anti-Marxist theories" and the "pseudo-leftist positions of anarchists and Trotskyists, with reformist rhetoric from the left wing of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party's entourage". The work was put on paper in a 1969 document entitled *A Guide to Marxist Theory: The Importance of Revolutionary Theory*.³ SVB activists were "impressed by the achievements of the Chinese Revolution" and it was obvious to them that "the Chinese Communists had a theoretical arsenal that enabled them to achieve practical results". In studying this theory, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are still mentioned at times.⁴ But the affinity with Mao Zedong's "revolutionary theory" prevails, and when the Chinese leader updates his theory with the concept of the *Three Worlds*, where all reference to social classes disappears (§ 1.1.), the SVB followed suit. Khrushchev was responsible for abandoning "true communism" by denouncing (at the 20th Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1956) the crimes of Stalin (who died in 1953) and "capitulating" to the United States in the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962). The SVB denounces the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968).

Their obsession with defending what they considered to be orthodox communism led them to defend Stalin's legacy, and the Belgian Communist Party became an enemy organisation.⁵ In September 1970, Kris Merckx (top centre in the photo) took part in a trip to China and visited Mao's birthplace.⁶



1.7.4. The "left"-options

These young people also sought guidance in the landmarks in the nebula of political organisations.⁷

1 *Ervaringen uit twee jaar strijd te Leuven*. 1968 Ed. VVS We cite the book as *Ervaringen*, op. cit.

2 *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. II,1

3 *Dokument 69*. A guide to Marxist theory. The importance of revolutionary theory. This Dokument 69 is reproduced in full in *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. III.2. The reproduction is preceded by a warning that "some of the criticism of Stalin is exaggerated". We cite it as *Dokument 69*, op. cit.

4 In *Réflexions militantes* from February 1970, it is claimed that "the economic and material struggle of the working class implicitly highlights the opposition between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat". Quoted in J. Versteegh, *D'un mouvement étudiant à un parti. Alle Macht aan de Arbeiders 1970-1979*. A thesis presented at the ULB in 2000. We quote the thesis as Versteegh, op. cit.

5 The assessment of the USSR and the Three Worlds Theory was revised later, in 1987, leading to a "call for unity", a letter addressed to the president of the PCB, Louis Van Geyt, who refused. See History of the PTB, (notes for a PTB training course in Liège, 27 February 2013) § 1.1.4.

6 Photo in *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. III.2.

7 For an overview of the radical left at the time, see Buelinckx, Jan, *Radicaal-links in België en de val van de Muur*, 2002, bachelor's thesis, RUG - <www.npdoc.be/Buelinckx-Jan/index.htm>. Hereafter cited as Buelinckx, op. cit. In *Les partis politiques en Belgique* (Political Parties in Belgium), Pascal Delwit, Emilie Van Haute and Jean-Benoit Pilet (eds), Brussels, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2011, there is a chapter (pp. 273-296) by Pascal Delwit and

The 'left-wing' organisations in Belgium were the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the Trotskyists (Fourth International, led by Mandel).¹ The PS was known to them, through their studies of the Belgian situation, as the saviour of the capitalist regime after the major strikes of the winter 1960/61. It had replaced the liberals in the coalition government with the Catholics in April 1961 to put an end to this major insurrectionary strike.² It was therefore ruled out from the outset. And in the wake of this, Mandel's party was also excluded, as they associated it with the PS because of the entryist experience of this current in the footsteps of André Renard. This entryism ended with the exclusion of the Trotskyists from the Jeune Garde Socialiste / Socialistische Jonge Wacht in 1964, but of the 2,500 militants, only a few hundred remained.³ And for Ludo Martens' friends, the label remained. These Trotskyists would later reorganise as LSR/RAL⁴

As for the Communist Party, it had sought to flatter these students, praising their anticlerical courage, but their siren song did not survive the young people's commitment to the workers. During the January 1970 strike in Limburg (§1.6.), the CP denounced Mijnerwerkersmacht in De Rode Vaan as "*small groups alien to the miners*" and "*troublemakers*".⁵ Anyhow, isn't the PCB an expression of Soviet revisionism?

1.8. A Communist Party in the making

A party "*was formed in September 1970 after the decision was taken to create a Marxist-Leninist organisation whose main work would be carried out among the working class.*"⁶

1.8.1. Local roots

The participation of students in workers' struggles had led to a more direct rapprochement, with the first concrete roots in this milieu. (§1.5.) A specific choice in this direction was made by medical students who, upon graduating, chose to practise "close to the people". They had already participated as students in surveys on healthcare. And during the miners' strike of 1970, *Medica*, the KUL medical students' association, was outraged by a 20% increase in doctors' fees, while miners were striking in vain for 15%. On 4 January 1971, Kris Merckx and Michel Leyers started a Group Medical Practice in Hoboken, which would become *Geneeskunde voor het Volk* (GvhV -Medicine for the People).⁷ It achieved its first success when it denounced lead poisoning as an occupational disease.

Giulia Sandri entitled *La gauche de la gauche* (The Left of the Left).

([https://dipot.ulb.ac.be/dspace/bitstream/2013/98141/1/Delwit-Sandri %20PARTIS%20POLITIQUES.pdf](https://dipot.ulb.ac.be/dspace/bitstream/2013/98141/1/Delwit-Sandri%20PARTIS%20POLITIQUES.pdf)) We refer to it below as *La gauche de la gauche*, op. cit.

1 The PS, born from the ashes of the Belgian Workers' Party in 1945, did not split into two separate parties according to language until 1978. The Militant movement (including the current PSL/LSP) did not appear in Belgium after the founding of the CIO in 1974.

2 It remained there until April 1974, apart from a brief interlude from 1966 to 1968.

3 See the brochure on *The Strike of the Century*, on the LCT website, <http://lct-cwb.be/images/pdfs/LCT/20150225_greve_1960-61.pdf>

4 After several years of crisis, the Trotskyists finally created the Revolutionary Workers' League / Revolutionaire Arbeidersliga (LRT/RAL) in 1971, which became the Socialist Workers' Party / Parti ouvrier socialiste (SAP/POS) in 1984. In 2005, the POS adopted the name of its counterpart in France, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), with no change in the SAP. As early as 1972, the Trotskyists were the target of virulent criticism from AMADA, the group that would become the PTB in 1979. Much later, Ludo Martens traced this "criticism" back to 1968: "*Since 1968, the various Trotskyist groups have been able to drive thousands of potentially revolutionary young people into the arms of social democracy.*" (Le Parti de la Révolution, op. cit. Introduction)

5 *Kwarteeuw*, op. cit. II.6

6 *Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit., chap. 1 §1 Some elements of the history of the PTB. The first chapter of the book, on The Organisation of a Bolshevik-Type Party, develops this subtitle after setting out a few principles.

GvhV was the starting point for a more permanent local presence outside the university environment.

In this context, the students sought ways to organise themselves more effectively. They revisited Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?*, which in 1902 had concluded that a revolutionary party of cadres must be formed. The ideological orientation that had triumphed in the SVB after its participation in the Limburg miners' strike, combined with sectors of the *Gentse Maartbeweging* (§ 1.4.3.) and the *Derde Wereldbeweging* (§ 1.3.) gave rise to a new organisation.

On 5 October 1970, the first issue of a publication entitled "*Alle Macht Aan De Arbeiders*" (AMADA - All Power to the Workers) appeared. Its editor-in-chief was a certain Jo Cottenier, then aged 23, a member of the SVB who had gone to work in a factory the previous year. (§ 1.5.) The front page read: "*We don't vote, we fight*" and denounced parliamentarianism, saying to a bourgeois who was calling to vote for him: "*We will settle our affairs among ourselves, in our action committees. It's more productive!*"¹ At page 8, one found: "*Down with the American imperialism and the Russian social-imperialism.*"



The paper was initially sold by students at factory gates and the new organisation became known by the name of the publication, while the party adopted the name "*Kommunistische Partij in opbouw*" (Communist Party in the making).²

The paper reported various theatres of struggle, but it also provides political education on issues like *State and Revolution* by Lenin and *the two great dangers*: the United States and the URSS.³ A subtitle read "*Leve het marxisme-leninisme en de en de gedachte van Mao-Tse-Toeng.*" (Long live Marxism-Leninism and the thought of Mao). The logo (a clenched fist) was accompanied by "*Proletariers aller landen, onderdrukte volkeren en naties, verenigt u!*" (Proletarians of all countries, oppressed peoples and nations, unite!) A year later (in issue no. 13), the logo was replaced by another featuring the heads of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao.

1.8.2. The first interventions in struggles: an antidote to sectarianism

This anchoring then gave rise to a first local intervention in a workers' conflict, during the strike at the Vieille-Montagne zinc factory (January-March 1971). (§1.2.) These newcomers to the workers' struggles, still influenced by the student movement, immediately denounced the union leadership, which aroused mistrust among the workers. And the strike committee in the company tried to do everything possible not to appear to be linked to AMADA.

During the strike at the Boel-Temse shipyard (13 September – 1 December 1971), (§ 1.2.) there was already a Boel cell. Initially, it also followed this sectarian anti-union policy inherited from the student movement, but this time the strike was led by combative delegates such as Jan Cap (ACV) and Karel Heirbout (ABVV).⁴

7 A second house followed in 1974 in Genk (with Harrie Dewitte, who had initially gone to work as a miner in the Winterslag mine). Others followed, first in Flanders, then also in Wallonia (Séraing 1982) and Brussels (Molenbeek 1998). See <http://gvhv-mplp.be>

1 See a retrospective on the editor-in-chief at the time in *Solidaire* on 16 September 2010, which also includes a reproduction of the front page of the first issue.

2 Interview with Boudewijn Deckers on the occasion of Martens' death, on *Redactie.radiocentraal* 11.6.2011 <http://redactie.radiocentraal.be/Home/?p=1076>, hereafter cited as *Interview Deckers*, op. cit.

3 Segers, op. cit. IV.1

4 Jan Cap later recounted that AMADA activists "*sold a newspaper, which was also called AMADA, and at the top were five heads: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao and Stalin. And when you read it, it was always about revolution and armed*

AMADA's attitude changed and a collaboration was established with these delegates, who were themselves confronted with bureaucracy at the top. The strike had been called by the union leadership with the aim of putting an end to the tactic of partial strikes, often declared at the last minute and affecting only one branch, which in this way obstructed the smooth running of other branches in the complex shipbuilding process, particularly when a ship was being launched from dry dock. The unions' intention was to send the workers home to wait until they calmed down, but AMADA, together with these militant trade unionists, intervened to publicise the strike, spread the word in the neighbourhoods and mobilise support for it.¹ This strike demonstrated that the sectarianism of "the anti-union approach" could be corrected, and Ludo Martens "*changed his political line. No anti-unionism, but a strengthening of progressive forces within the union itself. The aim was to protect the trade union movement from attacks by the right and the establishment.*"² Subsequently, members of AMADA were able to become members of the union.

AMADA's active participation in the dockers' strike that began on 6 April 1973 in Ghent and spread to Antwerp three days later provided a further antidote to student sectarianism. The strike demanded a 100 FB increase and a 13th month's salary. Added to this were political demands in favour of freedom of strike action and trade union democracy, as well as the repeal of Law 430, which tightened repression (§ 1.2.) and against which tens of thousands of young people had already taken to the streets in January. The strike was not recognised by the trade unions, which warned the strikers in a letter dated 12 April 1973: "*Just as the unions protect you against arbitrary employer action, those same unions will protect you against leaders, who have nothing to offer you but chaos and who are jeopardising everything you have built with your unions.*"³ Among these *cheafs* was a strike committee organised by *Arbeidersmacht Antwerpen*, supported by dockworkers from the Belgian Communist Party (PCB).⁴ AMADA, which had just organised its cell in the port, initially had difficulty accepting that the strike was being led by the PCB, with a committee from which it was excluded. It denounced the committee as anarchist and economist, while the PCB accused AMADA of making unrealistic proposals and merely propagating revolution. But subsequently, AMADA joined in support of the strike, also backed by the RAL⁵ and by the then already famous worker priest Frans Wuytack, expelled from Venezuela for "subversive" activities. The dockers' wives formed a committee to support their husbands (whose leader, Wies De Schutter, later joined AMADA). All these forces organised a first major demonstration on 16 April in Antwerp, despite the mayor's ban,

struggle." See Jan Cap, *In naam van mijn klasse*. EPO 1987

<www.marxists.org/nederlands/cap/in_naam_klasse/index.htm > Cap's book is rich in lessons about trade union struggles. For example, it describes in concrete terms what "the right to work" means during a strike, when 200 police officers are mobilised to bring a strike-breaker ("een rat") into the factory, despite the strike having been voted for by more than 90% of the workers. Cap became a PTB activist in May 1985. At the time, AMADA activists marched in demonstrations chanting slogans such as "Le pouvoir est au bout du fusil !" "Power is at the rifle top!" and "Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao!"

- 1 On one occasion, when a sympathiser distributing an AMADA leaflet at the very gates of the union was taken away by the police (called by the union leadership), the immediate reaction of these combative delegates was to secure his release without delay.
- 2 *In Memoriam*, op. cit.
- 3 See a very detailed report on this strike in CRISP Weekly Bulletin 1973/32-33. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-courrier-hebdomadaire-du-crisp-1973-32-page-1.html> A report was published in *Solidaire* on 18 April 2013 to mark the 40th anniversary of this strike.
- 4 A second letter from the Intersyndicale, dated 9 May 1973, stated that 'any solution has been sabotaged by the Antwerp Strike Committee, led and paid for by the Communist Party, which is thus interfering in trade union affairs and undermining freedom of labour'.
- 5 AMADA and RAL organised numerous meetings and fundraising events in several cities across the country and attempted to spark solidarity actions abroad (France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands)

and in Ghent. May Day that year was celebrated in the context of the conflict.¹ After the strike, which ended on 5 June due to exhaustion,² (AMADA activists were prosecuted and finally sentenced in December to prison terms, most of which with partial delay.³

Another conflict directly affected AMADA, clearly demonstrating its local integration. In 1973, the Medical Profession Association had already attacked the young organisation Médecine pour le peuple (Medicine for the People), banning it from practising medicine for eight days. At a meeting of doctors and patients, Ludo Martens explained that the correct attitude was simply to ignore this ban and continue practising.⁴ This tactic would set a precedent within the party, and a successful one at that. In 2014, following the PTB's major electoral breakthrough, the Medical Profession Association attacked again, and the PTB responded in the same way. On several occasions, the Association backed down in the face of mobilisation.⁵

1.8.3. A direction

The confrontation with the concrete reality of local roots inevitably had repercussions within the *Communist Party in Construction*. "The editorial staff of the Journal became, in effect, the centre of the organisation. And in July 1971, for the first time, a permanent Executive Committee was set up, with the task of building the party from the top down."⁶

One of the Bureau's first interventions was to rectify the approach taken by the Antwerp section during the Boel conflict, which we have just mentioned. (§ 1.8.2.)

However, the lack of contact with the concrete struggle in local integration, or rather the lack of such contact on the part of the leadership, was to create problems. At the end of 1972, an anti-party faction developed in Ghent, which Martens attributed to the fact that "the rules of operation of a communist party were not known to all party members". As a solution, new statutes were drafted.⁷

"At the end of 1972, the first Permanent Bureau was dissolved and several national cadres were given the task of working in a province [...] in order to strengthen ties with activists, the masses, and the struggle of the masses. [...] It was necessary to get rid of a leadership that was in the hands of bureaucrats [capable only of] producing all kinds of texts 'that sounded good', with lots of quotations from Marx and Lenin."⁸

1 The RAL decided to demonstrate in Ghent with the F.G.T.B. procession as a separate group, while AMADA did not want to demonstrate in the traditional procession and organised a 'national demonstration' under the banner of relentless class struggle.

2 Frans Wuytack urged the strikers: "We must continue. We have a unique opportunity to show the mafia of union leaders that our demands are justified." And the previous day's referendum had resulted in 54% voting to continue. But the Committee had set a quorum of 65% to decide to continue the strike. The strikers did not obtain the 100 FB and the 13th month at that time, but they won their case at the end of 1973.

3 The total sentence for the 13 defendants was nine years, including eight months' actual imprisonment. See Segers, op. cit. II.8

4 See a speech by Kris Merckx at the funeral of Ludo Martens in June 2011.

5 See Claire Geraets' testimony in *Le Soir* on 19 April 2014

6 *Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit., chap. 1 §1 Historical background. The Bureau is composed of Ludo Martens, Imelda Haesendonck and Paul Theunissen. Imelda's presence is significant. At the time, access to university education for girls was well below 50%, and there was a certain amount of segregation, such as reserving seats for girls in the front rows of lecture halls. There were also very few women in the SVB. For the record: when Pinochet staged his coup in Chile (11 September 1971), AMADA's initial reaction was to condemn it, but within 24 hours, the Bureau intervened to change its position and support the dictator, who was backed by China, given that Allende was supported by the USSR. The newspaper, already in print, was replaced by a corrected version.

7 *Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit. ch.1 - 2.3.

8 *Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit. ch. 1 - 1

Active participation in the dockers' strike that began on 6 April 1973 in Ghent and spread to Antwerp three days later (§1.8.2.) revitalised the party. Ludo Martens and Jo Cottenier became personally involved in the Ghent and Antwerp cells.¹ And finally, "in October 1973, a new permanent national leadership was organised, which made it possible to strengthen the work of the provincial leaderships."²

In the parliamentary elections of 7 November 1971, AMADA was still opposed to this "*electoral carnival*", but three years later, the organisation decided to participate, obtaining 2.8% of the vote in the Antwerp region.³ And from 1975 onwards, a new political orientation was developed. The "fight against sectarianism" resumes. The slogan becomes "militant trade unionism".

The newspaper began weekly publication in 1975.

1.8.4. The struggle between two lines

This development also brought ideological confrontation with other movements to the fore. During the revolts in Leuven, the SVB held joint meetings with French-speaking movements. But subsequently, their paths diverged. In *Le Parti de la Révolution*, Ludo Martens refers on several occasions to the ideological struggle against Grippa's group, a splinter group of the PCB that expressed its views in the magazine *Clarté*,⁴ and against the *Union of Marxist-Leninist Communists of Belgium* (UCMLB). These groups "had a long-standing influence on the whole party".⁵(97)

Regarding Grippa, Ludo Martens said that "dialectical materialism is [...] an essential point in the struggle against all the opportunistic deviations of *Clarté*".⁶ Regarding the UCMLB, it had "led to the loss of an entire generation of potential revolutionaries because it claimed to develop a scientific line based essentially on theory."⁷

An interview in *Clarté*, No. 9 (May 2008) with Silvio Marra, a leader of the struggle at the Clabecq ironworks in the 1990s, confirms this assessment. From the moment he joined the ironworks in 1972, Silvio was part of a UCMLB cell of five comrades until 1975. "*We said that we had to make a revolution. [...] But if you say things to workers, it's to get them done. You have to confront them with problems that need to be dealt with immediately. If you talk about armed struggle, you have to do it and not say 'we have to prepare for...'*"

For Ludo Martens, the Maoist concept of "struggle between two lines" is the guiding thread of ideological struggle. In *Le parti de la Révolution*, he lists six of them. The struggle "against the intellectualist line of the UCMLB, against its social-democratic conception of the party and against its putschism" is the third.⁸

1 Versteegh, op. cit. p. 101

2 *Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit. ch.1 - 1

3 AMADA received a total of 19,794 votes in 1974 and 24,899 in 1977. The RAL, its main rival on the radical left, only stood in certain municipalities in 1976, then systematically in all elections from 1977 onwards, obtaining 0.26% of the vote in parliament elections.

4 Jacques Grippa was a member of the Central Committee of the PCB. Mao's criticism of Khrushchev's 'revisionism' in the USSR had led to this split in Belgium in 1963, fuelled by generous financial resources from Beijing. However, by 1979, all the French-speaking groups [Franz Legros, from the Walloon Workers' Party, and Robert Fusz, from a Maoist student group at the ULB, Grippa] had disappeared; their members who had remained faithful to socialist ideals had meanwhile joined the SVB, which would become the PTB. (Kwarteeuw, op. cit. III.2.)

5 *Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit., ch.1 - 2.2

6 *Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit. ch.1 - 3.1.

7 *Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit. ch.3 - 2.3.

8 *Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit. ch. 1 - 7.4 For the first and second points, see § 1.4.2. and § 1.6.2. respectively. For the fourth, fifth and sixth points, see § 2.2., § 2.3.1. and § 3.2. respectively below.

2. The PVDA

In 1975, AMADA launched a call for candidates to move to Wallonia and develop the organisation there. A first contingent of around ten members was sent there, most of whom managed to find a job in a factory. They thus entered into competition with the UCMLB (Union des communistes marxistes-léninistes de Belgique - § 1.8.4.) The newspaper published a French version: *Tout le Pouvoir aux Travailleurs* (All Power to the Workers). The organisation became national and at the first May Day celebrations in Brussels, in 1978, AMADA-TPO publicly presented itself as the *Parti Ouvrier Communiste en Construction*.¹ In the 1978 elections, the party almost doubled its vote-score from 1977.² The strategic goal remained "socialist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat". But in its analyses, it was still the *Three Worlds* theory (§ 1.1.4.) that dominated.³

Meanwhile, with the death of Mao Zedong (9 September 1976) and the restorationist shift under Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese reference had changed somewhat. The Sino-Soviet split (1965-1976) escalated into confrontation. And in Albania, Enver Hoxha, head of State from 1944 until his death in 1985, who had followed until then China in his critique against the "revisionism" of Khrushchev, rejected Deng Xiaoping's shift, still supporting Mao and Stalin. In 1978, Albania broke off relations with China.

In August 1978, a delegation from AMADA-TPO visited China. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China then officially invited a second delegation, composed of Ludo Martens, Kris Merckx, Herwig Lerouge and Jo Cottenier.

On the other hand, with a decade of experience behind it, the *Communist Party in Construction*, which was still in its infancy, wanted to "break with 'extremist' concepts".

On 1 May 1979, Ludo Martens officially launched preparations to build a new party.

For Ludo, "the name 'AMADA' only refers to the issue of power. The many facets of the party's activities are not reflected in this name. Furthermore, it gives the impression that we are only addressing workers. For two years, we have been fighting against sectarianism, and this must also be reflected in the name. We want to get rid of the image of 'extremism' and we want to build a party that manages to connect with the broad masses."⁴

A directive from the Central Committee of AMADA-TPO, dated 12 May 1979, sets out the challenges: "After ten years of preparation, we can act externally as a real party. [...] We have acquired a certain knowledge of Marxism-Leninism, of Mao Zedong Thought".⁵

1 *Communist Workers' Party in the Making*. The reference appears for the first time in the header of issue no. 7 of the TPO newspaper, dated 3 March 1977. (Versteegh, op. cit. p. 123.)).

2 The interview with Silvio Marra mentioned above (§ 1.8.4.) illustrates this development. Silvio continues: "At the end of 1976, the UCMLB broke up, but workers who shared this outlook continued to meet in the factory. [...] We didn't work with any other organisation after that. We didn't get on at all with TPO. And then, at that point, TPO wasn't coming to the Forges much any more."

3 *Tout le Pouvoir aux Travailleurs*, no. 15, 11 May 1979. See Versteegh, op. cit. pp. 130-132

4 Ludo Martens, in one of the last issues of AMADA.

Thirty years later (in an article published on the PVDA website on 3 November 2009), Boudewijn Deckers said: "We kept our political convictions, but we also wanted to get rid of this dogmatism."

5 See Versteegh, op. cit., p. 138.

2.1. The Founding Congress

A Founding Congress of the new party finally took place on 7 November 1979, attended by four thousand people.¹ The name, revealed in the AMADA-TPO newspaper on 29 August 1979, was that of Enver Hoxha's party, the *Partij van de Arbeid* (PVDA).² Its the loyalty to the "orthodox" communism of Mao and Stalin. The programme champions the work of Mao, who had "the merit of having learned the lessons of the total degeneration of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism in that country", and it aligns itself with the Three Worlds theory, (§ 1.1.) with "*the two superpowers* [the United States and the USSR] *as enemies of the peoples*".

As a bulwark against extremism, the Programme proposes "*raising the consciousness of the masses*" through "*strong and enthusiastic support for all the struggles of the masses for their concrete and direct demands*". For the socialist revolution, there is no longer any need to go through the stage of "*all power to the workers*". The programme advocates a reformist solution, through "*struggles [which] must ultimately lead to the expropriation of monopoly capital and the dissolution of its repressive apparatus*" within bourgeois society itself.³ The name of the newspaper became *Solidair/Solidaire* in 1980.⁴

From then on, the focus was on working within the trade unions and winning over trade union activists. The statutes advocated a Leninist party "*with democratic centralism*". The leadership included Ludo Martens, Boudewijn Deckers (from the *Derde Wereldbeweging*), Herwig Lerouge and Jo Cottenier, among others.⁵

2.2. The 2nd Congress, 1983

In the municipal elections of 10 October 1982, the party won its first councillor, in Zelzate. Tensions arose within the young party, with members who left the party denouncing its 'hard line' stance, to the detriment of open debate.⁶ The party leadership (Ludo Martens) denounced a "liquidationist tendency",⁷ and a second congress was convened for March-April 1983. A book by

1 Laurent-Désiré Kabila, who had just created his *People's Revolution Party* (PRP) in January 1967 upon returning from a training programme in China, was a guest of honour.

2 A clarification is needed regarding the use of the acronyms PVDA and PTB.

The "*clarification*" refers to the French-language source text of our translation. In this English language version, we use the French practise, as mentioned in the Prologue: PTB, and eventually PVDA. [TN]

It should be made clear that these acronyms refer to one and the same party. The PTB uses PVDA on its website and in its Dutch-language literature, and PTB on its website and in its French-language literature. In this French-language text, we will therefore use the acronym PTB, even though, for a few more years, the party will only really exist in Flanders. The acronym PVDA will only be used to refer to the party's Dutch-language website, for references that explicitly mention both acronyms (e.g. PTB+/PVDA+), or when a reported source explicitly uses this term. The party named *Partij van de Arbeid - PvdA* in the Netherlands is the social democratic party, founded in 1946.

3 See Articles 101, 102 and 108 of the *Founding Programme*, cited in an article by the Political Bureau of the PTB published in *Etudes marxistes*, No. 26

4 An initial name, *Konkreet*, had to be discarded following a threat of legal action from a section of the CVP that had a newspaper with that name.

5 Herwig Lerouge was already working with Ludo Martens when the latter was still a student at the KUL. He continued to work as editorial secretary of *Ons Leven* when Ludo was expelled from the KUL. Jo Cottenier was previously editor-in-chief of AMADA.

6 See Buelinckx, op. cit. II.3.4. p. 54

7 In 1980-1982, we fought against the social-democratic and liquidationist line of the KPD [Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands] and against the same tendency within the Party." The term liquidator comes from Lenin, in the context of the split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. See *Socialism and War*, 1915. Ludo feared suffering the fate of the model, the KPD/ML, the German party that had also broken with Maoism after the death of Mao Zedong. This is the fourth of the six "struggles between two lines" (see §1.8.4.)

Martens and Merckx reports on this Congress. (The slogan, the "magic weapon" of the second Congress, is the "United Front". *"The united front is a fundamental weapon for any revolutionary party. The united front is a means of mobilising the broad masses, involving them in the struggle and enabling them to gain revolutionary experience. We unite with other forces whenever this is useful for the broad development of the class struggle and the raising of political consciousness."*¹ It should be noted, however, that this does indeed involve building a united front "around the party". But in practice, with regard to the PTB's participation in a major miners' strike in Limburg in 1986 against the closure of the Waterschei and Winterslag mines, Ludo Martens said: *"When leaders discuss issues endlessly, for a long time, without providing appropriate solutions to major issues, they prevent activists from carrying out their work effectively."*²

On the other hand, the party's development in Wallonia is stagnating.³

2.3. The debate on the international situation

2.3.1. Glasnost

With Gorbachev's arrival in power in the USSR (March 1985), the PTB changed its stance on that country,⁴ with *"the hopes that Gorbachev's new policy raised in 1985-1987, for the renewal of the communist movement after the Brezhnev winter."* The PTB, which in 1979 denounced the restoration of capitalism in the USSR, (§ 2.1.) now corrected this characterisation. The fact is that *"the Chinese Communist Party has revised most of its criticisms"* of the USSR, and that *"Gorbachev has stated that Stalin's enormous merits must be recognised"*. Therefore, *"the re-evaluation of the analysis of the Soviet Union has become an unavoidable necessity."* And *"for too long, we have, out of prejudice, turned a blind eye and seen only the evidence of restoration."*⁵ The debate was conducted openly in Solidair between October 1987 and early 1989 under the title *"From the October Revolution to glasnost"*. And a consensus seemed to be emerging that the USSR and the Eastern Bloc countries were indeed socialist countries. And that Gorbachev was defending this achievement. A rapprochement was even sought with the Belgian Communist Party, whose last two elected representatives had disappeared from Parliament in 1985. The aim was to be *"Marxist and revolutionary in today's world"*.⁶

2.3.2. Etudes marxistes

In 1988, the party held its third congress, the *Trade Union Congress*. The party's relationship with trade union leaders had been a controversial issue for years. On this occasion, a theoretical instrument was established, *Études Marxistes* (Marxist Studies).⁷

Party President Ludo Martens opened the discussion with an *analysis of the Trotskyist strategy of the workers' government*. Following the Maoist model, the strategy



1 *Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit. ch. 3 - 3.5.2

2 *Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit. ch. 3 - 1.3.4

3 In 1996, Ludo Martens said: *"We have been demanding 'Priority for Wallonia' for ten years. The results do not allow us to know whether we have made any progress on this issue."* (*Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit. ch. 2-2.6).

4 This is the fifth of the six struggles between two lines (see § 1.8.4.) "The struggle against the anti-communist campaign and against the revisionist current within the Party."

5 L. Martens, *The Velvet Counter-Revolution*, 6 April 1991 <http://www.marx.be/fr/content/lurss-et-la-contre-r%C3%A9volution-de-velours.20>

6 Buelinckx, op. cit., III.3.1.1.p.93

7 The collection of issues of the journal was available at <http://www.marx.be>, but this was no longer the case at the end of 2014. The last issue we were able to consult, No. 106, dates from April-June 2014.

of was "armed popular insurrection", and "to claim that the great strike of 1960-61 was an onset to socialist revolution is to make oneself look ridiculous."¹ [...] In actual circumstances, developing class consciousness means [...] making it clear that workers must organise themselves independently, pursuing a revolutionary policy [...] It means making clear the vital necessity of strengthening the Communist Party and the mass organisations that fight against some aspects of capitalist and imperialist reality. It also means creation of a Popular Front...

From its second issue onwards, the magazine focused on international politics, particularly the situation in the former Belgian colony. The PTB, and Ludo Martens in particular, had maintained a fraternal relationship with Laurent Kabila since the very foundation of the PTB, where this guerrilla fighter against Mobutu had been a guest of honour.² On the other hand, good relations with "leaders" such as Arafat, for example, led to some rather curious ideological pirouettes. "The slogan 'wo peoples, two states' [...] remains an erroneous and unacceptable slogan, which, moreover, is more demobilising than mobilising..." but we must "continue to support the political, diplomatic and military struggle of the PLO, the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people."³

The Nicaraguan Revolution will be taken as an example to denounce Trotsky's theory of "permanent revolution".⁴

And in 1996, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the magazine devoted an issue to *the Soviet Union from 1991 to 1996*, the scene of a "mind-boggling catastrophe".

2.3.3. China

The Tiananmen Square crackdown in June 1989 prompted mixed reactions within *Solidair*. Initially, the intervention by the army was considered as "disproportionate". Ludo Martens denounced the negative developments under Deng Xiaoping, allowing "capitalist forces" to develop. However, a week later, he confirmed his unwavering solidarity with the Chinese Communist Party, reserving the right to clarify his position in the future. And in September 1991, he summed up the situation: "Tiananmen 1989: from revisionist drift to counter-revolutionary riot."⁵

A few years later, Martens would say that at that time, "right-wing opportunism was the greatest danger to the party." More specifically, "in 1988, we correctly analysed the rise of reformist and revisionist ideas throughout the world. On the one hand, the Trotskyists and revisionists were on the verge of total defeat for their policies and were trying to use the reformist wave to manoeuvre and survive at the expense of the party. On the other hand, the most bitter enemies of communism were promoting 'unity of the petty left' in order to hunt down the Communist Party, break it up and attract its supporters. We had to resist the temptation to bow to the 'unitary' tendency of the petty bourgeoisie, and at the same time we had to consolidate, above all, our own Marxist-Leninist positions."⁶

1 In his speech on 1 May 1997, Martens nevertheless described this strike as 'memorable'. See below, § 3.3.4.

2 L. Martens, *Le Zaïre étranglé par le F.M.I. (Zaire strangled by the IMF)* - *Etudes Marxistes* no. 2 - 1989 In 1995, Ludo Martens published a 270-page book in French, which gained some notoriety: *Abo: Une femme du Congo (Abo: A Woman from the Congo)*, (published by L'Harmattan). Léonie Abo is the widow of Pierre Mulele, and the book is about the struggle against Mobutu's dictatorship. See In Memoriam, op. cit. 26 *Etudes marxistes* No. 12 - 01.09.1991

3 W. De Neuter, *The Palestinians and the State of Israel: Two Peoples, Two States?* - *Etudes marxistes* No. 2 - 1989

4 L. Martens, *The Sandinista Revolution and Permanent Revolution*, August 1988 - 19 May 1989- *Etudes marxistes* No.4

5 *Etudes marxistes* No. 12 - 01.09.1991

6 *The Party of Revolution*, op. cit. chap. 3 - 1.3.3. It should also be noted that in the meantime, the German party KPD/ML, which had already been denounced in 1982, had unified in 1986 with a Trotskyist group, the GIM (Gruppe Internationale Marxisten), to form the VSP (Verein für solidarische Perspektiven).

3. The party after the fall of the Berlin Wall

The capitalist restoration in Eastern European countries, marked in history as the fall of the Berlin Wall (9 November 1989), obviously had repercussions for the PTB, as it did for the entire left around the world. Unsurprisingly, the fall of the Stalinist regime in the USSR was a major defeat for Ludo Martens. But the PTB "*survived, strengthened, the anti-communist wave that broke out in 1989-91. [...] And in order to broaden the debate, the party decided to hold a Congress*".¹

This 4th Congress took place in 1991, and in April 1991, Ludo published *La contre-révolution de velours*,² - "*After five years of perestroika and glasnost, a number of observations and analyses*". He arrives at the conclusion that "*Gorbachev is increasingly aligning himself with the liberal right*", and aims for "*a slow, gradual but systematic evolution towards capitalist restoration*", while "*glasnost means opening up Soviet newspapers to CIA chiefs*". he denounces, for example, the fact that Gorbachev pilloried Honecker, "the true communist".³ A year later, Ludo makes an "*Assessment of the fall of the Soviet Union – on the causes of betrayal and the tasks facing communists*".⁴

The campaign against Trotskyists remains relevant: Trotskyism in the service of the CIA against socialist countries.⁵ And in June 1993, *Solidaire* published "*What young people need to know about Trotskyism*".⁶ At the PTB's May Day celebration in 1993, Ludo Martens' lengthy speech analysed the situation and claimed the PTB as a bastion of orthodoxy: "*Fortunately, there are still communists!*". He regretted that in Belgium, "*in the labour and trade union movement, we are seeing the development of a whole mythology of submission to capital developing*". There were some nuances within the Party. In March 1993, Dirk Van Duppen said that "*even a sick, degenerate or diminished socialist system is still superior, in terms of human development, to a dynamic, expansive and aggressive capitalism*".⁷ But in 1994, Martens published *Another Look at Stalin*,⁸ which became a global reference for Stalinist currents.



*A other look on Stalin,
by Ludo Martens*

3.1. Internationalism of "Friendly communist parties"

In 1992, Ludo Martens took the initiative to organise an annual International Communist Seminar,⁹ given "*the necessity, but also the possibility, of reunifying and strengthening the international*

1 *The Party and the Revolution*, op. cit. Introduction, pt 7

2 L. Martens, *The Velvet Counter-Revolution*. 6 April 1991.
<<http://intellettualecollettivo.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Ludo-Martens-LURSS-et-la-contre-r%C3%A9volution-de-velours-1991.pdf>>

3 On May Day 1993, the PTB received a message from Honecker (then residing in Chile) - *Solidair*.5.5.1993

4 This text, dated 2 April 1992, is available in Spanish on the internet at <http://es.scribd.com/doc/78248312/Ludo-Martens-UN-BALANCE-DE-LA-CAIDA-DE-LA-UNIONSOVIETICA>

5 *Etudes Marxistes*, 20 October 1992. <<http://www.reveilcommuniste.fr/article-un-texte-de-ludo-martens-contre-le-trotskisme-1992-124708226.html>>

6 *Solidaire* 16 June 1993

7 *Etudes Marxistes* No. 17 - 20 March 1993 - We emphasise

8 Ed. EPO, Antwerp 1994. A Spanish version is available at <https://asturiesdixebra.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/otra-mirada-sobre-stalin.pdf>. [The foreword and introduction can be read in French at <<https://reconstructioncommuniste.wordpress.com/2015/05/25/un-autre-regard-sur-staline-par-ludo-martens-avant-propos-et-introduction/>>]

9 The respective website http://www.icseminar.org/ics_presentation_fr.html became obsolete after 2014.

communist movement on the basis of scientific socialism, in an internationalist spirit', following "the degeneration and final overthrow of socialism in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries."¹ Delegations from these parties, sometimes including ambassadors from the respective countries were systematically invited to the PTB's May Day celebrations.

These international meetings increasingly became the focus of Ludo Martens' political activity. On 4 May 1995, four months after his party's 5th congress, where he had handed over the reins to Nadine Rosa Rosso, (§ 3.3.) he chaired the *4th International Communist Seminar* in Brussels, where he made *Proposals for the unification of the International Communist Movement*.²

Two years later, the 6th edition, under the name "*Seminar for the Unification of the International Communist Movement*", was attended by 74 parties and organisations and received messages from 24 others.³

Ludo himself chaired each seminar until 2000. In 2002, the PTB organised a conference with thirty communist parties to support North Korea. Ludo Martens was one of the last foreigners to meet North Korean President Kim Il Sung, who died on 8 July 1994.

The 12th Seminar, held on 4 May 2003, denounced American preparations for a "*Third World War*". Baudouin Deckers summarised: "*All reports recognise the seriousness of the United States' rejection of the authority of the UNO.*" (And let us note in passing that Ben Bella was invited to the party, where he congratulated France for not accompanying the United States in this escalation: "*Yesterday we drove the French out of Algeria, but today I say 'long live France'.*" This was the position of the PTB at the time.⁴(For the 13th Seminar, in May 2004, Ludo published another brief introduction, with a self-criticism of the PTB's positions taken in "the great debate" between "the Chinese Communist Party and the Communist Party of the USSR".⁵ This would be his last public appearance".⁶

1 These discussions are echoed in an article by Martens in *Etudes Marxistes* No. 29, 1996, Sur quelques aspects de la lutte contre le révisionnisme (On some aspects of the struggle against revisionism).

2 Martens' contribution is reproduced in Bulletin international - New series no. 4-5
<http://321ignition.free.fr/pag/fr/pre/pag_003/pag2.htm>

3 See <http://www.wengewang.org/read.php?tid=18178> -a report by Ludo Martens on this event, with a photo of the Seminar in Brussels in May 2008. [website inaccessible in 2019]

4 "*And that the Iraqi people regain their sovereignty, with the possible assistance of troops from the UNO countries that did not participate in the war.*" Editorial in *Solidaire*, 29 October 2003. In an exchange of letters with a PTB activist who had doubts about "*sending French and German armies to replace the American occupiers*," David Pestieau clarified the PTB's position: "if necessary for security reasons, sending troops from the Arab League or within the strict framework of the UN (restoration of sovereignty illegally attacked), sending UN troops excluding all countries that participated in the war and occupation. These troops would remain for an extremely short period (6 months)".

5 *Etudes Marxistes*, 66/2004 - There were 70 parties and organisations registered as participants and 12 as observers. Regarding the PTB, it states: "Our Party was formed in the school of the Great 1 Debate that pitted the Chinese Communist Party against the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1966. It was the Chinese Communist Party that taught us to defend Leninism and the work of Comrade Stalin and to criticise revisionism. We made the mistake of taking the Chinese experience as our main, even sole, source of reference. Thus, we followed the CCP when it developed its theory of social imperialism, the most dangerous superpower. This is followed by self-criticism on the condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the MPLA, mercenaries of social imperialism, positions that were rectified thanks to the Cuban party.

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At the 15th Seminar, on 1 May 2006, in Brussels, the PTB highlighted "*Communists in popular movements around the world*".¹ As an example, he cited the Syrian Communist Party, with "*four members of parliament and one minister in the government [of Bashar Al Assad]*", whereas two weeks earlier he had criticised the *Linkspartei* in Germany for its "*participation in government*".² At the 17th Seminar, held in Brussels on 16-18 May 2008, a declaration was ratified "*by 49 communist and workers' parties from around the world*".³ The 21st Seminar, held in Brussels in 2012, was attended by 59 delegations. (P1) 22nd Seminar, also held in Brussels on 31 May 2013, had as its theme "*Attacks on democratic rights and freedoms in the global capitalist crisis. Strategies and actions in response*." (s)

On the other hand, since 1998, the PTB has also participated every year in the *International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties* (IMCP), an initiative of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) this year (taking the name of the 1960 and 1969 meetings organised by Moscow, in which the PCB participated), which always included the Communist Parties of Cuba and Vietnam, as well as, systematically since 2006, the Communist Party of China and the two Communist Parties of Syria..⁴ 2009, an extraordinary session of the Meeting was held in Syria.⁵

In December 2010, Boudewijn Deckers participated in the Meeting in South Africa, where Jacob Zuma, president of the ANC and president of the Republic, took the floor, "*emphasising the historic and inseparable unity between the ANC, the Communist Party and the workers, represented by COSATU*".⁶ And in 2012, Herwig Lerouge participated in the 13th Meeting in Athens, an opportunity to defend communist orthodoxy. He stated that "*political unity must be based on the socialist perspective, the leading role of the working class and the Leninist character of the party in order to resist the social-democratic and neo-reformist pressure of the European Left. [...] With the democratic legitimacy of the bourgeois parliament being widely questioned by a growing sector of the working classes, we must convince them of the revolutionary path to overcoming capitalist domination*."

For the PTB, internationalism boils down to friendly relations with other parties considered faithful to communist orthodoxy, not only the single parties of communist countries such as China, Albania, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea, but also communist parties in other countries, especially countries where the communist party is close to the government, parties that support the progressive national bourgeoisie.

Ludo's fraternal relationship with Laurent Kabila (§ 2.3.2.) extended to his son Joseph, when he succeeded his father, who was assassinated in January 2001. In the Philippines, the main contact was Luis Jalandoni. This former priest, leader of the *National Democratic Front* (controlled by the Communist Party of the Philippines, the PTB's "sister communist party"), was in exile in the Netherlands at the time. He was able to return to his country in December 2010, and in June 2011, he was Cultural Attaché at the Philippine Embassy in Brussels..⁷

1 *Solidaire* 10.5.2006 At that time, Ludo Martens was already suffering from Alzheimer's disease

2 *Solidaire* 26.4.2006

3 *Etudes Marxistes* No. 83

4 The intervention of the PTB delegate in these Meetings for the years 2009 to 2012 is available on SolidNet.org. [After 2014, this site no longer reports on these interventions, but it still provides the contact details of the PTB/PvdA for Belgium and announces its 21st Seminar in Greece on 9 November 2019]

5 Mentioned in the organisation's 2012 Beirut Declaration.

6 *Solidaire* 23 December 2010.

7 He was present at the tribute to Martens after his death on 26 June 2011. Already in May 1996, Jalandoni participated in the International Seminar of Communist Parties in Brussels and in the May Day celebrations at the ULB. Comrades from the LIT, who had a stand there with their Trotskyist leaflets and literature (50 metres from a 2 m x 3 m billboard glorifying Stalin), met him there, and he signed a petition for the release of comrades (Trotskyists) imprisoned in Argentina.

In Brazil, the PTB's sister party is the PCdoB.¹ In Syria, the "sister parties" are the two communist parties, which participate in Assad's government.

3.2. The campaign against the 1993 Global Plan and against Europe

Meanwhile, Belgian workers, unconcerned with international developments and even less so with Ludo Martens' ideas, continue their struggles.

After the Maastricht Treaty (1992) formalised Germany's new position as a reunified country and master in Eastern Europe, Belgium aligned itself with Europe's requirements with a Global Plan. Workers resisted – with a demonstration of 50,000 on 29 October 1993 and a general strike on 24 November 1993 – but the Plan was imposed. On the occasion of the European Summit in December 1993, the PTB organised a Counter-Summit "Eurostop"² with more than 35 organisations from 14 different countries. For the PTB in 1993: *"It is the failure of a system based on private ownership of production means and the free market, with the pursuit of profit as the sole motive for production."* And *"Germany is achieving by peaceful means what Hitler was unable to achieve by military means: domination of the whole of Europe."*

However, when it came to formulating the programme, it boiled down to *"making the rich pay"*. The *"stubborn work of raising awareness"* consisted of *"explaining each point of this programme over several years"*. And for the socialist revolution, it was simply a matter of swelling the ranks of the PTB.³

On the other hand, *"What threatens European integration most, beyond the real contradictions that are intensifying between the German, French and British bourgeoisies, is indeed the revolt of the people."*

In the European elections of June 1994, the PTB pointed out that *"fortunately, there are still true communists"* and presented three themes: *"Make the rich pay for the crisis"*, *"No to the European Union"* and *"Against the crisis, the exploitation, the fascism and the war"*. The Dutch-speaking list of the party was led by Kris Merckx, and the French-speaking list by Nadine Rosa Rosso.⁴

The PTB went from a score of 0.5% in 1989 to 1% (60,000 votes).⁵

However, on this occasion, the Trotskyists, who had only 0.17% in 1989, ran in the *Gauche Unie* (United Left) and so obtained 0.60%. This caught the attention of the PTB. Had we neglected our task of defending our programme? And at the Central Committee meeting on 15 September 1994, the PTB engaged in self-criticism. Gaining points in terms of the number of votes is all well and good, but *"in the 1994 election campaigns, we noticed that there was a tendency within our party to hide behind the economic programme in order to conceal our fundamental strategy, namely the socialist revolution."*⁶

1 *Solidaire*, dated 22 August 2013, glorifies the PCdoB and its "ten years of Communist Party rule" (in the PT government) without mentioning the demonstrations by millions of people against the government that had just happened.

2 *Etudes Marxistes* No. 20-21, 1 January 1994

3 May Day speech by Ludo Martens, *Solidair*, 5 May 1993. Among the guests at the celebration was Roberto D'Orazio, who spoke about the struggle of the workers at the Clabecq ironworks. He said that *"the workers have understood that the PS is betraying their struggles. But they also understood that there is another kind of 'left'."*

4 *Le Soir*, 9 May 1994

5 *Vlaams Belang* won two seats with 7.78% of the vote, while *Ecolo*, the *Volksunie* and the *Front National* each won only one seat.

6 *Etudes Marxistes* No. 26 - 15.01.1995. This was the sixth of six "struggles between two lines" (see §1.8.4..) *"In 1994, we began the struggle against bureaucracy and for the revolutionisation of the leadership."*

This criticism extends to the "campaign against the Global Plan" more generally, under the heading "A revolutionary party in the strikes". "A comrade can work correctly in strikes, but if he does not have the courage to push the discussion on our anti-capitalist programme, he is playing into the hands of the fascists. We cannot make a break between this strategic task – working for the revolution – and the tasks in the class struggle."¹

Two years later, Martens would say: "In 1994, we did not understand that the situation had changed and that trade unionists and workers were looking for an alternative. Out of a spirit of conformity and routine, we abandoned the initiative, which fell into the hands of the Trotskyists and revisionists. With their demagogy of a 'united left', they managed to attract a few revolutionary trade unionists and workers, drawing them into a project that was a disguised support for social democracy. We showed a lack of vision in the active struggle. We should have realised in time a correct united platform, with a completely different perspective from that of 1988 [when right-wing opportunism was the greatest danger (§ 2.3.3.)], oriented towards trade unionists and workers in general."²

In the municipal elections of October 1994, the PTB lost its seat in Zelzate, falling from 9.67% to 7.55% (648 votes).³ In Antwerp, it maintained its score of 1.9%. Anyhow, it was time to take the bull by the horns: a new congress was needed.

3.3. The 5th Congress (1995)

In January 1995, the PTB held its 5th Congress. More than two hundred activists took part in eight days of "debates in committees and plenary meetings. More than ten thousand amendments were tabled."⁴ At this Congress, Ludo assumed his role as the Party's ideologue, focusing on discussions at the international level. He remained President, but for day-to-day management, the position of *General Secretary* was created and assigned to Nadine Rosa Rosso, who headed the list in the European elections in June 1994. However, the Congress provided Ludo with an opportunity to systematise his views in a work based on the Congress documents: a book dated 1995 under the title *Le parti de la révolution*. (The Party of the Revolution). It concerns "the new tasks [of the party], five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implementation of a gigantic wave of demagogy on the themes of 'democracy, freedom and human rights'".⁵ This document (already cited several times above in this text) remained the party's ideological reference for years. On the cover, next to the name, was mentioned: "In collaboration with Nadine Rosa-Rosso ». This clearly should be understood as a simple courtesy towards the new general secretary.⁶



1 *Etudes Marxistes*, No. 26 - 15.09.1994

2 *The Party of Revolution*, op. cit. ch. 3 - 1.3.3.

3 <https://www.vlaanderen.be/uitslagen-van-verkiezingen-in-belgie>

4 *The Party of Revolution*, op. cit. Introduction, 7.

5 *Le Parti de la Révolution*, op. cit., first sentence of the book.

6 After Nadine was sidelined in 2003 (see § 3.8.), the text was still sometimes quoted to mark a certain continuity with Ludo, but without mentioning Nadine. In 2014, the book was no longer available in the PTB e-shop. A Spanish translation from 1996, mentioning Nadine as co-author, is available at <<https://leningradwritings.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/el-partido-de-la-revolucion3b3n-ludo-martens.pdf>>

For Ludo Martens, 'the central task was to "consistently improve the work of the party leadership"'¹ For Herwig Lerouge, the Congress "was devoted to rectifying the party's governing bodies. Its main themes concerned the sense of responsibility of the cadres, the political struggle against right-wing and left-wing opportunism, bureaucracy and routine, as well as individualism in the highest echelons of the party."²

During this congress, a certain Peter Mertens joined the party's Central Committee.

3.3.1. The setback in the 1995 elections sparked a debate.

In the federal elections of 21 May 1995, one year after the European elections, the PTB's score fell back to its traditional level of 0.5% (35,000 votes), sparking a debate on the orientation the PTB should take. This was not a concern for Ludo Martens, who had 'successfully' made his 4th Seminar on 4 May. (§ 3.1.) In the debate after the elections, Herwig Lerouge, from the national leadership, took stock.³ He put the success of 1994 into perspective (a favourable climate after the fight against the Global Plan; social democracy had revealed itself there; "*an improvement in the party's organisational work*"). But above all, he observes that "*our current election results also reflect the political, ideological and organisational flaws discussed at the Fifth Congress. [...] we must set our objectives based on the 4% that we should be able to achieve.*" It is now a question of "*having the courage to analyse the mistakes made by the leadership and to seek ways to rectify them.*"

There would have been errors in political orientation, such as underestimating social democracy. "*It is true that they are moving to the right, but that does not mean that they are losing their base. [...] In the big cities of Wallonia, they still get 50% of the vote and the vast majority of trade unionists follow them.*"

However, there would have been errors also in the leadership's methods: "*The election campaign was viewed too exclusively as a campaign to spread our ideas and not as a constant political struggle against class enemies. [...] It was a bit like leading a strike without analysing the employers' plans and the positions held by the masses.*"

And finally, "*Opportunism uses the fight against fascism as a pretext to eliminate the anti-capitalist struggle.*"⁴ [...] *We turn our anger against the truly wealthy. We denounce the capitalist system here and around the world.*" On the other hand, it is not enough to criticise capitalism. We must also "*promote socialism in a lively manner.*"

3.3.2. From the teachers' struggle to the Marche blanche

The defeat of the struggle against the Global Plan did not reduce the workers to immobility. The teachers began a strike that would last several months. Their great march on 28 April 1996 in Charleroi was supported by several delegations of workers (Forges de Clabecq, Cockerill, Caterpillar). The PTB is on the front line: "*Flemish and French-speaking teachers want unite !*"; "*With the teachers, against the Capital!*"⁵ On 11 March, the first strike since 1973 at Opel (formerly GM) broke out.

1 *The Party of Revolution*, op. cit. Introduction.3

2 *Etudes Marxistes*, No. 27/1995-12-15 - Herwig Lerouge was a member of the party leadership. He was editor-in-chief of *Solidaire* for a time and is editor-in-chief of the journal *Etudes Marxistes*. It should be noted that this congress adopted the theses on women from the Third Congress of the Third International. - See *Etudes Marxistes* 28/1996

3 *Etudes Marxistes* No. 27 15 December 1995

4 There were joint lists with *Unité antifasciste* (PTB-UA) in the nine Walloon constituencies.

5 *Solidaire* 24.4.1996; 1.5.1996

On 1 May 1996, *Solidaire* reports a "hurricane of protest" against the signing of a "Contract for the Future" by the government, employers and first rang union leaders, a hurricane stirred up by the Walloon Interregional of the FGTB and the CNE, and then supported by several central and regional branches of the two unions throughout the country. An "unbridled competitiveness" is denounced and, according to the CNE, "*it is becoming very urgent to develop a social project that gives priority to people rather than to the market and competitiveness.*" However, the title of the *Solidaire* article reflects the moralising discourse of the PTB. "*against the rich*" (taken from a comment by Anne-Marie Appelmans, then president of the FGTB-Brussels), as well as, as a solution, joining the party, rather than a class perspective: "The selfish capitalists have made billions thanks to Busquin's PS. Only the PTB has a plan that makes capital pay." ¹ This does not prevent from repeating that "Marx was right, capitalism is misery. Long live socialism."

And on this May Day, Ludo Martens denounces:² "*Social democracy has become the party that defends the selfishness of employers. Yet the selfishness of the upper middle class and imperialism's thirst for profit and domination are leading the whole world to disaster.*" After a diatribe in defence of Marxism ("*The basis of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is private ownership of the means of production.*"), he concludes that "*Only this profound historical vision allows our party to be clear-sighted and firm in its daily struggles.*" The conclusion is that, in order to bring about revolution, one must join the party, which has the right plan and must replace the PS among workers, who will thus be able to "*train themselves in Marxism-Leninism in order to fight better.*" And while waiting for the working-class "to train themselves", the claims for "*redistribution of wealth*" and moralising discourse return to the forefront. "*We must break with certain sectarian and bureaucratic habits that were thoroughly criticised at our 5th Congress [in 1995].*"

However, Martens' party had little direct influence on events when, on 20 October 1996, 350,000 people, outraged by the horrors of paedophilia and child murder,³ expressed their anger at the government in the *Marche Blanche* (White March), from which the radical left-wing parties were carefully excluded.⁴

A new instrument was then created, *Forts Ensemble* (Strong Together), to guide the work of activists: how to run PTB campaigns, how to recruit new members, how to work with *Solidaire*, how to train. Issue 0 announced a training course at the end of December 1996 on the theme of Ludo Martens' book *Un autre regard sur Staline* (Another Look at Stalin) and another at the end of December 1997 on *Le parti de la Révolution* (The Party of the Revolution § 3.3.)

Meanwhile, the debate on the Soviet Union continues, with a publication in *Etudes Marxistes* on *L'Union soviétique de 1991 à 1996* (The Soviet Union from 1991 to 1996).

3.3.3. *The Multicoloured March*

But 1996 was marked above all by the struggle of the workers at the Clabecq ironworks, led by a team – in particular Roberto d'Orazio and Silvio Marra – who refused to bow to the whims of the trade union bureaucracy.

1 Kris Hertogen, in *Solidaire* 1.5.1996. We emphasise.

2 *Solidaire* 8 May 1996

3 The Dutroux affair

4 See *Presse Internationale* No. 2, October-November 1996. *Presse Internationale* was the newspaper of the LIT activists in Belgium, then of the LCT from 2006 onwards. [The newspaper changed its name to *En Lutte* from issue No. 101 in November 2015.]

A march had brought together 10 000 people in Tubize already on 3 February 1996, to defend jobs. When the company was finally declared bankrupt on 3 January 1997 and the workers received their C4 (redundancy notices) ten days later, a "Marche multicolore" (Multicoloured March)¹ was organised on 2 February 1997. This unprecedented mobilisation – in which the national leadership of the FGTB was refused permission to speak – brought



together 70 000 people on the factory grounds. On 28 March, the workers' bulldozers invaded the motorway and confronted the police. A few days later, "the Clabecq workers" attended a meeting at the Renault-Vilvorde factory, which was threatened with closure,² and the bureaucracy did not let them in. On 5 April 1997, a March to Namur brought together another 20 000 people. On 18 April, the government announced a "buyer" (Duferco), who set his conditions, to be put to a referendum on 6 May. The national union leaders accepted it, but in the factory, 55.7% ultimately rejected the agreement. A new version of the agreement was then put to a vote during the holidays (on 18 July) and approved by 95% of the workers. On 6 August, the *Forges* restarted, but the members of the union delegation and all those registered on the 1995 social election lists were excluded. In the wake of this, the leaders who had led the struggle were also excluded from the FGTB.³ A year later, the main leaders were charged with offences under an 1887 law that holds 'ringleaders' responsible. The trial began on 26 November 1998 and ended in 2002 with nine of the defendants being acquitted and the sentences of the other four being suspended.

3.3.4. *The Mouvement de Renouveau Syndical (MRS)*

It was in this struggle that, after the Multicoloured March of February 1997, a *Mouvement de Renouveau Syndical* - (MRS - Trade Union Renewal Movement) was formed with the aim of promoting "a new trade union practice". In weekly meetings attended by around a hundred trade unionists, a document was discussed and finally published. It denounced "the capitalist system", where "employers own the means of production" and appropriate the wealth produced by workers. It spoke of class struggle and noted that "the role of activists inspired by class struggle has been particularly important for social gains." And with regard to trade union bureaucracy: "It is unthinkable to want to fight the bosses' system on the one hand, and on the other hand to accept the existence of bosses' methods within the union."

The PTB is actively involved in the MRS, but it does not have a monopoly on intervention. In an interview with *Presse Internationale* on the political organisation of workers, D'Orazio said that "*the current left-wing parties claim to be the workers' party, whether it be the POS, the PTB or something else*".⁴ But it is the PTB activists and its "union leadership" who call the shots. In the invitation to the Multicoloured March at the Clabecq Forges, the PTB states: "*Capitalism means misery. We need*

1 Less than four months after the *Marche Blanche*.

2 The closure was announced on 27 February 1997 and took effect four months later.

3 During the fight against the closure of Renault, a PTB activist, Stan Van Hulle, was also expelled from the FGTB. See *Presse Internationale* No. 6, October 1997.

4 *Presse Internationale* No. 11, Nov. 1998

socialism!" or "*Liquidate Clabecq or liquidate capitalism?*" And it is still the PS that is "*murdering Clabecq*".

During the May Day celebrations in 1997, unlike in previous years, Ludo Martens' speech was devoted almost entirely to the national situation. "*On 2 February 1997, we witnessed the most memorable workers' demonstration in Tubize since the strike of 1960-61.*" The slogan was: "*Capitalism is killing our children and destroying our jobs – Let's fight for socialism!*" And to that end, "*the alternative to which the rebellious masses aspire already exists*," namely the PTB, which "*has been building itself up for thirty years*." D'Orazio is honoured and the leaders of the FGTB (Nollet) and the CSC (Piette) are booed for signing "the agreement of shame", as are De Vits (FGTB) and Jorissen (CMB) for have "*killed the Renault strike*".¹ It is "*the birth of a new trade unionism*".² On this occasion, "*a new October Revolution*" is called for in the Soviet Union.

3.3.5. *The emergence of Nadine Rosa-Rosso*

Gradually, Nadine Rosa-Rosso, who became Secretary General of the PTB in 1995, began to become the point of reference for the bourgeois press, which forgot about Ludo Martens. In July 1997, in order to find out about the PTB's relationship with the MRS, the press approached Nadine, who said that the PTB "supports the movement's platform, but the MRS is not a trade union offshoot of the PTB".³ At the end of November 1998, the trial against the MRS protagonists began, and the PTB's focus became exclusively on defending them by attending the sessions, each time with a few dozen supporters, to back the PTB's lawyers, without any mobilisation in the world of work.

On the other hand, the concept of party membership was reviewed. Previously, "*you almost had to be a perfect communist before you could join the party*" (and those on the periphery were in "friendly associations"). "*The concept of party cells was unsuitable*." Now, "*in order for the PTB to become a mass party*", there is a campaign "*for 'simplified cells'*".

On 1 May 1998, it was once again Ludo who gave the speech. He stated that "*Two years ago, the PTB opened its doors. Anyone who is willing to take on a task and attend a monthly meeting can become a member*." But his speech quickly turned into a *defence of principles*. 150 years after the Communist Manifesto, "*We need a real communist party, the PTB*." "*Let us be authentic communists, let us study Lenin, let us study Stalin, but above all let us learn to bring our knowledge to the masses in a language they understand. Let us strengthen our ability to organise within the party the workers, labourers and young people who want to commit themselves to concrete tasks and struggles, and let us educate them step by step in communism*".⁴ For the PTB, unlike Agalev, which defends criminal capitalism, it is "*the path of struggle, not that of parliamentary deception*. And incidentally, "*community pettiness in Belgium*" is an opportunity to raise the national question.⁵

1 Kris Hertogen in *Solidaire*, 30 April 1997

2 *Solidaire* 7 May 1997

3 *Le Soir*, 25 July 1997

4 *Solidaire* 13.5.1998 – we emphasise

5 *But what Flemish identity can we talk about when, on the one hand, we have these nouveau riche billionaires such as De Clerck and Vinck and, on the other, tens of thousands of women excluded from the labour market? Marxism has two essential principles when it comes to the national question. The first is positive: proletarian internationalism, solidarity among all workers, regardless of their nationality. The second is negative: the rejection of all forms of discrimination or privilege based on nationality*

3.4. The seventh "struggle between two lines": Nadine versus Ludo

Meanwhile, the struggle of those in Clabecq had abandoned all street mobilisation, limiting itself to the defence of the prosecuted workers by PTB lawyers, "supported" by the presence of a few activists at the court hearings. On May Day 1999, Nadine was in charge of the keynote speech, "*a speech to mobilise support for the election campaign, at the request of our president, Ludo Martens*". (55) (She praised, in particular, the PTB's lawyers and the PTB's doctors. Apart from Nadine, the leading candidates for the regional elections on 13 June 1999 were medical doctors Kris Merckx, Lieve Dehaes and Colette Moulaert. For the concurrent European elections, a list involving several radical left-wing parties, was presented : the *Debout* list, headed by Roberto D'Orazio, who was still on trial at the end of November 1998. The signatures needed to present the list were quickly collected and enthusiasm was high, fuelled by hopes that the leader of the Clabecq Forges struggles would win a seat in the European Parliament.

The PTB will lead the way, and for him, the Debout list does not need a programme: "*It is ridiculous for our opponents to ask us where our programme is. What matters to us is the spirit of Clabecq, the spirit of not letting ourselves be pushed around.*"¹ Of course, this is a spirit in which all anti-bureaucratic opposition has been suppressed, with a D'Orazio who no longer was involved in the Forges after the takeover by Duferco. It will still be formally stated that "*it is capitalism, and not communism that must be consigned to the dustbin of history*", but the tone is already very different from the self-criticism of the Central Committee Report of 15 September 1994 (§3.2.). The list will obtain 2%, with higher peaks in certain constituencies.

Meanwhile, in June 1999, Ludo "asked the party leadership if he could focus his militant activities in the Congo" (where he had long maintained friendly relations with former guerrilla leader Laurent Kabila, who had ousted Mobutu from power in May 1997).² It seemed as though he was throwing the towel in a seventh "struggle between two lines" (§1.8.4.), his own and that of Nadine Rosa Rosso, for whom the post of secretary general had been created in 1995. The 1998 May day speech was his last public appearance on the Belgian scene. From then on, when he spoke in Belgium, it was mainly as a specialist on Central Africa. His many contributions to *Etudes Marxistes* ended in 1998 with a commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Communist Manifesto.³ However, at the end of 1999, ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, he and Nadine published another article in *De Morgen*: "*Hadden ze die muur niet beter laten staan?*"⁴

On May Day 2000, it was again Nadine who gave the keynote speech, with Ludo's role limited to that of moderator in a debate on the Congo.⁵ According to Nadine, the PTB has never advocated a one-party system. The PTB still defends the dictatorship of the proletariat, including collective ownership of the means of production, an economy that serves the people, planned by a state in the hands of the workers. But "we have decided to adapt more resolutely to the new conditions and to take better account of the criticisms levelled at us. [... There are] issues that we were wrong to neglect in the past: food quality, the problem of waste, housing, or the reasons why hundreds of thousands of working citizens find themselves queuing twice a day. " In concrete terms, attention is already focused on the municipal elections in October 2000. "We must recognise that a decline or increase in

1 *Solidaire* 5.5.1999

2 *In Memoriam*, op. cit. and *Solidaire* 9.6.2011

3 *Etudes Marxistes* 41/1998 - The Manifesto, 150 years young in a history that spans centuries.

4 *Wouldn't it have been better to leave that wall standing?* *De Morgen* 27.12.1999.

See Buelinckx, op. cit. Notes - ref. 414. - p. 162

5 *Solidaire* 3.5.2000.

our votes is a judgement on the quality and quantity of our work. In some municipalities, we have decided to fight for an elected representative."¹ The PTB will obtain 12.79% and two elected representatives in the municipality of Zelzate, two medical doctors, Lieve Dehaes and Kris Merckx (compared to one elected representative since 1982). Nadine's May Day speech in 2001 was published *Etudes Marxistes* as well as in *Solidaire*,² the first time Nadine appeared as an author.³ "The communist parties of socialist countries" are still honoured there, and "The Belgian Labour Party is a communist party. [...] Johan, Nadia, Frans, Dirk and Mie were elected by the workers."

3.5. The arrival of the "youngsters": Hedeboom-Mertens

3.5.1. D14: Raoul Hedeboom enters the scene

On the occasion of the European Summit in Laeken in December 2001, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) called for an Euromanif in Brussels on 13 December, bringing together 80,000 people under the official slogan: "More Europe: **We** are Europe". A collective of several organisations then called for a counter-summit the following day, with a demonstration by anti-globalisation activists, under the name D14 (for 14 December). A certain Raoul Hedeboom, then aged 24, who grew up in a PTB family,⁴ made his appearance as "spokesperson for the D14 coordination". *Solidaire* gave extensive coverage to the PTB's participation in these three days of mobilisation (13-15 December) against Europe, emphasising "two types of trade unionism", that of the ETUC and that of the grass-roots. "The line served and followed by the European Trade Union Confederation and many other trade union organisations is the line of integrating trade unions into the capitalist system. This line transforms trade unions into co-managers of the system. They oppose neither the capitalist system nor the European Union as a capitalist mechanism. This is how they try to deceive workers with the lie that Capitalism also has a human face! But capitalism cannot be repaired or corrected. It can only be overthrown."⁵

D14 had been in preparation for a year, in the wake of the demonstration against the UNICE (European employers' federation) summit in June 2000. The participation of Maria Vindevoghel, "abandoned by her union leadership" and accompanied by her Sabéniens,⁶ was featured on two pages in *Solidaire*. One hundred and fifty Sabéniens managed to lead the



1 *Solidaire* 10.5.2000

2 *Solidaire* 2 May 2001

3 *Etudes Marxistes* 54/2001 - Throwing globalised capitalism into the dustbin (free) of history. It appears only once more in *Etudes Marxistes*, issue 57/2002 - Against the Europe of capital: think globally, act globally

4 Raoul appears with five other comrades as "the comrades of Liège" in issue 0 of *Maria Vindevoghel with Sabéniens* (see § 3.1.2). His parents, steelworkers and trade union activists in the CSC, had helped build the PTB with Ludo Martens. His mother was the sister of Kris Hertogen. Raoul, born on 12 July 1977, had been active in a *Herstal student committee* since entering the University of Liège.

5 See *Solidaire* 19.12.2001, which is the source of the information on D14 concerning the PTB. It lists the names of Tom De Meester, Marco Van Hees, David Pestieau and Herwig Lerouge as journalists who have written articles (interviews). Peter Mertens mentions the ETUC demonstration in his book *Priorité de Gauche*, p. 102, (see § 4.2.4), giving the figure of 100,000 and reducing the D14 protest to 'a large demonstration by young people and alter-globalisation activists the following day'.

6 "Maria found herself isolated in the departure hall at the time of the Sabena bankruptcy. There was not a single secretary from the trade union there." Bert Verhoogen, FGTB representative at DHL, member of the Maria list, in an interview in *Presse Internationale* 25.09.2003.

procession, with a plane made for the occasion, "*despite protests from officials*". And for the PTB, "*the message is clear: those who do not lead the fight for jobs should not march at the head of this demonstration*".

For Hedeboww, "*D14 was able to break away from the traditional Belgian straitjacket of conciliation by asserting that Europe can be neither social, peaceful nor democratic.*"

During D14, the PTB reprinted and sold hundreds of copies of *The Communist Manifesto*.

Etudes Marxistes published three issues on globalisation and Europe. In particular, an article by Jo Cottenier launched a scathing attack on the leaders of the CSC and FGVB, relentlessly denouncing them for acting against the interests of workers.¹

3.5.2. *The youth movement, entrance door for Peter Mertens*

From its inception, the PTB specifically organised young people. The Marxist-Leninist Movement (MML- Mouvement Marxiste-Léniniste) brought together young university student The Communist Youth League (LJC - Ligue de la Jeunesse Communiste) first organised Secondary school students² (68). and grew up in the 1980 -years to a broader movement: *Rebelle*. where young workers and unemployed people and also were welcome.



In 1987, Peter Mertens, born on 17 December 1969, entered the Jesuit University in Antwerp,³ where he created *Studenten tegen Racisme* (SteR - Students against Racism). And in 1991, the year he obtained his bachelor's degree in sociology, he joined the MML, becoming its president in 1994. He joined the Central Committee of the PTB in 1995 (5th congress).

"*After the student strikes movement of 1995-96, the Rebelle groups gradually disappeared. [...] Experienced members of Rebelle left the organisation [...] and in 1999-2000, Rebelle officially disappeared. [...] The conditions for membership of the MML also became more flexible after the student struggles of 1994- 95.*" In 1998, Mertens became provincial leader of the PTB in Antwerp. It was under his leadership that PTB youth occupied Antwerp City Hall on 20 November 2002, demanding '*No US troops in the port*'.

Mertens joined the PTB Political Bureau at the party's 7th congress (March 2002). This Congress finally decided to build a single organisation bringing together young people between the ages of 15 and 30. Under the slogan "*Revolutionary Generation*", the First Congress of this PTB youth movement, held its first session on 30 November 2002. On this occasion, a Commission *révolutionnaire internationale des jeunes* (International Revolutionary Youth Commission)brought together 14 delegations from 12 countries in Brussels. The second session took place in March 2003, where 83 young people were elected to the National Council.⁴ The movement promoted the figure of Che Guevara with the poster "*Change the world*". It took the name Comac ("*beCome Active*" / "*Communist and Active*") during the first "*Change The World Day*" in October 2003.⁵ On this

Photo from *Solidaire* 19.12.2001

1 *Etudes Marxistes* 57/2002, *Myth and reality of the European social model: how far will collaboration between union leaders go?*

2 "*The conditions for membership of the LJC are very strict: for example, you must agree with almost the entire PTB programme. [...] Rebelle has considerably relaxed its membership conditions. Marxism and left-wing organisations are less fashionable. [...] Without this relaxation, Rebelle would probably have disappeared.*" [The source of this quotation and those that follow in the text on this topic is a link that is currently inactive.] http://chengetheworld.be/sites/default/files/fields/attachment/chap_1.pdf

3 Academic, Faculteiten Sint-Ignatius Antwerpen – Ufsia

4 *Solidaire* 11.12.2002

5 *Solidaire* 10.09.2003

occasion, Peter Mertens, then aged 33, presented himself as "*the President of the youth movement*".¹ The statutes for Comac were voted only at its 2nd Congress in April 2008.²

3.6. The 7th congress (March 2002), after "five years of rectification".

In her May-Day-Speech in 2001, Nadine announced that "*In order to take stock of five years of adjustments, setbacks and progress, failures and victories, the Central Committee has decided to convene the seventh congress of our party.*" With three key points: "*our analysis and our programme in response to the global situation and European integration; our objectives for the struggle in the years 2002-2006; our organisational rules to make the PTB a true workers' party.*"

It should be remembered that 11 September 2001 was marked by the attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York. And on 30 November of the same year, Ludo Martens enthusiastically approved the attack in a speech in Havana, an attack also approved by Nadine in on 2 February 2002, at a conference with 30 communist parties from Europe in support of North Korea.³

In March 2002, the 7th Congress began. Nadine was confirmed as General Secretary⁴ and for the Central Committee, priority is given to "representatives of the world of work, in particular those who work in large companies and those who are involved in trade union activities", and to young people.⁵

On May Day in 2002⁶ Nadine is still at the helm. Ludo Martens is revered there as the Congo specialist "*who has been teaching us for thirty years to love the people and hate the executioners, two qualities that make us what we are today: revolutionaries, internationalists, communists*". The essential thing is communist orthodoxy in discourses. "*If communists around the world stick to the revolutionary path, the 21st century will be one of definitive victory for the people.*" The slogan is "*Resistance, from Clabecq to Palestine*".⁷ Participation in the International Brigade for Vietnam from 7 to 28 July 2002 is being prepared.

On this occasion, Nadine announced the publication of the documents from the 7th Congress in a brochure (currently unavailable) entitled *Communism, the Future of Humanity*. Three resolutions were submitted: one on globalisation, another on European integration and a third on the renewal of the party.⁸

An interesting echo of this can be found after the 7th Congress, in an article by Nadine in *Solidaire* in January 2003. (Our emphasis)

1 In this capacity, he signed an invitation to the *Lebanese Communist Students*. See <http://www.angelfire.com/jazz/csleb/int007.htm>.

2 On this occasion, two "manuals" (for schoolchildren and students respectively) were written. From then on, the Comac formally had its National Council, its National Bureau, a president and a vice-president.

3 "*11 September 2001 became the day when, in Asia, Africa and America, the peoples said to themselves that the monstrous crimes that the imperialist system inflicts on them will sooner or later be avenged.*" *Solidaire* 27.02.2002 - An 8-page dossier defending socialist Korea in the struggle against imperialist globalisation.

4 After the revival of 2008 (§ 4), opponents of Peter Mertens will recall Nadine's leading role in the 2002 congress, which was greater than that of Peter Mertens and Boudewijn Deckers. <http://wetenschappelijksocialisme.blogspot.be/2008/03/anti-mertens17volgens-peter-mertens.html>

5 *Solidaire* 27.3.2002

6 *Solidaire* 8.5.2002

7 The verdict on Clabecq was expected on 22 May.

8 <http://courcelles.skynetblogs.be/archive/2005/06/06/documents-du-ptb.html>. [The reference is out of date in 2019. Some comments can be found at <https://romaincourcelles.wordpress.com/2005/06/06/documents-du-ptb/>]

Full steam toward members! – The PTB invites all its members to attend a general meeting in late February/early March [2003].

Our congress has just voted on its new statutes, with almost unanimous support. However, this was not without difficulty. At the first session of the congress, the delegates were divided on a key issue: what exactly do we expect from our members? The congress therefore decided to take more time to examine the question. This was a wise decision, because now things are much clearer. With the adoption of Chapter II on membership, the congress has set the party on two paths that are not contradictory but complementary.

The first is to open the party to anyone who meets the conditions of Article 1 of the statutes.

The second is certainly rigour... a core of rigorous members who have understood and accepted the efforts necessary to build a revolutionary party in this rotten society.

This is why Article 6 of Chapter II on membership imposes additional conditions on members who wish to become more involved in building the party.¹

Why so soon [these meetings]? We will have to deal with the elections on 18 May 2003.

Regarding the new statutes (to be published on 1 May 2003):

The participants at the 7th Congress of the PTB, which concluded its work at the end of 2002, drew up new statutes that are better suited to the current reality of the party and the world. The first statutes adopted at the founding congress in 1979 had not been amended since then. Between 1995 [the year Nadine became general secretary] and today, the PTB has organised two debates on the rights and duties of party members. The party wants to take better account of flexibility and workload in companies, as well as other issues that hinder the organisation and commitment of workers. The amended statutes have been compiled in a handy little red book. The light and accessible style does not detract from their revolutionary and communist essence. What are the main changes?

- The chapter on members is limited to setting the minimum conditions for becoming a member and organising: recognising the statutes and accepting the distinction between different members based on their commitment to the party (Articles 3, 4 and 6 of the statutes).
- The 'duties of members' have been replaced by the "cell duties", in order to emphasise the collective nature of the members' efforts and to avoid party members being assigned tasks for which they do not feel prepared.
- All the important modalities of the work of a cell and its members are now in place to ensure that the cell truly takes care of the development of each of its members. The application of these modalities is the result of discussion and struggle within the cell.
- The statutes concerning the party's organisational principles and working style take greater account of the current national and international political situation.
- The principles of party financing are developed in a separate chapter (Chapter 6), because they constitute the essence of the party's ideology and because they guarantee its total independence.²

1 "To be entitled to take part in the decisions of the party cell, the member must satisfy the additional conditions [...] the cell approves the membership [...] This decision by the cell is subject to the approval of the higher body of the party."

2 "Workers, members with voting rights, [...] one per cent of their net salary. [...] Intellectual comrades, members with voting rights, make a greater effort than workers to also acquire the material position of the working class."

It goes without saying that the PTB remains faithful to Marxist-Leninist principles such as democratic centralism, the mass line, criticism and self-criticism, and the transformation of the world view. These are clearly explained in chapters 4 and 5.

What Nadine does not mention in her summary is that these same Statutes, in the first chapter, *General Programme*, subtitled *Socialism is based on a scientific approach*, provide that the working class can achieve socialism without first taking power with its own organisations, simply by eroding the bourgeoisie's apparatus, through reforms, by building 'its own socialist state' within the bourgeois state (which is what the bourgeoisie did within the feudal state). Let us see:

The overthrow of capitalism and the struggle for socialism will therefore be the work of the broad masses. This revolution will become possible when the working population no longer wants to live in a world of war, unemployment and misery, and when the current established order can no longer keep the working population under its domination. The socialist revolution involves a series of fierce class struggles for social progress, democracy and peace. These struggles will weaken the domination of the big capitalists. They will lead to the expropriation of these big capitalists without compensation. Their state apparatus will be dismantled. The working class and the working population will take their fate into their own hands by building their own socialist state. Factories and all key sectors of society will become, through nationalisation, the collective property of the working population.

3.7. The 2003 federal elections

3.7.1 The alliance with the RÉSIST list

In September 2002, on the first anniversary of the attack on the Twin Towers of the WTC, the PTB decided "to make the fight against war its main objective for the coming years."¹ A war in Iraq was imminent and mobilisations against this aggression were in full swing. This policy was manifested above all in two initiatives.

Colette Moulaert, a paediatrician in Charleroi, and other members of the PTB's *Médecine pour le Peuple* (Harry Dewitte, Geert Van Moorter, Claire Geraets) undertook a trip to Baghdad, where they were present during the US invasion on 20 March 2003. Colette and Harry returned to Belgium on 16 April.

On 14 October 2002, Jo Cottenier of the PTB presented the *StopUSA* Coordination to the press for the mobilisation against the war, as part of the international appeal by *Stop United States of Aggression*. He is there accompanied by Dyab Abou Jajah (from the Arab European League – AEL), Han Soete (from Indymedia) and Roberto D'Orazio.² *StopUSA* immediately called for a demonstration on 10 November 2002, which brought 5 000 people onto the streets of Brussels. Several trade unionists from the CSC and FGVB also signed the appeal. At the same time, there was another demonstration on 17 November, "the NGO demonstration, politically subsidised by the government" according to D'Orazio. And on 19 January 2003, the 12th anniversary of the start of the first Gulf War, *StopUSA* also relayed the call for the *International Demonstration Against War* by ANSWER (United States). For its part, the MRS launched an appeal from *Syndicalistes contre la guerre* (Trade Unionists Against War): "No to war, racism and exclusion"³

1 Nadine, in *Solidaire* 11.09.2002.

2 *Solidaire* 16.10.2002.

3 See *Presse Internationale* No. 23, December 2002, and *Presse Internationale* No. 24, April 2003, with an interview with Gust Haverbeke, CGSP-Limbourg.

Dyab Abou Jahjah, of Lebanese origin, immigrated in 1991 at the age of 19, graduated in Political Science from the UCL, then became director of the ASBL *Welkom* (welcome to immigrants), of the ABVV/FGTB), and had gained great popularity. In 2000, he created the Arabisch-Europese Liga (AEL).

This organisation founded the *Sabra and Shatila Committee*, which brought legal proceedings against Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. In April 2001, the AEL organised its first demonstration in solidarity with the Palestinian people in Brussels (2,000 people), and another in Antwerp in April 2002. After the press conference on 14 October 2002 and the demonstration on 10 November, the press began to harshly denigrate Abou Jahjah, who had started organising citizen patrols in Antwerp ("armed with a camera and leaflets"). This also sparked discussions within the PTB, to which the party responded with an interview with Dyab in *Solidaire*.¹

Following the murder of a young Moroccan man in Borgerhout (Antwerp) on 26 November 2002, the AEL organised protests – some of which turned violent – against this racist crime, and Dyab was accused of causing unrest, and imprisoned for several days. The PTB fully supported the 'prisoner of war', in particular with the help of lawyer Zohra Othman (from the PTB), former president of the Antwerp Immigrants' Council.²

The AEL intended to stand in the 2006 municipal elections in Antwerp, but under pressure from its grassroots, it decided to present a RESIST list in the federal elections of 18 May 2003, and it contacted the PTB, arguing collaboration in StopUSA.³ For the PTB, the strategy of the 7th Congress was to "*unify resistance to all wars waged by capital*", and "*everyone wanted a new way of working*". On the other hand, in the August 2002 resolution, the Central Committee had already decided to give absolute priority on the electoral lists to the spokespeople for workers' anger. The alliance with the AEL therefore raised quite a bit of discussion within the party. "Communists in alliance with Arab nationalists!"⁴ As it did within the AEL. "Isn't communism outdated? Won't fighting for world revolution undermine our ideology, our religion?"⁵ But in the end, the RESIST list was formed with Zohra Othman (PTB), Dyab Abou Jahjah, Ahmed Azzouz (AEL) and Koen Calliauw (an Agalev representative in the Antwerp district council, who was subsequently expelled from Agalev).⁶ The PTB's proposal was to extend the alliance with AEL to the whole country, but AEL did not feel itself ready.⁷ The RESIST list was therefore limited to Antwerp for the Chamber, and the Dutch-speaking constituency for the Senate. The PTB presents its own lists everywhere else, in particular with Colette Moulaert for the Senate on the French-speaking side.

1 *Solidaire* 27.11.2002

2 *Solidaire* 4 December 2002

3 "*Both the PTB and the AEL are accused of being sectarian and fundamentalist in their own fields, of not tolerating the slightest deviation from their views, etc. But in the StopUSA coalition, [...] the AEL remains a democratic Muslim organisation and will not turn into a communist organisation, and the PTB will not become an Islamic party.*" Dyab in *Solidaire*, 26 February 2003.

4 We see an echo of this, even before the decision was announced, in the column *Le journal du dockeur Johnny Maris* (The Diary of Dockworker Johnny Maris) in *Solidaire* on 8 January 2003: "*Jean had heard that the PTB would be running in the elections with Jahjah. 'Don't you think that's going too far? ... An alliance with a rioter! It's going to backfire on you in the elections!'*"

5 *Solidaire* 5.3.2003

6 *Solidaire* 12.02.2003

7 *Solidaire* 16.04.2003

3.7.2. *The spoil-sport of the MARIA List*

However, shortly afterwards, the PTB was confronted with another initiative. In April 2003, already on the verge of legal deadlines, Maria Vindevoghel, an activist who was very popular for her "courage" at DD14 (§ 3.5.3.) decide – pressured by his grassroots – to present lists for the Chambre at Brussels-Halle-Vilvorde (BHV) and in Leuven, made up of trade unionists actively involved in the struggles, such as Max Feraille, from the STIB,¹ second after Maria on the list for BHV. The PTB presents then its own list in these two constituencies. And Maria accept enlarging her list with anti-war activists.



From this point onwards, the campaign focuses on: "*Dyab, Colette and Maria in Parliament*". However, there will still be a slight nuance in the campaign: *participating* in the RESIST list and *supporting* the MARIA list.² And within the PTB, the question remains: *Why not campaign for the PTB everywhere?*³

The May Day celebrations in 2003 will be the climax of the campaign, with Nadine saying that the Colette-Maria-Dyab trio can make it into Parliament. They are pleased that newspapers and television were talking about the PTB. However, the party must continue to insist on convincing its activists that the AEL is not the devil.⁴ But for Peter Mertens, the polarisation around the list is a benefit.⁵

3.7.3. *Disillusionment*

The illusions created by the triumphalist rhetoric of "Colette-Maria-Dyab in Parliament" meant that even relatively positive results were greeted as a bitter defeat.⁶

The MARIA-list obtained 6,440 votes, which is an improvement of around 2,600 votes compared to the PTB's results in 1999. Maria Vindevoghel thanked the PTB for its "*support*" and praised "*a very rich campaign and a movement that is taking off. We will be everywhere there are struggles. A list like ours, which brings together so many people from all sectors and backgrounds, has never existed before.*" On Sunday, at the MARIA-list's election night party, Nadine saw "*the determination of all these candidates to continue*". But for Nadine, "*We are facing a monster, the electoral machine of the right-wing parties. We still haven't solved this problem, despite the measures taken and the enormous efforts made in this campaign. The contrast between the sympathy our party encounters on the street and in businesses and our election results is stark. The result forces us to question our electoral approach.*"

The same goes for RESIST, which obtained 10,059 votes, or about 1,100 more votes than the PTB in 1999. But for Mertens, "*what we failed to do was to unite the entire working class around the RESIST programme*".

Colette obtained 0.78%, compared to 0.51% for the PTB in 1999. Kris Hertogen notes that "*In the province, we obtained 5,500 votes, an increase of around 2,000 votes compared to 1999.*" However, for him, "*Colette spoke both in mosques and in front of the core group of Caterpillar activists. She received*

1 Public transport company in Brussels.

2 And this "support" was still relative. At the ULB, there was only one meeting with Maria and Max, organised by comrades from the LIT, without the PTB. See a reference to this by Max in *Presse Internationale* No. 27, July 2004.

3 *Solidaire* 23.04.2003

4 *Solidaire* 7 May 2003

5 *Solidaire* 23.04.2003 r

6 See the review interview in *Solidaire* 21.05.2003.

a triumphant welcome at the gates of this American multinational. But, electorally, this did not translate as well as the campaign activists had hoped."

We console ourselves with the fact that "*the other parties want to maintain a social base that entrusts them with power. We don't want that. We want the workers themselves to take control of their own destiny.*" But the conclusion is still: "*The tasks are there. How to translate all this into an electoral strategy is something we need to discuss further.*"

Later, the question resurfaced: should the PTB continue to build electoral fronts or present itself as a party? ¹ As for the AEL, a few weeks after the elections, it decided to create a Democratic Muslim Party in Belgium and not to repeat the Resist experiment.² When Abou Jahjah was sentenced in 2008 to one year in prison for his alleged "incitement" to clashes between young people and police in Borgherhout in 2002, the PTB defended him. "*Regardless of what one may think of the AEL, this [conviction] is a serious precedent that could spread like wildfire.*"³ "*Whatever one may think of the AEL, that is not the issue. This is clearly a political trial.*"⁴

During the European and Regional elections on 13 June 2004, the PTB's approach changed radically: only PTB+ / PvdA+ lists. There was also no question of repeating the Debout list experiment.⁵ Meetings were held with Maria Vindevoghel, Max Ferraille and supporters of the 2003 MARIA-list to try to relaunch it, but the PTB's obstruction was blatant.⁶ (In a November 2004 issue of *Solidaire*, devoted to the struggles of Sabena and Stib, the names of Maria Vindevoghel and Max Ferraille are not even mentioned.⁷ The promoters of the MARIA-list finally gave priority to the social elections that were taking place at the time, without however abandoning the idea for the 2007 elections.⁸ The PTB made slight progress compared to its 1999 lists, but suffered a qualitative decline compared to the Debout list (from 46,088 to 19,645).

3.8. The exclusion of Nadine Rosa Rosso

3.8.1. The "debate on substance": where to build the party.

The 2003 elections raised the question: why does the PTB remain stuck in the 1% category? Some accused Nadine of being ineffective in "*opening up*" to RESIST. Others accused her of abandoning communist orthodoxy by trying to *cast wide*, without success. In a May 2004 memo entitled *The debate on the fundamentals has finally begun*, Nadine claims that she had "*proposed that we take the time to conduct [the debate] in depth throughout the party, over the course of a year, in order to arrive*

1 *Solidaire* 28.05.2003

2 *Solidaire* 02.07.2003

3 *Solidaire* 09.01.2008

4 *Solidaire* 21.05.2008

5 See §3.6. Completely outside the PTB, a "Sta Op" list was presented in Limburg, led by Frank Lambrechts, with Raf Verbeke and Theo Meuris, among others.

6 "... *apart from a few people here in the room who supported us, who campaigned for us and everything, we did not receive any calls for support or backing from the other left-wing parties.*" Max, in a meeting (with Maria Vindevoghel and Frank Lambrechts) at the ULB, on the eve of the 2004 elections. See *Presse Internationale*, No. 27, July 2004.

7 *Solidaire* 10.11.2004

8 Maria: "We had to make a choice, and it was important to give priority to the social elections. However, we also decided, with the Maria List, to prepare for the 2007 parliamentary elections, [...] My experience with elections is that I have never had so many political discussions with the working class. We discuss everything. If I regret anything today about not having presented the list, it would be that." - *Presse Internationale* No. 27, July 2004 (which also includes the election results). For more on these social elections, see *Presse Internationale* No. 26, February 2004.

at a new party programme, including a strategy adapted to current realities and Marxism. For reasons I still do not understand, the party leadership chose to deal first with questions of form and procedure.¹

A debate on the substance of the issue is indeed taking place within the PTB. Should the work be concentrated on the working class, the only class capable of carrying out a socialist revolution, or should a large party be built, casting a wide net within the existing bourgeois society, which could then lead 95% of the population towards a socialist revolution?

In her note, Nadine criticises Boudewijn Deckers, who had been representing the party at international meetings for some time, following in the footsteps of Ludo Martens, as well as Tom Demeester.

For several years, there had been a theoretical debate within the party about the current composition of the working class and the "deindustrialisation".² Deckers defends the orthodoxy of Ludo's line, and Nadine responds with quotes from Marx and Lenin. She asserts that "*here in Western Europe, we are living in a relatively long period of peaceful development of the class struggle, and that revolution is not on the horizon*"; and when this assertion is criticised, she calls on Engels to justify herself. Regarding the fall of the Berlin Wall, the "*years 1989-1991 [which] marked a decisive turning point in the class struggle on a global scale*", Nadine recalls the theses of the 7th Congress and refers to Ludo Martens' book *Le parti de la révolution* (The Party of the Revolution). She argues that "*the PTB was in great need of a change of strategy. [...] Until shortly before 1989, the PTB had been counting on a social-imperialist invasion of the Soviet Union. [...] With the counter-revolution, this hope vanished for good. The entire 1979 programme, adopted at the founding congress, was based on this strategy.*"

Finally, at the end of 2003, Nadine was expelled from the party (along with a handful of other activists) and a Central Committee meeting on 2 February 2004 appointed Boudewijn Deckers as Secretary General, assisted by Lydie Neufcourt and Peter Mertens.³ According to an interpretation close to the PTB, dated 20 March 2004, Nadine would be guilty of instigating the "opening line" that led the party "*to dissolve into heterogeneous coalitions*".⁴ A year later, Peter Mertens said that Nadine "*questioned the possibility of still organising workers in the workplaces of large companies.*"⁵ In 2012, Raoul Hedebeuw recalled that during the 2003 elections, the PTB realised that "*something was wrong [...] we were stuck at 1 or 2 per cent. [...] And half of the party leadership, including Nadine Rosa-Rosso, left. It's as if Didier Reynders had been expelled from the MR.*"⁶

3.8.2 The 'Nadine line'

Nadine's subsequent statements and activities confirmed that she was openly questioning the leading role of the working class in the revolution. In February 2009, she promoted the creation of

1 Nadine, in a note dated 25 May 2004. In it, she refers to a text she had written, which was criticised by the current management.

2 *Études Marxistes*, 43/1998 - Jo Cottenier, The Composition of the Working Class; Jean Pestieau, Changes in the Composition of the Working Class and the Proletariat.

3 *Solidaire* 18.02.2004. In *In Memoriam*, op. cit., we read: "*In 2004, the party was led by the Executive Committee composed of Baudouin Deckers, Lydie Neufcourt and Peter Mertens.*" Nadine's role is limited to 1999-2003, even though she was appointed General Secretary in 1995. In 2011, the PTB still stated that "Between 1999 and 2003, the party was led by Nadine Rosa-Rosso, General Secretary-" (*Solidaire* 9.6.2011).

4 A comment on "the history of this struggle between the two lines" by a PTB supporter who applauds "the salutary correction against the opportunistic course promoted by former General Secretary-Nadine Rosa Rosso". See www.bellaciao.org/fr/spip.php?article5291

5 Peter Mertens, The Working Class in the Era of Transnational Corporations. *Études Marxistes*, 72/2005.

6 See an interview in *LeVif-Express*, cited below, §5.5.

Egalité, which stood in the regional elections in June 2009 and immediately obtained a score of 1%, more than that of the PTB+ (0.84%), "*at the top of all the small left-wing lists and ahead of the Muslim list in Brussels*". She concluded that "*it is therefore not necessary to deny oneself in order to achieve electoral results*". She denounced the fact that "*the PTB is abandoning not only the front with Résist, but also any policy of alliances based on the same principles and objectives*". She notes that "*the 'classic' working class, i.e. the one concentrated in large industrial complexes and powerfully organised in trade unions and/or political organisations, has shrunk dramatically*" and concludes that "*we must address other social strata, such as managers, the liberal professions, in short, the middle classes. Since 1989, things have changed a lot in the world, and if we want to continue to support national liberation movements, we no longer find communists in positions of power, but of course Muslim-inspired parties or movements*".¹ This confirms what the "*Nadine line*" really was, diametrically opposed for more than ten years to the "*Ludo line*". (§ 3.4.)

3.8.3. The "*Deckers line*"

At the May Day celebrations in 2005, the keynote speech was given by Boudewijn Deckers, the new General Secretary.² In a thinly veiled reference to discussions within the party concerning the proletariat, Deckers said, with regard to the Splintex struggle:³ "*Can there be any clearer proof that the factory working class is the vanguard of the struggle against this unjust capitalist system? [...] We had to put this work [of solidarity with Splintex] at the forefront, as it is the raison d'être of our party. [...] we have resolutely put our party back on track to work with the working class and young people.*"⁴

However, the PTB must show that, from now on, it wants to "*eradicate everything that prevents us from better connecting with people's reality*". And he will propose *programme points* like any major party does, *models*, insisting that these things are possible, since they have been implemented in other (capitalist) countries.

And the PTB takes up the slogan launched by Di Rupo and the PS for that same May Day 2005:⁵ "*People first*", adding "*not profit*".

When Deckers refers broadly to "*the trade unions and other progressive organisations*" with which "*we are fighting side by side*", this is a far from Cottenier's criticism of the trade union leadership in 2001. This does not prevent him from proclaiming that socialism "*can only arise from class struggle waged with ever greater determination and led by a revolutionary party linked to the workers and their trade unions*".

On the other hand, the PTB is beginning to criticise "*the big parties*", and in particular the SPa and the PS: "*During the general strike of 7 October [2005], everyone could see at the picket lines that the trade unionists were turning their backs on the socialist parties. [...] In the period following the Global Plan in 1993, the SPa organised a recruitment campaign. There had been a lot of resistance to the government's plans from the trade unions, and this was not to be repeated. Many young trade unionists joined the SPa at that time. Today, many of these people feel they have been deceived.*"⁶ (116)

1 Published on 29 October 2009 on the *Egalité* website at the time.

2 *Solidaire* No. 18 - 4 May 2005

3 See *Presse Internationale* No. 30 - March 2005

4 However, there is no mention of the Alert Committee, created by Di Rupo and composed of representatives of employers, trade unions and the government, to "*break the deadlock*" at Splintex.

5 *La Libre* 2.5.2005 - www.lalibre.be/actu/belgique/article/218142/di-rupo-la-comedia-n-a-que-trop-dure.html

6 *Solidaire* October 2005

However, in 2005, the PTB participated as a guest at the 11th congress of the PCdoB in Brazil, a party with two ministers in Lula's government.¹ And when China calls for "*democratic reform of the UN and its Security Council*", Deckers applauds².

3.8.4. The "*Mertens line*"

In 2005, Peter Mertens defended "*the fundamental strategy of the 1979 Party Programme*" and denounced Nadine, who, just before leaving the party, had written: "*We must achieve our goal of crossing the famous 5% threshold in the 2007 elections. In order to accomplish this task, it is necessary to seriously criticise leftist conceptions of parliamentary struggle.*" Mertens countered that "*the essential terrain for social change is not in the parliamentary chamber, but in the social struggle in the workplace and in working-class neighbourhoods.*" He concluded that "*Nadine is protecting revisionism*", that of the communist parties that capitulated and joined the Party of the European Left³

Some years later,⁴ he gave a different view of what was the question at the time. "*Until 2003, there was a powerful left wing [in the party] which defended, among other things, the theory that the working class could no longer be the class of the future, given that migrants were the most oppressed class. In a way, we drove the party into a corner in the 2003 elections, and we lost a lot of votes and a lot of influence. We were like a fish out of water.*" Mertens obviously meant "Nadine", but with a dubious interpretation. For Mertens, migrants are not the most oppressed members of the working class, who are exploited at will and drive down the cost of labour for the entire class, but a separate class, '*the most oppressed*', which the leftists in the party were interested in, wrongly so because it does not contribute to the electoral cause. Nadine, for her part, disqualified the working class from bringing about profound changes in society, using a purely numerical criterion, adding the middle class to increase the water flowing to the electoral mill.

For Mertens, it is therefore a question of rebuilding the party, even if we are not starting from scratch: we needed to "*reaffirm two principles: first, we are a communist party based on Marxism-Leninism; and second, we need flexible tactics to achieve our political goals and reach the people. [...] Being both principled and flexible is an art we must learn.*"

And in his particular concept of the working class, Mertens concludes that, given that "*class consciousness has declined, and that the task of the party is to develop the consciousness of the working class, which is now highly differentiated*", we must "*work politically where people live. We call this S.O.M.: Sensitise people to Marxist ideology; Organise in the Party, in mass organisations and in party initiatives; Mobilise for more movement, for more struggle for their own interests. There is unanimity on this in our party. This is what determines our participation in elections, the reason for our work in the working class and how we do it.*"⁵

1 See *Presse Internationale* No. 34 -Dec. 2005

2 *Solidaire* 28.09.2005 - In its electoral programme for 7.06.2009, the PTB explicitly calls for the "promotion of democratic United Nations, whose power emanates from the General Assembly" (point 17) - see *Presse Internationale* 67 - May 2009

3 Peter Mertens, *The Working Class in the Era of Transnational Corporations*. *Études Marxistes* 72/2005. The ELP was founded in Rome in May 2004. According to Boudewijn Deckers, "*It mainly brings together (formerly) communist parties, but also some socialists, ecologists and Trotskyists.*" (*Études Marxistes* 73/2006)

4 In an exclusive interview for comrades of the DKP in Germany, with whom the PTB maintains a relationship of "good communists". See *Was hat Peter Mertens mit Käthe Kollwitz zu tun?* in *Unsere Zeit*, Sozialistische Wochenzeitung Zeitung der DKP, 14.02.2014 (www.unsere-zeit.de). Hereinafter cited as DKP, op. cit. – Emphasis added

5 S.O.M. suggests the Dutch word for 'sum', 'addition'.

3.8.5. The "Ludo line" is fading.

In 2004, Ludo Martens was not completely inactive. In May of that year, he published a brief introduction for the 13th Seminar for the Unification of the International Communist Movement, with a self-criticism of the PTB's positions "*in the 'great debate' between the Chinese Communist Party and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.*" (§ 3.1.)

What is more curious, however, is a contribution concerning the Democratic Republic of Congo in that year. In February 2004, Joseph Kabila made an official visit to Belgium, where he declared in a speech to the Senate: "*The history of the Democratic Republic of Congo is also that of the Belgians, missionaries, civil servants and entrepreneurs who believed in King Leopold II's dream of building a state in the heart of Africa. We want to pay tribute to the memory of all these pioneers.*" And Ludo Martens, who in his speech on May Day 1996 criticised Leopold II for "exploiteing the Congo by forcing black people to supply him with rubber and ivory," ¹ now supports his friend Joseph Kabila: "*A great state, as large as Europe, was founded. [...] The colonial period also developed productive forces at a dizzying pace.*" ² Should we see this as a sign of fatigue on the part of the great leader, who no longer has all the analytical powers he deployed for four decades?

1 <http://www.ptb.be/doc/doc/1mai96c.htm> [Reference no longer valid in 2019]

2 *Solidaire* 18.02.2004

4. The "Renewal"

The 2003 election results, which kept the party in the 1% category, were considered a "failure". (§ 3.7.3.) The PTB would later say that this was the starting point for a renewal that would lead to the election of two MPs to the Chamber in 2014. A renewal that would then be "*deepened between 2004 and 2008, culminating in the 8th PTB Congress*".¹

This interpretation overlooks the influence of Nadine Rosa Rosso, who was already talking in 2002 about "*five years of rectification*". (§3.6.) And to erase the Nadine period, there is no hesitation in attributing the initiative to Ludo Martens, who "*himself laid the foundation stone for the party's renewal*". A 1999 study by Ludo on sectarianism is cited, which states that "*the party had to abandon its patronising attitude and its 'I'm always right' stance. It had to become a modern, open party, without renouncing its principles.*" But in June 1999, Ludo had moved to Kinshasa. When he returned to Belgium in 2006, he was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. And his death on 5 June 2011 went almost unnoticed.

Anyhow, this argument from authority, apart from being simplistic, poorly conceals the essence of the "renewal": the search for bourgeois electoral legitimacy, defended since 1995 by Nadine, to the detriment of the orthodoxy still defended for a time by Boudewijn Deckers. And it will be Peter Mertens, later joined by Raoul Hedebouw, who will lead the way, taking the place of Nadine, who is said to have misapplied the new orientation with the RÉSIST list.

4.1. The 2006 municipal elections: 15 elected representatives

In October 2006, municipal elections were programmed and yet in May, the PTB announced that it wanted to double its number of municipal councillors from five.² In his May-Day speech 2006,³ Deckers even broadened the horizon to the federal elections of June 2007. He denounced the fact that, out of 150 parliamentarians, only four had voted against the *Generations Pact*, and he saw this as "*one more reason to commit fully to the upcoming parliamentary elections*". Dirk Van Duppen will head the list so that he can "*put his true Kiwi model on the political agenda.*" (§4.2.1.) On the other hand, Deckers praises the union leadership: "*A labour movement is nothing without strong unions. 3,000,000 union members – tens of thousands of delegates. [...] Bravo to the trade union leaders who fought tooth and nail against the Generations Pact.*" But ultimately, it is the PTB that has the great task of being "*a united organisation that can bring together all the fighting movements*".

The results of these municipal elections exceeded expectations. In its stronghold of Zelzate, the PTB obtained 22% of the vote and increased its number of seats from 2 to 6 (out of a total of 23). In addition to its elected representatives in Hoboken and Herstal, it entered the municipal councils of Deurne (Dirk Van Duppen), Genk, La Louvière, Lommel and Seraing (Hans Krammisch), with a total of 15 elected representatives.

This would seem to prove of being on the right path... towards renewal.

1 *In Memoriam*, op. cit.

2 *Solidaire* 3.5.2006 - The PTB had elected representatives in Zelzate (Frans Van Acoleyen and Dirk Goemaere), Hoboken (Mie Branders) and Herstal (Nadia Moscufo and Johan Vandepaer). It hopes to have representatives in Molenbeek, Deurne, La Louvière and Genk

3 *Solidaire* 3.5.2006

4.2. The 8e Congrès (2008), Peter Mertens' Congress

4.2.1. May-Day: an election rally

In March 2007, the PTB proposed documents for an 8e Congrès, to be discussed "*in all rank-and-file groups and activist circles*", which would ultimately be put to a vote "*at plenary sessions on 20 October and 24 November [2007]*".¹

Peter Mertens became the figurehead of the PTB. He gave the keynote speech at the May Day celebrations in 2007. Boudewijn Deckers disappeared from view: he was not even mentioned in the edition of *Solidaire* announcing the celebrations.

The federal elections of 10 June 2007 are at the heart of the issues and Mertens' speech is announced as "*the election rally at 6 p.m.*". Apart from trade unionists (Nik Stam from the Netherlands and Jacques Guilmot, formerly of VW), other prominent figures were also featured, such as a representative from the Venezuelan embassy, a journalist from the newspaper *Le Soir* (Bénédicte Vaes, invited to moderate a debate on state reform) and Dirk Van Duppen, the lead candidate for Antwerp.²

These elections will be marked by the N-VA, which is running in coalition with the CD&V, with resounding success in Flanders.³ But at the moment, the consequences of this are obviously not yet clear.

The slogan "to the left of the PS and Ecolo" is beginning to appear in the radical left, but the PTB will have its own lists. For the campaign, Mertens, now "*chairman of the PTB's day-to-day management*", is reviving Di Rupo's slogan "people first" from May-Day 2005. (§ 3.8.3.)

The emphasis is on the PTB's "*achievements*": PTB proposals to the Hoboken municipal council have been accepted and "*the kiwi model is the symbol of the renewed PTB*". In New Zealand, the main producer of this fruit, the purchase and distribution of medicines are centralised by the state, which allows it to obtain favourable prices from multinational pharmaceutical companies. This is a model for the PTB. Such models will now be used extensively in propaganda: programme points that have proven to be realistic because they "*work in other (capitalist) countries*". And three years of PTB campaigning on this kiwi theme, with Dr Dirk Van Duppen as its promoter, have finally brought down the price of 900 medicines. This is "*the proof that we can make large multinationals bend to our will*".⁴ The conclusion is that one must vote for PTB+ so that Van Duppen can enter parliament.

In the meantime, non-affiliated personalities are being welcomed onto the electoral lists, which means, for example, inviting people to "vote for *Monsieur le Baron*".⁵ And a "former SPa", Johan Peeters, is also a candidate. However, the PTB tried in vain to poach the figurehead of the LSP/MAS

1 *La gauche de la gauche*, op. cit. 5

2 *Solidaire* 25.04.20

3 The *Nieuw-Vlaamse Aliantie* (N-VA) ran in coalition with the CD&V for the first time in the 2004 regional elections in Flanders, winning 26% of the vote and becoming the region's leading political party. This success was confirmed in the 2006 municipal and provincial elections (31.7% for the provincial councils). Jean-Marie Dedecker's entry into the NV-A was an obstacle to renewing the coalition in 2007, but in the end, the N-VA abandoned the controversial figure and the coalition remained intact. The N-VA, which until then had struggled to exceed the electoral threshold, won six seats in the Chamber of Representatives and two in the Senate. Bart De Wever obtained 41 000 preferential votes in Antwerp.

4 *Solidaire* 2.5.2007.

5 Baron Gérard de Séllys, former journalist at RTBF, candidate for the Senate. - *Solidaire* 2.5.2007.

campaign, Jef Sleenckx.¹ On the other hand, the PTB is pleased that "since June 2006, the press has been increasingly reporting on the PTB"².

"The issue at stake in the elections is [...] whether there will be significant support for social opposition to the government," and the PTB+ is "a useful vote to support the left wing of Ecolo." This applies in particular to Zoé Genot, Josy Dubié and Bernard Wesphael. However, the PTB denounces the fact that a vote for Ecolo is "increasingly a vote for government participation", a participation that "today is not justified".³

After the elections comes the balance sheet. While "almost 80% of the population in the north of the country voted for the right or the far right", the results are "encouraging for the PTB+" which, according to Dirk Van Duppen, "was able to continue the progress it had made in the 2006 municipal elections", but which remains at 1% level. For the PTB, "it is up to Ecolo and Groen!, the PS and the SPa to take their place in a resistance that is as broad and as strong as possible, with social movements and, first and foremost, the trade unions. Of course, this can only be done in the opposition."⁴

In January 2008, Mertens already set the tone for the 8th PTB Congress, after "the negative experience of 2003 when we decided to stand for election in the north of the country with the RÉSIST list", and now with "the guidelines for the next five years [...], for example with Dr Dirk Van Duppen's 'kiwi' campaign", and with "three starting points: a party that is firm on its principles, a flexible party, a party of the workers."⁵

4.2.2. The Renewal Congress

The 8e Congrès closed on 2 March 2008, "the final point of debates that had been ongoing within the party for three years".

The new Party Executive, elected by the Congress, consisted of⁶

Peter Mertens (38 years old in 2008), President

Raoul Hedebouw (31), National Spokesperson for the PTB

David Pestiau (39), Editor-in-chief of *Solidaire* and head of the PTB's research department

Tom De Meester (33), PTB energy specialist and PTB chair for East Flanders

Boudewijn Deckers (62), In charge of International Relations. Former General Secretary

Lydie Neufcourt (53), In charge of Party Expansion

Jef Bruynseels (59), In charge of Trade Union Relations

Jo Cottenier (61), in charge of socio-economic affairs, formerly of trade union relations

The Bureau confirmed the 'day-to-day leadership' of 2004: Mertens, Deckers and Neufcourt.

At that time, Raoul Hedebouw was mainly a media figure rather than a recognised activist within the party. In 2001, his telephone had already been tapped by the police.

It should be noted that there are no representatives from *Médecine pour le peuple* (Medicine for the People) nor from PTB lawyers.

As for the labour movement, there are Lydie Neufcourt, a French language teacher, and Jef Bruynseels, an employee.⁷

1 *Presse Internationale* 48 - May 2007

2 *Solidaire* 9 May 2007.13

3 *Solidaire* 6 June 2007 - We highlight

4 *Solidaire* 13.06.2007

5 *Solidaire* 9 January 2008

6 According to the list published on the PTB website at the time. In *Solidaire* on 05.03.2008, Jan Hasaers (40), Communications Manager, is mentioned instead of Tom De Meester.

The defenders of the Ludo-orthodoxy finally agreed to fall into line, accepting positions of responsibility without direct public involvement. Jo Cottenier, who had been a "union leader" for more than twenty years, with opinions that were sometimes highly critical of the union bureaucracy,¹ now has other responsibilities. Boudewijn Deckers, formally retained in *day-to-day management*, will henceforth be responsible for cultivating the 'communist' image among 'fraternal communist parties' around the world.

4.2.3. *The Congress Theses*

The Congress theses are published in a book entitled: *A party of principles, a flexible party, a party of workers*.² These three elements, already announced by Mertens in January, are the subject of three chapters, but these are preceded by a first chapter entitled *The future lies in socialism*.

Socialism: The 7th Congress had already considered the consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the 8e Congrès would "highlight the latest developments. This allows us to refine certain theories and improve others." In principle, "socialism has become a necessity for the very survival of humanity. [...] It is therefore the power of transnational corporations and their major shareholders (owners) that must be questioned." But currently, for example, China can not yet claim to "socialism as conceived by Marx and Engels" because its capitalist development is not yet sufficiently advanced for that and it must therefore content itself, for the time being, with a "market economy that the State controls to a certain degree".

The principles: "The left-wing movement as a whole needs a positive and constructive vision that the PS and SPa do not offer. And there is room for this alternative. The PTB is still 'Marxist', but this is now limited to Marx, Engels and Lenin, without Stalin or Mao."³ Hedebouw later confirmed this: "'We no longer want to define ourselves as 'Stalinists', 'Maoists', etc. We are PTBists. "⁴ However, "The party is part of the international communist movement."⁵

A flexible party: "In recent years, we have changed our attitude towards trade unions. Today, their very existence is threatened by aggressive employers. [...] our ability to take concrete action to achieve victories. [...] moving from a party that 'gives lessons' to a party that 'questions'." Flexibility also requires "unity with the vast majority of trade union leaders and delegates". In the trade unions, "there is no contradiction between the rank-and-file and the leadership".⁶

A workers' party: "where they feel 'at home'. [...] Adapt our forms of organisation [...] achieving the target of 5000 members in 2010 (whereas at the beginning of this year we have 2856 members)".

Legitimacy through bourgeois elections is clearly claimed: it is the party's elected representatives who refine the tactics of the party, because "they are the ones who are confronted with the concerns of the masses".⁷

7 Bruynseels, a law graduate, gave up a career in law in 1968 to work in factories (Renault, Umicore, Ford, Exxon), eventually being dismissed in 1980 for not declaring his degree.

1 *Études marxistes* 57/2002, *Myth and reality of the European social model: how far will trade union leaders go in their collaboration?*

2 See https://www.ptb.be/il_etait_une_fois_le_ptb / *Congrès du renouveau du PTB de 2008 (pdf)* We cite this book as 8e Congrès, op. cit.

3 8e Congrès, op. cit., p.46

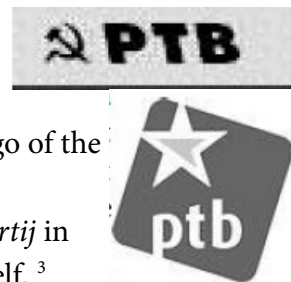
4 *Journal du Mardi*, 4 March-1 April 2009

5 8e Congrès, op. cit., p. 67. In May 2008, the 17th International Communist Seminar met in Brussels. See § 3.1.

6 8e Congrès, op. cit., p. 103

7 8e Congrès, op. cit., p.83

In order to clearly mark the break with the past, "*the icing on the cake is that the party's new logo will be unveiled on 2 March*", The reference to the Russian Revolution of October 1917 (hammer and sickle, style CP) is abandoned in favour of a five-pointed star with an arrow, copied from the logo of the European Left Party.¹



The new party model is explicitly modelled on that of the *Socialistische Partij* in the Netherlands,² with "Marxist-Leninist" origins that has also "renewed" itself.³

The 8e Congrès will also decide to "*put prominent figures and spokespersons [...], young national spokespersons.*"⁴ This is highlighted in the Media as a new "communication strategy".

4.2.4. Left-wing priority: Red tracks for a way out of the crisis

After the Congress (March 2009), Peter Mertens wrote a 272-page book: *Op mensenmaat. Stof voor een socialisme zonder blauwe plekken*. (On a human scale, material for socialism without blue marks.).⁵ "*The book also touches on other simple, achievable measures: a state bank, no redundancies in profitable companies, reduction of VAT on gas and electricity, the kiwi model.*"⁶

The French version, *Priorité de gauche. Pistes rouges pour une sortie de crise* (Left-wing priority. Red paths for a way out of the crisis), is co-authored by Raul Hedeboom, who added an afterword on *Les maux bleus du Parti socialiste* (The blue ills of the Socialist Party). Anne Demelenne (FGTB) praises the "simplicity" of the book, while regretting that the PTB "*cannot help but settle scores with social democracy*".⁷

The ideas are summarised in a 30-page A6-format "*Petit livre de poche du PTB*" (Little Pocket Book of the PTB), with the same title, *Priorité de Gauche* (Left-wing Priority).⁸ The emphasis is on "*People first, not profit. Nothing better defines the renewal of the PTB.*" We need "*a society that is fit for the people [whose work] disappears into the well-lined pockets of major shareholders.*" To achieve this, we are counting on "*elected representatives [who] are held accountable for their achievements*" and the

1 In January 2012, the PCF in France also abandoned the symbol of the Russian Revolution, replacing it directly with the logo of the European Left Party.

2 In the Netherlands, the *Partij van de Arbeid* is the social democratic party, while the *Socialistische Partij* (Socialist Party) has Marxist-Leninist origins. The *Komunistiese Partij/Nederland/Marxisties-Leninisties* (KPN-ML) began in the 1970s with the aim of being "the party of the common people", which earned its electoral success from the 1990s onwards under the charismatic leadership of Jan Marijnissen. The apology for the SP in the Netherlands will be rectified in 2012, see below. § 5.4.

3 See note 57 in the book of the 8e Congrès: "*It is useful to keep in mind a number of golden rules for action. Here are some rules that we have borrowed from SP Nederland, but which correspond well to our experience:*

1. Action is something you take with the people. You must dedicate a lot of time and energy. to it
2. Action is a means to an end. Adapt your methods to changing circumstances.
3. Action requires knowledge and expertise.
4. Action is struggle. Take into account the strengths and weaknesses of all parties involved.
- 5 Taking action means attacking. Avoid being on the defensive.
6. Action requires good organisation. Goodwill alone is not enough.
7. Action is taken to achieve results.

4 *8e Congrès*, op. cit., p. 92

5 The trade unions responding to the three historic "pillars" in Belgian Society, *Liberals*, *Catholics* and *Socialists* are identified by colours, respectively Blue, Green and Red. (Mertens apologises for a socialism without concessions to Liberals.) The play on words: "blue marks" (a Dutch term used for a haematoma, that shows blue marks on the skin) is not used in the title of the French language translation, but Hedeboom uses it in the added afterword.

We quote the book according to the translation, as *Priorité de gauche*, op. cit.

6 The presentation of the Dutch version, as offered at the time on the website www.pvdashop.be

7 *Solidaire* 30.04.2009

8 [Until 2014, this paperback could be downloaded from the PTB website.]

people of the PTB who "*do everything they can to deliver on their promises*". You can become a member of the party by text message and a payment of €20.

And there is the audacity to invoke the legacy of Ludo Martens. The transformation of AMADA into PTB (§ 2.1.) would have meant "*breaking with extremist ideas*" while European sister parties at the time "*remain stuck in their dogmatic squabbles*".¹

4.2.5. A credible alternative for society: tax the millionaires

After the Kiwi Model, other models followed. In the same country, a public bank was created in 2002 "*in partnership with the post office*": the **Kiwibank**. For Mertens, this is the solution to the domination of financial capital. ²This bank "*stays away from international capital markets*". It would suffice to "*grant it state guarantees*" rather than granting them to private banks. This bank "*would then surpass all other banks in terms of customer satisfaction*". The PTB had '*accurately described the pillars on which a bank should be built*'. It regrets that this solution, "*proposed during the Fortis Black Weekend on Monday 29 September 2008, [...] was not reported in any media*", even though it works in other countries, where "*the social democrats are much less influenced by the financial markets*" than the PS or the SPa. The PTB provides amounts: Kiwibank could be the State's preferred creditor and subscribe to government bonds at a lower rate than other banks, thus contributing 300 million to the Treasury in 2009. "*This is the solution to the debt burden.*" ³A debt... to these other banks.

On the other hand, the PTB Research Department was able to detect *anomalies in the taxation system*. It was the PTB campaign that questioned the *notional interest* system, "*introduced without debate*" in 2005.⁴ PTB later said: *We were alone in 2005, and it went through like a letter in the mail.*⁵ According to David Pestiau: "*We influenced the debate, in particular by revealing that large multinationals pay ridiculously low taxes. [...] And now [2014], all the parties want to change the system.*" ⁶ For Hedebouw, "*we are making things happen. [...] What will it be like when we have an MP?*" ⁷

In 2008, to increase purchasing power, the PTB will launch a campaign for a 6% VAT rate on energy (gas and electricity) consumed by households. On May Day, the workers' struggle day, the campaign already has "*more than 85 000 signatures*".⁸ Its feasible, as "*the rate 5% is the rate in the United Kingdom*".⁹ And when the government decided on 29 October 2013 to lower this rate to 6%, "*Vande Lanotte took up the PTB's demand*".

All of this led to a major campaign for *taxing millionaires* as a credible alternative for society, nothing less!

After the European elections in June 2009, (§5.1.) the economic crisis returned to the forefront, and "*the world of work needed a strong and stable party offering a credible alternative for society*", which is why the PTB launched a call for *a broad left-wing social front to impose a tax on millionaires*

1 *Solidaire*, 5 November 2009

2 *Priorité de gauche*, op. cit. p. 82.

3 *Solidaire* 12.01.2012 - editorial

4 The law on notional interest, a tax loophole that allowed multinationals to reduce their tax base, was passed on 2 June 2005 by the MR and PS, with the N-VA and CD&V abstaining.

5 *Solidaire* 30.9.2010.

6 *Le Soir* 26.04.2014

7 Hedebouw, in *Mise au Point*, 1.9.2013 See § 5.6.

8 *Solidaire* 7 May 2008

9 *Solidaire* 28.5.2009. See also 8e Congrès, op. cit. p.95

in order to protect workers from the crisis ".¹ A dossier is prepared with a detailed plan: "The tax on millionaires in a few lines". It is "simple and has proven its effectiveness abroad".²

The campaign really took off in October 2009 with an "Interview with Peter Mertens, president of the PTB, at the start of the new academic year."³ "A 2% tax on fortunes of more than €1 million would bring in €8 billion a year for the state. We could invest this money in job creation, education, healthcare and social security." Mertens cites the example of Germany, where "75% of the population is in favour of a 5% tax", and of France, where "this wealth tax already exists".

Mertens adds a "1-2-3 alternative": a crisis tax on banks (€1 billion); the abolition of the notional interest system (2 billion); and zero tolerance for major fraudsters (3 billion). He insists that these measures "are not radical, they are simply *democratic measures* and obvious". They are "moderate approaches" which, for the most part, "already exist in other countries". A two-page dossier follows the interview with further details, a week later. Mertens tells us that it is the government that "must play an active role in promoting employment and creating jobs itself in the public sector".⁴ The problem, however, is that "the authorities have been duped by the banks".⁵

From now on, one can join the "fan club" of tax millionaires. And the campaign was finally officially launched in November, with a poster of a hostess offering "the product – whiter than white – that will change your life", TAX millionaires, on the front page of *Solidaire*.⁶



4.2.6. The specialists

These *feasible* measures must be carried out with the help of the PTB Research Department.⁷ It is headed by David Pestiau. And for each important topic, there will be a *specialist* in the field.⁸ The specialist in the Kiwi Model is Dr Dirk Van Duppen, who therefore had to be brought into parliament for even greater efficiency. Meanwhile, this medical doctor explains clearly that this replaces everything we have learned from past struggles. "We no longer need models that are foreign to us, [...] it's over with 'isms', Stalinism, Maoism, Trotskyism." The task now is to "fight against the Americanisation of our society."⁹ For finance (the millionaire tax), the specialist is Marco Van Hees, a former employee of the Ministry of Finance. For the 6% VAT, and incidentally, ecology, it is Tom Demeester.

4.3. A party that "returned to order" and is listening to Raoul Hedebouw

For Hedebouw, the 8e Congrès was indeed a congress. "of rebuilding, which updated the doctrine and mode of operation. 'We have reviewed all our political theses.'" ¹⁰ After this Congress, the

1 *Solidaire* 18 June 2009, editorial.

2 *Solidaire* 3 September 2009. In *Solidaire* on 20 August 2009, it was already stated that this was feasible, "because France is already doing it".

3 *Solidaire* 8 October 2009

4 *Solidaire* 15.10.2009. Peter Mertens' reaction to the political statement by Van Rompuy (then Prime Minister), "a collection of half-measures and major gaps", the "budget of missed opportunities"

5 *Solidaire* 22.10.2009, editorial

6 *Solidaire* 5.11.2009

7 The party will spend most of the money it receives as parliamentary representation (more than €900,000) on this. See Hedebouw in an RTBF programme broadcast on 12.6.2014. See also *Solidaire* 5.6.2014

8 8e Congrès, op. cit., pp. 87, 92

9 *Knack-Van Duppen*, op. cit. (2007)

10 Statement on RTL on 23 March 2014 <<https://www.rtl.be/info>> - emphasis added.

bourgeoisie rejoiced that the PTB had 'returned to order'. The magazine *Journal du Mardi* had until then justified "the ostracism of the party, which [...] still followed the tradition of the extreme left of the 20th (and 19th) century, outside the democratic framework." But now, the magazine rejoiced that within this party, "a new generation of leaders has taken power, abandoning once and for all the old ideas of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and the contempt for 'formal freedoms' – even if this is undoubtedly with the blessing of seniors disillusioned by nearly 30 years of electoral stagnation."¹ It also published an interview with spokesperson Hedebouw, who explicitly declared the abandonment of revolutionary politics and aligned himself with reformism: "Our problems have nothing to do with those of Third World countries that have chosen a path other than the market economy. [...] It is a question of re-establishing a different balance of power in the capitalist society in which we live. [...] The PTB is a reformist party."

For Hedebouw, "the PTB remains committed to Marxist principles." One wonders which principles. As for past struggles, "if there is a balance sheet to be drawn up, it is up to the Russians, the Chinese and the Cubans to do so." And "we subscribe fully and exclusively to the electoral process. [...] We want to emphasise that we are in favour of the rule of law."

"Highlighting our opposition to the war [during the 2003 elections²] was a mistake. [...] We no longer want to define ourselves as 'Stalinists', 'Maoists', etc."

On the eve of May-Day 2008, Hedebouw has the opportunity to recall May 1968, but without even mentioning the miners, Ford Genk, etc.³ As for the Workers' Day itself, celebrated since the 19th century, the PTB merely points out that this year it coincides with Ascension Day, the day on which Catholics commemorate the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*,⁴ which "will give rise to a joint statement" from the two trade unions. After the day, we learn from *Solidaire*⁵ that the PTB's "celebration" took place in Brussels, with the keynote speech being given by "the brand new president of the PTB, Peter Mertens". But the front page of the newspaper is devoted to the campaign for 6% VAT on energy. The following year, there will be no more PTB May Day celebrations. It will be replaced by *Manifesta*. (§ 5.1.)

The PTB will now receive a little more coverage in the mainstream press. In *De Standaard*,⁶ Kris Merckx considers *Medicine Doctors for the People* to be "a legacy of May 1968". Kris champions the relentless struggle against the Medical Profession Association,⁷ but he complains that "we would have made much more progress in the electoral arena if we had softened our extreme positions earlier and fought a little less with other left-wing forces". And he confirms that the debate on the fall of the Berlin

1 *Le Journal du Mardi* 4.3.2008 - The newspaper justified ostracism "in the same way as the far right".

2 In *Solidaire* on 11.09.2002, the secretary general of the PTB, Nadine Rosa Rosso, reiterated that the PTB would "make the fight against war its main objective for the coming years".

3 *Solidaire*, 30 April 2008.

4 The papal encyclical published on 15 May 1891, setting out the social doctrine (of class collaboration) of the Catholic Church.

5 *Solidaire*, 7 May 2008

6 *De Standaard* 3.5.2008 - see *Solidaire* 7.5.2008

7 The fight against the Medical Profession Association lasted from the suspension of Kris Merckx in 1973 (who continued to practise) until the victory in 1978. In 2009, the presidents of the Socialist and Christian mutual societies were guests of honour at the opening of the renovated Centre for *Médecine pour le Peuple* (MPLP) in Hoboken.

In his speech at the tribute to Ludo Martens after his death (5 June 2011), on 26 June 2011 at the ULB, Kris Merckx recalled that a year before his death, Ludo Martens said that 'Medicine for the People is the best thing we could ever have imagined.' We subsequently quote this speech (published at the time on the PTB website) as *Hommage_Merckx*, op. cit.

Wall "is not over". On the other hand, in 2011, on the 40th anniversary of the founding of the MPLP, Kris received congratulations from Minister Paul Magnette for his book on this experience.¹

Let us quote a comment by Di Rupo on this "renewal". *"Those who want to cast a protest vote against the capitalist system and who really do not want to vote for the PS should vote not for Ecolo but for the Belgian Labour Party (PTB). This party is breaking with its Stalinist past and, if I had to choose, I would prefer to see a small radical left wing party 'à la Besancenot' emerge alongside the PS."*²

Meanwhile, the PTB's new statutes remain very Stalinist, with no possibility of forming tendencies within the party.

4.4. An internationalism of "true communists" and "anti-imperialist countries"

One aspect of the PTB's policy has hardly changed with the renewal: its conception of internationalism. (§3.1.) The *Principles* state that *'The party is part of the international communist movement.'* This internationalism fits well with Mao's *Three Worlds theory* and boils down to a network of "orthodox communist parties"³ that meet annually at a *Seminar* organised by the PTB, as in the days of Ludo Martens, and annual participation in the *International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties*. (§ 3.1.)

Since 2006, the PTB has also participated annually in an international conference with the communist parties of Germany (DKP),⁴ Luxembourg (KPL) and the Netherlands (NCPN). *"An opportunity to discuss how the European Union is taking advantage of the crisis to attack social gains, working conditions and wages for the benefit of multinationals."* The 7th edition happened in April 2013 in Luxembourg, with 40 participants.⁵

4.4.1. The "anti-imperialist" countries

More than ever, the PTB supports the "*progressive bourgeoisie*" of the "*Third World*". But the fall of the Berlin Wall and capitalist restoration have forced it to reformulate this reasoning somewhat in terms of the *Three Worlds*. They thus support the "emerging countries" - primarily China - against imperialism,, but also, for example, Brazil and South Africa. The bipolar world is over. *"The current world has more than two poles."* And *"other power relations"* now exist. *"In 1984, Brazil managed to free itself from the sphere of influence of the United States."* And *"it is thanks to their position of independence that these countries are developing."*⁶ As for the protests of the Brazilian population, they *"risk being hijacked by the right,"* because *"Brazilians recognise the progress made by the progressive governments of Lula and Dilma."* And it is unfair that the press *"is firing broadsides at the*

1 *Solidaire* 22 September 2011

2 *Le Journal du Mardi*, 1.4.2008

Olivier Besancenot, leader of the LCR, a Trotskyist party in France, called in May 2007 for the founding of a new radical left-wing party, which led to the founding of the *New Anti-Capitalist Party* (NPA) in February 2009.

3 That is to say, considered as such by the PTB, what may change over time. Sometimes, we find surprising historical analyses, such as the one on the year 1932, when *"the socialists attacked the communists more than the fascists."* [...] *The socialists refused to ally themselves with the communists."* (*Solidaire* 31.01.2013) At the time, in Germany, it was indeed the Communist Party, led by Stalin, that called the socialists *social-fascists* and refused to collaborate with them in the fight against Hitler's rising fascism.

4 See the DKP website <www.kommunisten.eu> In the 2014 European elections, the DKP obtained 25 000 votes, slightly less than in 2009, and *Die Linke* obtained 2,200 000 votes, slightly more than in 2009.

5 On the *Solidaire* website, 29 April 2013, there was an article entitled: When four communist parties from the Benelux countries and Germany meet.

6 *Solidaire* 25.04.201366

left, which has been in power for ten years.¹ The PTB admits, however, that "*the government with the communists*" is not a revolutionary government and that, therefore, struggles remain necessary.²

For the PTB, Russia's international position is very important, if only because it is "*the only country in the world capable of standing up to the United States in terms of nuclear armament*".³ While Putin oscillates between the G7 on the one hand and China and other emerging parties on the other, Zyuganov's "sister party" (Communist Party of the Russian Federation – CPRF)⁴ resolutely supports cooperation with China in it. Incidentally, we learn that "*the CPRF is convinced that it will be able to take power through parliamentary means*". But when North Korea, the country so beloved by Ludo Martens (§3.1.), makes threats in April 2013, it is still "unacceptable". It should be noted that at that time, China and Cuba "*distanced themselves*" from that country.⁵

The presence of "good" communist parties in government would also be a guarantee of prosperity. For the PTB, this is the case in Nepal, where "*the communists became the leading party*" in April 2008 and are "*ready to form a government*".⁶ And when, in July 2012, Cyprus took over the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU, there was a congratulation: "*a communist at the head of the EU*". The fact that Cyprus had signed contracts with Israel for a joint pipeline is no problem, given that "*the gas exploitation zones of Cyprus and Israel are adjacent*". The only problem is that "*the Turkish occupation prevents it from giving priority to socialism*".⁷ This is also the case in Latvia (population 1.9 million, EU member), which voted left in June 2013. The "*communists*" of the Latvian Socialist Party are part of the governing coalition.⁸

In the *Democratic Republic of Congo*, Joseph Kabila deserves praise for his policy of welcoming China as an ally against the Belgians and imperialists of all stripes. In 2010, the fiftieth anniversary of Congo's independence provided an opportunity to publish an interview with the country's ambassador,⁹ given that, in the media, "*the Congo is not portrayed in a favourable light*". We learn that it is a good thing to return the statues of Leopold II and Stanley to Kinshasa, because Leopold II did some good things after all: "*he prevented the country from being carved up between Portuguese, French and English interests*". And that we should salute, "*during colonisation, the courage shown in going so far away, taking charge of a country 80 times larger than Belgium, and trying to govern it [...] a courage that we no longer see today*". However, this approach attracted criticism, including in the "letters to the editor" section, and in subsequent issues of *Solidaire*, the tone changed, denouncing Leopold II and giving ample space to Lumumba.¹⁰ But it was still a question of '*helping the democratically elected Congolese government*', and '*Laurent Kabila, Lumumba and Joseph Kabila [are held up as] examples*'.¹¹ On 17 January 2011, the 50th anniversary of Lumumba's assassination, Tony Busselen, the PTB's new '*Congo specialist*',¹² attended the first meeting of the new Communist Party

1 *Solidaire* 27.06.2013

2 *Solidaire* 22.08.2013

3 *Solidaire* 1 March 2012

4 In the years 1996-2000, the CPRF obtained scores of around 30% in parliament. Recently [2013], it obtained barely more than half that.

5 *Solidaire* 18.04.2013

6 *Solidaire* 30.04.2008

7 *Solidaire* 29.08.2012; see also *Solidaire* 21.03.2013

8 *Solidaire* 20.06.2013

9 *Solidaire* 18.3.2010

10 See the PTB statement, *Solidaire* 24.06.2010

11 *Solidaire* 9 July 2010

12 Ludo Martens had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease since 2009. In July 2010, Busselen published *A Popular History of the Congo*.

founded in the DRC. The P.C.Co "supports Joseph Kabila's candidacy for the presidential election at the end of the year."¹ "The PTB does too, because: *"The Congo is increasingly embracing this democratic exercise with the help of its new partners (China, Russia, South Africa)."*² When the UN Security Council voted on 28 March 2013 to send an international brigade (South Africa, Tanzania, Malawi) to the east of the country to fight the M23 rebels and their Rwandan accomplices, the PTB applauded.³ Victory over the M23 allowed the government to *"strengthen the rule of law"*.⁴

In other conflicts too, beyond its "anti-imperialist" rhetoric, the PTB supports bureaucratic leaderships of all stripes, in agreement with its *sister parties* in those countries. (§ 3.1.)

The PTB manages to justify Cuba cutting 500,000 jobs in the public sector,⁵ It justifies that in Bolivia, Evo Morales does not care about the indigenous people, who are *"manipulated by public opinion whipped up by the right-wing media"*, in order to impose his "economic development" project (for the benefit of multinationals).⁶ A few months later, it is the "remote-controlled protests" that are denounced in that country.⁷ And regarding the extradition to Colombia of a left-wing journalist who had arrived in Venezuela from Sweden, it is regrettable that Chávez "fell into a trap".⁸ Hugo Chávez's brother, Adán Chávez, will be the guest at *Manifiesta* in 2013, (§ 5.1.) where he will highlight *"the confrontation between two systems, capitalism and socialism"*.⁹ But in Peru, when President Ollanta, welcomed as a "leftist" in July 2011, launched his attacks on teachers in June 2012, he was considered to have made a U-turn and "betrayed the people".¹⁰

The colonisation of Africa by European powers boils down to *"a shared past [...] that has created ties"*.¹¹ In Africa, Areva is free to plunder raw materials in Mali, provided it *"pays a decent price"*.¹² *Everything must be done to save lives and put an end to anarchy and violence in the Central African Republic*", also with the African Union's military operation, but without France.¹³

4.4.2. "Chinese-style socialism"

For the PTB, at the end of 2013, China is still a "Socialist" country because the state is socialist thanks to the ChCP, even though the economy is practically capitalist. At the 18th ChCP Congress in late 2012, the market was given a *"decisive role"* instead of a basic role. But those *"eager to see Chinese socialism disappear [...] were disappointed. This is logical: they will only be satisfied if China follows in the footsteps of capitalism and the Chinese Communist Party follows the path of Gorbachev."* At this

1 *Solidaire* 27.1.2011. In *Solidaire* 13.1.2011, a four-page insert was devoted to the DRC based on Martens' 1985 book *Pierre Mulele, la seconde vie de Lumumba* (Pierre Mulele, Lumumba's Second Life), available online [in 2014] at www.marx.be, recalling the assassinations of Lumumba (17 January 1961), Mulele (3 October 1968) and Laurent Désiré Kabila (16 January 2001), and calling for a demonstration in Brussels on 16 January 2011. It paid tribute to Ludo Martens, who lived in the DRC from 1998 to 2006. When Ludo died, Hedebeuw travelled to Kinshasa for the funeral ceremony. (*Solidaire* 23 June 2011)

2 "Towards Kabila's re-election." *Solidaire* 17.11.2011

3 *Solidaire* 9 May 2013

4 *Solidaire* 7 November 2013

5 *Solidaire* 17 February 2011

6 *Solidaire* 13 October 2011

7 *Solidaire* 17 May 2012

8 *Solidaire* 5 May 2011

9 *Solidaire* 29.08.2013

10 *Solidaire* 14 June 2012

11 *"Living alongside Europe: we have a shared past. We are linked in countless ways, through trade and migration flows. I believe that with all these assets, Africa can..."* Interview with the African Union Ambassador in Brussels - *Solidaire* 23.05.2013.

12 *Solidaire* 31.01.2013

13 *Solidaire* 19.12.2013

Congress, "a third major reform began, after those of 1978 and 1993".¹ The fact that "China is still only at the beginning of a socialist society" justifies the fact that "Chinese-style socialism" is moving towards an economy that is essentially no different from a capitalist economy, with the maintenance of a socialist state structure and under the leadership of a communist party. [...] China is increasingly diverging from the classical concept of socialism."

The fact that capitalist restoration is readily recognised in the USSR but not in China is significant. In both Russia and China, restoration was the work of the Stalinist bureaucracy, but subsequently, in Russia, the people succeeded, through their struggles, in getting rid of the dictatorship of this apparatus, whereas this was not the case in China. And the PTB identifies itself much more closely with the latter case, where it is the party that must achieve socialism, and not the autonomous organisation of workers, guided by the party.

4.4.3. The revolution in Mediterranean Africa

The policy regarding the revolution in Mediterranean Africa is changing as events unfold.

In Tunisia, "The determination of the people drove Ben Ali out" and the PTB supports a demonstration in Brussels on 15 January 2011, attended by 500 people.² Mubarak's fall in Egypt was greeted in the same way.³ Peter Mertens himself travelled to Tunisia.⁴ In February 2011, a special issue of *Solidaire* was devoted to the revolution in Mediterranean Africa.⁵

Libya: the enigma of Gaddafi

In early March 2011, as the revolution spreads across Libya, Boudewijn Deckers comments: "Muammar Gaddafi and his sons are clinging to power they no longer have. [...] Tunisia and Egypt have encouraged the Libyan people. [...] Since the early 2000s, the Gaddafi regime has opened up the economy to foreign banks and companies, following the IMF's 'structural adjustments' and privatising and [...] This revolt opposes the dictatorial regime in Libya. Once he reached the top, Colonel Gaddafi effectively concentrated all power in his hands and appointed himself 'Guide of the Nation' for life. [...] Gaddafi's army is attacking the Libyan population with US Apache helicopters and FN rifles supplied by Belgium. [...] Since 2003, Washington and its Western partners had found a 'modus vivendi', a certain understanding with the Gaddafi regime. [...] The reality is that the United States wants to regain control of a situation that is slipping away from it." ⁶

A week later, the PTB rightly opposed the imperialist intervention in Libya, but with the argument that "the situation on the ground in Libya is confused", and that it is questionable whether "the repression of the popular uprising in Libya is so intolerable that intervention is necessary for humanitarian reasons". It supported a demonstration on 20 March 2011 in solidarity with the Arab popular uprisings.

Two weeks later, the PTB learned that Chávez's position was different, and the tone began to change. Meanwhile, after the UN authorised military intervention (Resolution 1973), the

1 *Solidaire* 28.11.2013, "Where is China headed?" An analysis by Jo Cottenier following the 3rd Plenum, held 9-12-November 2013, one year after the 18th ChCP Congress. The 11th Central Committee in 1978 marked the shift towards market mechanisms in agriculture, and in 1993, the Plenum of the 14th Congress decided to replace the planned economy with a fully-fledged market economy. Unprofitable companies had to close.

2 *Solidaire* 20.1.2011

3 *Solidaire* 3.2.2011 - In December 2012, when the people protests en masse against Morsi, the PTB acknowledged that "all that remains of Morsi are promises". (*Solidaire* 13.12.2012)

4 *Solidaire* 10.2.2011

5 *Solidaire* 24.2.2011

6 On the subject of Gaddafi, see the issues of *Solidaire* dated 3.3.2011 ; 10.3.2011 ; 24.3.2011 ; 31.3.2011 ; 7.4.2011 ; 28.4.2011 ; 16.6.2011 ; 30.6.2011 ; 1.9.2011 ; 27.10.2011

Organisation of African Unity (OAU) offered its mediation services to the two parties concerned, which was *"a reasonable proposal. Chávez had already made a proposal along these lines"*.

It is now once again the logic of "blocs". It is *"the West against the OAU – including Uganda's Museveni and South African Zuma Musevi."* The PTB signs a Declaration of 61 communist parties, condemning the imperialist aggression in Libya. Then they began to denounce "the rebels" all around. And follows the defence of Gaddafi: *"What if we were lied to?"*

From April 2011 onwards, the PTB denied that Gaddafi had massacred civilians in a large city. Faced with peaceful protests, Gaddafi allegedly ordered the police to stay away. And on 15 February, things allegedly went off the rails. *"The rebels have heavy weapons, which raises questions. It must be Al Qaeda."* Unless it is *"hundreds of US, French and British forces."* And *"all this offers a much more nuanced picture than that of a bloody Gaddafi army opposed by a massive and peaceful opposition."* Gaddafi would have also accepted the OAU peace plan.

And in his message on the eve of 1 May 2011, Peter Mertens, while congratulating *"those at the bottom [who] are rising up in Tunisia and Egypt"*, denounced NATO for *"supporting the anti-Gaddafi troops"* in Libya.

A few weeks later, the PTB finally understood everything: *"From the outset, 'the movement' took the form of an armed revolt, firing on the army, rather than a wave of civilian demonstrations. This revolt called NATO to its aid."* And *"in the meantime, it turned out that the accusations against Gaddafi were lies or, at the very least, dubious, because impossible to prove."* The West wants *"sabotage Gaddafi's largely progressive and South-South policy (and, in this area, push back China)."* *"Gaddafi ensured cheap bread, schools..."* *"Ten questions about Gaddafi's death – He brought a certain degree of prosperity and well-being to his country and his people."* Etc.

Syria, the danger of "chaos" (i.e. revolution).

For Syria, which is struggling *"between reforms and civil war"*, the issue was initially quite clear for the PTB, given that among the "brother communist parties", the two in Syria are part of Assad's government. And Assad is *"the symbol of the country's unity"*.¹ In 2009, an extraordinary meeting of the *International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties* was held in Syria.² But as the conflict dragged on, the reference to the "sister party" was no longer sufficient. At the beginning of 2012, *"the situation in Syria is much more nuanced than we are led to believe here"*. And *"many people would not like to see Assad disappear for fear of what might come next: either chaos or a takeover by the Muslim Brotherhood"*. Syria is not like Libya.

And the analysis in terms of blocs resumes. There is *"a US plan to break the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah-Hamas axis"*. While Verhofstadt³ calls for arms to be supplied to the Syrian opposition, there is a danger that *"arming the opposition will set the whole region ablaze"*. The PTB even conducts an investigation on the ground. But without a class analysis, it can only conclude, once again, that the situation is *"more nuanced..."* and that we should not believe everything we hear *"in the West"*. In June 2012, it already knows that *"the legitimate protest movement against repression has degenerated into a bloody civil war in which the whole of Syria – the state and the population – is the big loser"*.

But for the PTB, as for imperialism, the problem is the spread of revolution throughout the region. *"Insisting on regime change in Syria carries very great dangers, [...] a prolonged civil war that*

1 On the subject of Syria, see the issues of Solidaire dated 5.5.2011 ; 26.01.2012 ; 23.2.2012 ; 1.3.2012 ; 15.03.2012 ; 03.05.2012 ; 31.05.2012 ; 28.06.2012 ; 10.01.2013 ; 28.06.2012 ; 14.03.2013 ; 07.02.2013 ; 30.05.2013 ; 02.06.2013.

2 Mentioned in the organisation's 2012 Beirut Declaration

3 Belgian government. [TN]

will destabilise the entire region." Hope is pinned on the Geneva negotiations; these are hampered by "*sabotage of conflict solutions*", but also by the fact that "*the West is prepared to plunge Syria into chaos.*" Try to understand. Are the United States not "*opposed to arming the rebels*"? Is it not "*Qatar [that] supports the rebellion to protect a future gas pipeline, while Assad prefers a gas pipeline with Iran and Iraq*"?

This is the impasse of reasoning in terms of blocs. The *International Communist Seminar* of June 2013 denounces interference and imperialist aggression and supports "*the absolute right of the Syrian people [...] to determine their political path and direction without foreign interference*". And it declares its "*total and unreserved solidarity with the people of Syria*", without defending Assad, but also without distinguishing between the rebels, seeing only "*subversive attacks and terrorist attacks supported by imperialism and reactionary regimes in the region*". And the sister party in Syria, which is part of the "opposition" by the *Syrian National Coordination Body*, welcomes an agreement signed between Iran and the major powers (the 5+1) in November 2013, "*which paves the way for a historic turning point in the Arab world, the region and internationally*".¹

1 Extraordinary meeting of the Executive Bureau. See *Solidaire* 24.11.2013 and www.facebook.com/pages/Syrian-National-Coordination-Body-SNCB/113912412027630

5. Legitimisation through bourgeois elections

5.1. The 2009 European and regional elections: the promotion of Mertens-Hedebouw

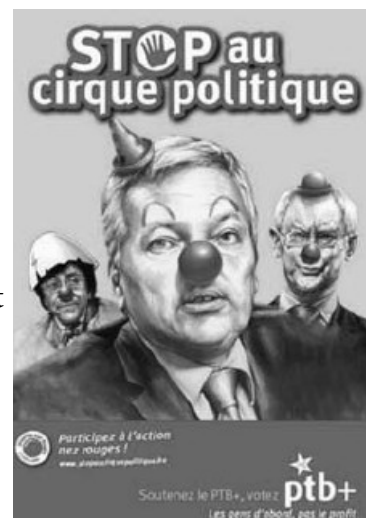
At the beginning of 2009, the PTB launched its campaign for the 7 June elections [for the Brussels-Capital Region] with the slogan *Stop the political circus* (caricatures of politicians with red noses). There was no time to waste on the PTB's May Day celebrations. This historic reference to the workers' struggle was now replaced by a '*great popular celebration of solidarity*' called Manifiesta, similar to the '*Fête de l'Huma*' in France.¹ And in this context, the party no longer talks about critics against the ETUC, at the D14 (§ 3.5.1.) and participates in the manifestation of this European Confederation, now "*the driving force in many manifestations against de liberal EU-politics*."²

Ecolo is seen as the main competitor (credited with 20%). It is on the left, but... "*It hopes to be part of the ruling majority*" without excluding the liberals; "*It participates in power in the Brussels region*"; "*It voted for the Treaty of Lisbon*." And despite a few positive points – it supports the Kiwi model, it is in favour of a wealth tax and it was labelled PTB by the liberals when it defended a European public steel hub – he is not as 'green' as he seems, because he don't support the reduction of VAT on energy. And in municipalities where the PTB has elected representatives, Ecolo systematically votes to increase rubbish collection taxes. They also imposed eco-taxes when they were in power in 2004.³

These elections, with no real prospect of electing anyone, are in fact an opportunity to promote candidates for the 2010 national elections and the 2012 municipal elections.

Kris Merckx, the historic figure in Hoboken and founder of *Medicine for the People*, was elected in 2009 by the local branch of the SPa as the *meest verdienstelijke Hobokenaar* (the most deserving citizen of Hoboken), an asset for gathering votes. But he only appears somewhere in the middle of the lists. The top candidates for the European elections are Mertens and Hedebouw, who are to campaign in Antwerp and Liège respectively. They manage to appear on television. Mertens organises an election barbecue in Antwerp (600 people) because "everyone must talk about us".⁴ And when the VRT talks about "*Peter Mertens, the outsider who could well be the surprise of the upcoming elections*", Solidaire is quick to point this out.⁵ These "youngsters" from the Bureau elected in 2008, who were not yet born when AMADA took its first steps,⁶ are intensely seeking legitimacy through the elections.

Apart from promoting the two leading figures, the party's 'specialists' are being promoted. This is a policy that was explicitly decided at the 8e Congrès.(§4.2.6.) The fact is appreciated that the party's leading doctor, Van Duppen, has been awarded the 2009 Democracy Prize, "*following in the footsteps*



1 *Solidaire* 23.04.2009

2 *Solidaire* 30.04.2009

3 *Solidaire* 07.05.2009

4 *Solidaire* 21.05.2009.

5 *Solidaire* 04.06.200

6 Mertens is born 17.12.1969 and Hedebouw 2.7.1977.

of previous winners such as trade unionist George Debunne", and that "the kiwi model is back on the government's agenda".¹

There is Van Hees for finance and Tom Demeester for energy. And a journalist from the newspaper *Le Soir*, Colette Braeckman, becomes a *specialist on the Congo*. In Antwerp, Mie Branders, from Médecine for the People, already elected as a councillor, appears second after Mertens.

There are, of course, more than 75 trade unionists on the lists",² and *prominent figures*. But the top names on the lists for the regional elections are people from *Medicine for the People* and from the party apparatus. There needs to be "a first PTB+ representative elected to parliament", but it will not be a trade unionist.

The PTB doubles its votes compared to 2004 and crosses the fateful 1% threshold. *Solidaire* publishes an interview with Hedeboew and Mertens.³ The former is "happy" to have passed the 2% mark in important districts such as Liège and Charleroi, but this is only "*an intermediate step before having elected representatives at the regional level*". The goal is to "go from 3, 600 to 5, 000 members and thus be as numerous as Ecolo". For Mertens, this is disappointing, as the goal was to triple the number of members. "*The momentum did not translate into votes.*" But we can already see the campaign to occupy the municipal horizon of large cities..

These elections are also an opportunity to launch the *Tax Millionaires* campaign with great fanfare, as "alternative society". (§4.2.5.) When Herman Van Rompuy became President of the European Council (19.11.2009), *Solidaire* took the opportunity to put his sister Tine on the front page of *Solidaire* as ambassador for the tax,⁴ while the fan club counter already showed 1,849 fans. The following week, when the counter showed 2,216 fans, the President of the PTB published an open letter to the European President concerning Opel.

By coincidence, the same issue of *Solidaire* promoting this tax commemorates the 30th anniversary of the founding congress of the PTB.⁵ And the "*founding president Ludo Martens*" is cited to try to justify that the "renewal" of the PTB is merely a return to its roots. (§ 4.2.4.) But it is still claimed that the roots of the PTB go back to the time when... Eddy Merckx won the Tour de France (1969).

5.2. The national elections of 13 June 2010: exceeding the fateful 1%

5.2.1. A large left-wing party, as in France, to respond to the crisis

In 2010, struggle seemss to be resuming in Belgium. At the end of 2009, following *Bridgestone* (58 days of strike action) and *La Poste*, FIAT-IAC workers had already taken strike action and occupied the company premises. International solidarity emerged in January 2010 in response to the threat of closure of Opel in Antwerp. On 22 January 2010, InBev workers achieved a major victory after two weeks of fighting against the company's restructuring plan. And on 29 January 2010, a demonstration brought together 35,000 people in Brussels. On the eve of this demonstration, "*Peter Mertens, president of the PTB, proposed [...] an InBev law to protect workers*".⁶

1 *Solidaire* 26.11.2009

2 *Solidaire* 14.5.2009

3 *Solidaire* 11.6.2009

4 *Solidaire*, 26.11.2009

5 "With debates on acupuncture (with doctors Harry and Ludo Fonteyne), karate demonstrations (with the Samoeray club from Leuven), shows [...] and even Laurent Désiré Kabila!"

6 *Solidaire* 04.2.2010

In February 2010, Jo Cottenier, from the PTB's research department, published a study on the crisis: *"It is time to take a Marxist look at the umpteenth phase of the economic crisis."*¹ There is talk of government debt, but no one ever suggests not paying it. Incidentally, Cottenier clearly states that *"all this shows us that these gangster practices can only be stopped with radical measures such as the nationalisation of the banking sector. [...] Our primary demand remains the creation of a genuine public bank that is permanent."* (the Kiwibank - \$4.2.5.) However, the study concludes that banks must pay tax: *"The minimum requirement is that banks pay full tax on their profits. That means 34% instead of the 10% they currently pay."*

In an insert, we find "the PTB's costed plan". It consists of:

- "A social emergency plan" funded by €11 billion (€8 billion from taxing Millionaires, €2 billion from the Kiwi model and €1 billion from a special Electrabel tax);
- "A fiscal plan" to "close the budget deficit" (i.e. pay off the debt to the banks) "without affecting workers' incomes", funded by the "1-2-3 alternative" formulated by Mertens. (§ 4.2.5.)

The Party is "on its way to 4,500 members" and is already taking on the appearance of the large communist parties in neighbouring countries. *Solidaire* is celebrating its 30th anniversary, and since one year, it has had its own *Solidarity Festival, Manifiesta*, joining "an international tradition of festivals organised by communist newspapers". This festival "replaces, in a sense" the festival organised each year for May Day, a day on which members and activists are invited to participate in trade union and association celebrations.²

In Flanders, the PTB is not afraid to join forces with the SPa,³ including the mayor of Termont, in order to occupy a space in the media. On 20 March 2010, the *Round Table of Socialists*⁴ organised a 'Socialism Day' in Ghent, for joint development *'through dialogue, debate, discussion and sometimes also through struggle. [...] No resolution or programme was issued, because in order to arrive at "common points of struggle or action, [...] we must first discuss".* None of the "six socialists who took turns at the microphone" were workers. The main thing for Mertens was to no longer be "the small left", so small that "no one wants to rally behind such depressed people".⁵

On the other hand, "as contacts between the CP and the PTB were improving in general, but especially in Liège", the PTB marches with the CP on 1 May 2010, with Hedebeuw as the speaker at the rally.⁶

5.2.2. The challenge of the 2010 early elections

On 25 April 2010, the Flemish liberals (Open VLD) "pull the plug" following community disagreements over BHV,⁷ leading to Leterme's resignation and the calling of early federal elections on 13 June 2010. For Peter Mertens, "this is truly irresponsible".⁸ This effectively disrupts the PTB's plans, which had not anticipated national elections until 2011. There is no question of not voting: "a

1 *Solidaire* 04.2.2010 and the following issue

2 *Solidaire* 04.3.2010

3 The social-democrat Socialist Party in Belgium split in 1978 in two separate parties: a Flemish SP (*Socialistische Partij*) and a French PS (*Parti Socialiste*). The SP was renamed *Socialistische Partij Anders* (SPa) in 2001 and Vooruit in 2021. (TN)

4 *Ronde Tafel van Socialisten* (Socialists Round Table)- an initiative from 2009, inspired by an Open Letter from professor Jan Blomaert (15.01.2009) and a contribution in *De Morgen* from Peter Mertens (16.01.2009). See www.rondetafelvansocialisten.be/ [reference obsolete in 2019]

5 *Solidaire* 25.3.2010 (Announced in *Solidaire* 25.2.2010)

6 *Solidaire* 22.4.2010 see also <http://grand-barnum.blogspot.be/2010/05/discours-de-raoulhedebeuw.html>

7 The questioning of an old electoral constituency of *Bruxelles-Halle-Vilvorde* (BHV).

8 *Solidaire* 29.4.2010

PTB+ representative in parliament for four years will achieve much more than a 20% abstention rate."¹ Marx and Engels are even called upon to reinforce the message that people must go out and vote, but while the quote refers to "protesting against the existing state", for the PTB, "the [existing] state must reassure the people and disarm the speculators".²

For these elections, a *Left Front* has been formed,³ while the PTB will have its own lists and wants to attract the protest vote. The website created for the campaign was <www.jevotecontre.be>, and the election poster has as slogan: "Vote against this political circus", a slogan repeated from the 2009 elections, but "more relevant than ever"⁴, given that "Parliament has become a big circus, with BHV as the highlight of the show."⁵ Indeed, "Last year, our main goal was to raise awareness of the party's name in order to grow. This time, we are asking people to vote against the political circus, but also to help the small PTB+ grow."⁶ "Faced with an impending austerity plan: a PTB+ elected representative..." It is "the only national opposition party in the country".⁷ Unsurprisingly, the candidates for the Antwerp and Liège constituencies will be Mertens and Hedeboww respectively. They are receiving some coverage in the press and on television: "The small PTB is playing in the big leagues."⁸

The PTB obtained more than 100 000 votes (1.55%) nationwide, but no seats, as it failed to reach the 5% electoral threshold anywhere.⁹ For Mertens, this is "a success for the party's renewal since the 2008 Congress". The result of 4.13% for Antwerp "is good enough to aim for two municipal councillors in 2012". And in Liège, according to Hedeboww, "the outlook is promising. [...] We have passed the important milestone of a score of more than 3% across an entire province".¹⁰ The score for the city of Liège is 4.2%, 9.8% in the canton of Herstal, and 7.3% in that of Seraing.¹¹ The target of 5,000 members for 2010, set at the 8e Congrès, has not been achieved, but there will still be 4,500 members in 2011.¹²

The highlight of these elections, however, is that the N-VA, which ran in a coalition with the CD&V in 2007 (18.51% – 30 seats) became the country's leading party, with 17.4% and 27 seats, ahead of the PS (13.7% – 26 seats) and the CD&V (10.85% – 17 seats).

This victory for the N-VA caused a problem for the bourgeoisie, which was used to operate on the basis of three pillars.¹³ A caretaker government managed the crisis – which emerged in 2008 on a global scale – on the sidelines of parliament and the community disputes that were taking centre stage. It was not until almost two years later, in December 2011, that the bourgeoisie finally decided to leave the N-VA on the sidelines and form the Di Rupo government.¹⁴

1 *Solidaire* 04.5.2010. Forecasts estimated 20 % abstention.

2 *Solidaire* 13.5.2010, Editio.

The quotation from Marx and Engels is from *On the Political Action of the Working Class* (1871)

3 PSL/LSP, CAP, PC/KP, LCR/SAP – But KP and SAP support the PTB in Flanders.

4 *Solidaire* 29.4.2010

5 www.ptb.be/fileadmin/users/nationaal/download/2010/05/programme2010.pdf

6 2525 Jan Hasaers, in charge of the PTB elections campaign, see http://www.ptb.be/index.php?id=1326&type=98&L=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=19348&cHash=485cfa5104ffb361c69e6222831ebb04 [reference obsolete in 2019]

7 *Solidaire* 13.5.2010

8 *Solidaire* 03.6.2010

9 The *Parti Populaire* obtained a seat with only 84 000 votes (1.29%). *Front de Gauche* got 0.32%; *Egalité* 0,09%.

10 *Solidaire* 17.6.2010

11 *La gauche de la gauche*, op. cit. p.293

12 *In Memoriam*, op. cit.

13 *Liberals, Catholics and Socialists* (TN)

14 See the LCT-brochure *La crise institutionnelle*, <http://lct-cwb.be/images/pdfs/Autres/crise_institutionnelle.pdf>

5.3. The PTB "assumes its responsibilities"

5.3.1. The community question

The PTB is riding the wave of the communautaire crisis and wants to position itself as a bulwark against the N-VA. The slogan "*We are one, wij zijn één*" is the theme of a brochure.¹ and of Mertens' speech at the *Manifiesta* festival on 25 September 2010.² The theme had been the subject of a resolution on the *community crisis* in Belgium a week earlier.³

The festival left little room in *Solidaire* for the European demonstration on 29 September in Brussels against the wave of austerity.⁴ However, it was an opportunity for the PTB to denounce – for once – the unfair dismissal of five SETCa permanent staff members by the union leadership.⁵ And the mobilisation of workers in France was an opportunity to highlight their participation in the Euro-demonstration on the 29th, in the next issue of *Solidaire*.⁶

Meanwhile, *Manifiesta* is above all an opportunity to launch a new style of communication. The PTB is preparing for the municipal elections in October 2012 and is adapting its discourse to be accepted by the bourgeoisie as a 'reasonable' party. On 19 October 2010, the PTB congratulated itself on playing 'in the big leagues': Raoul Hedebouw was awarded by a magazine "*in the antechamber of the circles of power*" as "*the best hope for political communication [...] who is not afraid to measure himself against the big names*". That is to say, "*a kind of Olivier Besancenot, but better*".⁷ And Hedebouw concluded: "*The fact that the PTB is present [at this kind of event] is proof that we are growing rapidly*".⁸

On 25 November, a new campaign was launched: "*The problem is not language but S-E-X (Social security – Employment – Xenophobia)*". And the fiftieth anniversary of the Strike of the Century (December 1960 – January 1961) was an opportunity to begin to distance the PTB from the PS, with a four-page insert in *Solidaire*,⁹ denouncing André Renard's "*Walloon federalism*", and the betrayal of the PS.

In early 2011, the PTB organised a *National Conference* (320 delegates) to strengthen the political and ideological unity of the Party in order to "*assume its responsibilities*" in the face of the crisis. After the 8e Congrès, communication had improved and the figure of 5,000 members was on the horizon.¹⁰

Belgian demonstrations of all kinds against Flemish separatism will be covered.¹¹ Incidentally, there are also calls for the demonstration against the AIP on 4 March,¹² and for the European

1 David Pestieau and Herwig Lerouge, *Nous sommes un, wij zijn één -Questions et réponses sur l'avenir de la Belgique*. September 2010

2 With 6000 participants, «Better than 1er May ! » (*Solidaire* 30.9.2010)

3 *Etudes marxistes* 92/2010

4 *Presse Internationale*-77 - September 2010

5 *Solidaire* 23.9.2010

6 *Solidaire* 30.9.2010

7 The "Preference" of Di Rupo, See § 4.3.

8 *Solidaire* 28.10.2010

9 *Solidaire* 02.12.2010 - *Le Drapeau Rouge* (PCB) is mentioned, not the Trotskyist intervention.

10 PTB intervention at the 13th International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, Athens, December 2011: « 20 ans après la contre-révolution en URSS » (<http://www.solidnet.org>) [obsolete in 2019]

11 Manif "*pas en notre nom*" Sunday 23.01.2011 against the communautaire bottleneck, called by "cinq étudiants du nord et du sud du pays" (45.000 participants, see *Solidaire* 20.1.2011 and 27.1.2011) The "*révolution des frites*" on 7 may (*Solidaire* 17.2.2011 and 7.4.2011)

12 *Solidaire* 10.2.2011 and 3.3.2011

demonstration on 24 March.¹ But there will be no large gatherings for the historic Labour Day. In April 2011, the next *Manifesta* is already announced for 24 September 2011.² And 1 May will be celebrated "in each region", with an aperitif at the International Centre in Brussels.³ Just a "Message" from Mertens for the occasion,⁴ in which "*the PTB reaches out to Erik De Bruyn [who left the SPa] for the 2012 elections*". After 1 May, the FGVB's speeches are relayed, while at the same time the trial of the five SETCa members is recalled.⁵

5.3.2. Farewell to the historic leader of the PTB

The death of Ludo Martens on 5 June 2011 went almost unnoticed in Belgium, whereas it was commemorated in a major ceremony in Kinshasa.⁶ It had already been five years since the leading figure in the party's formation had been forced to abandon all political activity due to Alzheimer's disease. And several years before 2006, Ludo had already decided to reduce his intervention in the PTB in Belgium, living in Kinshasa. (§ 3.4.)

Solidaire publishes a photo of "*the former President and founder of the PTB*" on front-page, and a 3-page obituary signed by the PTB Bureau.⁷ On Sunday 26 June 2011 several hundred persons assist in a ULB classroom on a ceremony,⁸ with interventions of family members,⁹ and former comrades (Herwig Lerouge, Kris Merckx, and others) and recent members (Raoul Hedebouw and Peter Mertens) of the PTB, as well as an ancient comrade, Paul Goossens, trade unionists (including Jan Cap) and Colette Braeckman (specialist for Ecuatorial Africa at *Le Soir*).¹⁰ There were also emissaries from Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Philippines¹¹



In 1968, Ludo told Kris Merckx that he had two paths. "He can try to accompany us on the path of the workers and the people. But he can also take the leap towards a dazzling seat in Parliament."¹¹ The day after the leader's death on 26 June 2011, Kris, *founder of Medicine for the People*, replied: "We, the 'elders', will help the new generation now leading the party to preserve and enrich your political legacy."¹²

5.3.3. Austerity measures

In July 2011, one year after the elections, the "Di Rupo Note" began to herald the end of the caretaker government and, above all, announced the austerity measures to be implemented. For the

1 *Solidaire* 31.3.2011

2 *Solidaire* 07.4.2011

3 *Solidaire* 07.4.2011 and 14.4.2011

4 *Solidaire* 28.4.2011

5 *Solidaire* 05.5.2011

6 With the presence of Hedebouw - See *Solidaire* 23.6.2011

7 *Solidaire* 09.6.2011 The following issue will feature reactions from Paul Goossens (based on statements in *De Standaard*) and from Colette Brackman (texts from her blog), among others.

8 *Solidaire* 07.7.2011

9 Ludo's daughter, *Amada*, reported a personal message from the brother of Joseph Kabila.

10 The newspaper *Le Soir* devoted only two sentences to his death in its *news in brief* section on 7 June, describing him as 'one of the Flemish leaders of the 1968 student protests [who] in 1979 played a decisive role in the creation of the PTB».

Interviews with Kris Merckx and Boudewijn Deckers appear in the Dutch-language press (*Interview Deckers*, op. cit.)

11 Luis Jalandoni, cultural attaché at the Philippine Embassy in Brussels, an old friend of Martens.

12 *Hommage_Merckx*, op. cit.

PTB, this was a golden opportunity to do battle with the PS and "expose Di Rupo I" ¹ even though "Europe" was primarily responsible for the measures taken by the government: for the 2012 budget, "the butterfly was caught in the Commission's nets".

In the meantime, workers are quick to mobilise, but the PTB is waiting for the decrees concerning these measures before reacting, having full confidence in the leadership of the trade unions. "*With the rally in Seraing this Wednesday [26.10.2011] for employment, the awareness campaigns and general meetings organised in the coming days by the trade unions, the world of work can now prepare for a strong response as soon as the measures of the new Di Rupo government are effective.*" ² And on the 10th anniversary of the great Sabena strike, *Solidaire* published a full page on this struggle, ³ without even mentioning the main protagonist, Maria Vindevoghel, the troublemaker with her Maria List in 2003. (§ 3.7.2.)

The *Manifesta* festival on 24 September 2011 brought together 7 500 people, with the new generation taking centre stage. The PTB is concerned that "*the federal government still has 45 billion left. With that, it has to pay civil servants, the army [...] And above all, it has to pay the public debt (nearly 18 billion euros)... [to the banks]*". ⁴ Never mind. The PTB has the solution. A wealth tax would not only be very profitable, but it is also feasible... since it exists in France. ⁵

As in the previous year, on 29 October, the PTB took part in the *Socialists' Round Table* in Ghent, (§5.2.1.), this time without the SPa, "*which could hardly be described as socialist*". There were 600 participants (compared to 750 the previous year). The invitations announced two starting points for the discussions: "*In the offensive, the right wing is against the trade unions*" and "*We need democratic trade unions that are prepared to fight*". ⁶

On 15 November 2011, the FGTB organised a rally at Heysel (6 000 people), where it announced that "*we are not ruling out a general strike*". ⁷ But the big demonstration took place on 2 December, with 80 000 people taking to the streets of Brussels. *Solidaire* published a photo showing trade unionists turning their backs on the SPa. According to the PTB, this was the beginning of a broad movement against austerity. ⁸ On 6 December, Di Rupo begins his government, and the next day, 40 000 people take to the streets of Liège, demanding the nationalisation of the steel industry. ⁹ On 22 December, there is a public services strike, but on the same day, Parliament already approves Di Rupo's pension plans. ¹⁰ Unions finally call for a general strike... in six weeks' time (30 January 2012). ¹¹

5.3.4. How dare they! (...those selfish rich people)

As the crisis of capitalism deepens, the tone of the solution becomes increasingly moralistic in the PTB: against the selfish ruling class. At *Manifesta* 2011, Mertens was already accusing the banks of "unfair play". ¹²) And at the end of 2011, he began writing a second book with the eloquent title: *Hoe*

1 *Solidaire* 22.12.2011

2 *Solidaire* 27.10.2011

3 *Solidaire* 03.11.2011

4 *Solidaire* 27.10.2011 Our emphasis

5 *Solidaire* 20.10.2011

6 *Solidaire* 06.10.2011 ; 13.10.2011 ; 03.11.2011

7 *Solidaire* 17.11.2011

8 *Solidaire* 09.12.2011

9 *Solidaire* 16.12.2011

10 *Solidaire* 12.01.2012

11 *Solidaire* 26.01.2012 gives « 5 raisons for going on strike at 30 January ».

12 *Solidaire* 29.9.2011

durven ze? *De euro, de crisis en de grote hold-up*. (How dare they? The crisis, the euro and the great heist.¹

In a preface, a popular author at the time says that he "*has nothing against multi-billionaires: he would like to be one himself*." They should simply "*contribute financially in proportion to their wealth*".² For Mertens himself, "*capital income*" (the surplus value extracted from workers) is as fair as "*labour income*" (what is left to the worker to regenerate his labour power). The discussion is about the fair distribution between the two types of income: "*The issue of fair distribution of taxes is one of the core concerns of our party, an unapologetically left-wing party. This explains why we are putting so much energy into developing a research department staffed by experts such as Marc Van Hees*".³ The book becomes a bestseller.⁴

To counter "banking extremism", the state must take control of the banks in order to lower The interest rates on debt.⁵ PTB's concern is therefore that the state must be able to pay its debts... to the banks, which can be helped by taxing Millionaires. And this tax is unlikely to call into question the supposed *rights* of the owners of the means of production: "*The existence of a wealth tax in France and the Netherlands contradicts the argument of capital flight*".⁶ Take the example of France, "*where wealth tax brought in £4.4 billion in 2007, 1.6 % of revenue*".⁷

These ideas will subsequently be clarified. Peter Mertens will explain that this involves "*a profound redistribution of wealth, so that those who produce wealth receive a larger share of the pie in return*". This, in turn, should "*create thousands of new jobs, and these new stable jobs can once again become the norm*".⁸ Marc Van Hees, the specialist in this field, will also have his say. He considers the holders of "*fortune*" to be "*professionals*" who are therefore entitled to their share, provided they pay tax.⁹

Media coverage will also be boosted by the publication of other books by party *specialists*. In 2005, expert Van Duppen had already published *La guerre des médicaments* (The War on Medicines). In 2013, Marc Van Hees, the finance expert, published a new book with a provocative but significant title from a moralising perspective: *Les riches aussi ont le droit d'être taxés* (The rich also have the right to be taxed).¹⁰ And Tom Demeester, the specialist in the campaign to reduce VAT on energy to 6%, which is still ongoing [in 2019],¹¹ published *Opgelicht* (Ripped off).

5.4. The October 2012 municipal elections: conquering the big cities

This *responsible* PTB can now look forward with some hope to the next elections, the municipal elections of October 2012. Legitimacy through elections is becoming more accessible via the

1 The book is presented as the second part of a trilogy, the first being *Priorité de gauche* (see above, § 4.2.4.) and the third being announced under the title *Le socialisme 2.0*. At the book launch on 18.12.2011, it was announced that the French edition would be adapted to the new situation with De Wever and Di Rupo. (*Solidaire* 01.12.2011). And a "*Congress about Socialism*" is announced (which will not happen). We refer to the book as its translation in French language *Comment osent-ils ?* op. cit.

2 Dimitri Verhulst in *Comment osent-ils ?* op. cit. - p.11

3 *Comment osent-ils ?* op. cit. - p.24

4 It will be translated into Spanish and Italian, and it will be made into a film. (See *Solidaire* 27.06.2013.

5 *Solidaire* 12.01.2012 - edito)

6 8e Congrès, op. cit. p.95.

7 *Solidaire* 20.10.2011 ; 13.12.2012

8 See P. Mertens in a 'back-to-school interview' in September 2013

9 May-Day 2013 speech. 'Let's tax income from wealth in the same way as professional income.' *Solidaire* 02.05.2013

10 *Solidaire* 02.05.2013. Van Hees had already published a book on Didier Reynders : *L'homme qui parle à l'oreille des riches*. 2007 (The man who whispers in the ears of the wealthy).

11 *Solidaire* 23.2.2012

"conquest of the big cities", a goal set at the 2008 Renewal Congress. And the Programme is being refined in this sense: *"We propose specifically that our cities each take the initiative to create a public inter-municipal association for the construction and renovation of public housing. This type of public enterprises exist in Germany: why not here?"*¹

For Mertens, *"Our party is in a phase of acceleration: there is a place to be taken to the left of social democracy."* And given that *"all resistance begins with information,"* he can be pleased with the success of his book: *"As for media attention, I have no complaints. It started with a three-page interview in De Standaard. After that [...] all the newspapers covered my book."*² The success of Mélenchon's *Front de Gauche* in France is cited as the way forward: it is *"the rebirth of revolutionary France"*. The task now is to overcome capitalism, a system which, like feudalism before it, *"has run out of steam"*.³ But how? The proof that it is possible, that there is another way in Europe, comes from a village in Spain, Marinaleda, with a communist mayor *"who has rejected capitalism"*.⁴

As for Raoul Hedebouw, at the end of March, he is *"on tour for the municipal elections"*.⁵ In Liège, the PTB and the PC are celebrating May Day 2012 together, as they did in 2011. And on this occasion, the 6th edition of the annual meeting between the *true* communist parties of neighbouring countries (Benelux and Germany) (§4.4.) also happens in Liège.⁶

President Mertens' message for May Day 2012 announces a *"European Spring"* (Spain, Greece, Portugal, France).⁷ A new form of socialism is proposed, a *'21st-century socialism'*, *'Socialism 2.0'*,⁸ where *'social issues, democracy and ecology should be the starting points for a new economy'*, and as in 2007 (§ 4.2.1.), an old slogan of Di Rupo (§3.8.3) is recycled for the election campaign: *"More than ever, people first"*. The programme focuses on *"Tax Millionaires"* and on the reform of the banking sector. (§4.2.5.) On this May-Day 2012, Comac celebrates its 10th anniversary.⁹

This May Day 2012 is also marked by Daniel Piron's speech in Charleroi, breaking with the PS and the FGTB: *What political future for the FGTB?* But the PTB's main takeaway is that *"it's for after the municipal elections"*.¹⁰

*"The municipal councils need a left-wing opposition."*¹¹ And *Manifesta* 2012 – a tradition that is going from strength to strength¹² – is obviously positioned with these elections in mind.¹³

The PTB's tactic is becoming clearer: the conquest of the big cities. The major issues for the 14 October elections can be summed up as *"Droit à la Vi(II)e!"*¹⁴ In an "elections" supplement to *Solidaire* 06.09.2012, Mertens explains: *"A party that is growing cannot rush things. [...] The number*

1 The programme published for the occasion, entitled 'Our priorities', can be consulted at https://issuu.com/ptbbelgique/docs/ptb_bruxelles_programme_2012

2 *Solidaire* 01.3.2012

3 *Solidaire* 22.3.2012 - « *Planning [in the USSR] did not fail entirely. It failed to provide everyday consumer goods. But it did not fail to build satellites. [...] Liberals plan to invade the market and have chosen market standards as their regulator. We plan for ecological and social change, and we put citizens in charge of regulating it.* »

4 *Solidaire* 01.3.2012 - It's no longer socialism in a single country, but in a single village.. See also *Solidaire* 06.10.2012

5 *Solidaire* 29.3.2012

6 *Solidaire* 03.5.2012

7 *Solidaire* 26.4.2012

8 The term *Socialism 2.0* has been used since November 2008 for a discussion forum on socialism. See: http://p2pfoundation.net/Socialism_2.0 - However, Mertens' inspiration is *21st Century Socialism*, the title of a book by Heinz Dieterich Steffan published in 1996, but which became popular when Hugo Chávez used it in a speech on 30 January 2005 at the 5th World Forum in Porto Alegre.

9 *Solidaire* 25.05.2012

10 *Solidaire* 03.05.2012 (Daniel Piron was Regional Secretary of the FGTB in Charleroi. - TN)

11 *Solidaire* 29.08.2012

12 *Solidaire* 27.09.2012

13 *Solidaire* 09.08.2012

one priority for the upcoming municipal elections is to get someone elected in Antwerp, Liège and Brussels (Molenbeek). [...] Next, we must start building a real opposition force today [...] with a view to the 2014 federal and regional elections, since Bart De Wever plans to paralyse the country. Finally, [...] we need three megaphones in these cities." Meanwhile, the *Socialistische Partij* in the Netherlands, whose tactics had been taken as a model at the 8e Congrès, (§ 4.2.3.) is no longer claimed. This Socialist party is denounced for its "social alliance between political parties, employers, workers and civil society organisations".¹

Trust is essential. *The PTB still has no MP, but it is gaining influence.*² And it will be "the voice of the social opposition, before and after 14 October".³

The results of these elections represent a breakthrough in the major cities, with four municipal councillors in Antwerp (including Mertens),⁴ two in Liège (including Hedebouw) and two in Brussels (Molenbeek and Schaerbeek), as well as a presence in the major cities of Hainaut (Charleroi, Mons, La Louvière). In the traditional stronghold of Zelzate, where Frans Van Acoleyen has been a councillor for 30 years, all six seats were retained. Another 'old hand', Kris Merckx, won a seat on the Antwerp Provincial Council and a seat on the Hoboken District Council.⁵ Summing up: the PTB+ won 31 municipal councillors, 17 district councillors (Antwerp) and four provincial councillors, increasing its number of elected representatives from 16 to 52. It now has 11 CPAS councillors. "This breakthrough will weigh heavily on the Di Rupo government tomorrow as it prepares for a new austerity programme worth more than €4 billion. [...] The PS is under attack from the left, a 'threat' that will force it to maintain a hard line." And the PTB declares itself "ready for tough social opposition".⁶ The "breakthrough" is analysed by David Pestieau in the PTB's theoretical magazine, *Études marxistes*,⁷ which attributes the success to "the profound renewal of the PTB, crystallised at the 8e Congrès in 2008, [where the party] turned its back on sectarianism and a certain dogmatism. Meanwhile, in the same issue of the magazine, there is also a contribution by Herwig Lerouge, aimed at a "communist" audience, theoretically reaffirming the main principles of Marxism."⁸

14 A play on words between "Ville" (city) and "Vie" (life)
Solidaire 16.08.2012

1 *Solidaire* 06.09.2012 - In 2014, the SP participated in several municipal executive bodies, particularly in Amsterdam, where it had already voted for austerity measures. For the PSL, 'it is a tragic mistake on the part of the SP to allow itself to be used by pro-capitalist parties'. The PSL still supported the SP as a potential 'broad workers' party' in the March 2014 elections. And 'the coming period will be decisive in determining whether the SP will become that party'. See *Lutte Socialiste* n° 193 - été 2014 p. 10.

2 *Solidaire* 20.09.2012

3 *Solidaire* 11.10.2012

4 One of these Council members, Frank Hosteaux, will be expelled from the party in March 2013. See *Solidaire* 07.03.2013.

5 See the results in <https://www.vlaanderen.be/uitslagen-vanverkiezingen-in-belgie>

6 *Solidaire* 18.10.2012

7 David Pestieau, *Quelques réflexions sur les élections communales belges 2012 - Études marxistes* no. 100

8 Herwig Lerouge - *La gauche européenne face à la crise. - It is NO to the participation of the Communist Party in bourgeois governments: the failure of the Communist Party under Mitterrand, of Die Linke in Germany, of Blum's Popular Front. 'Neither the European Left Manifesto nor its statutes refer to private ownership of the means of production, the economic crises inherent in the system, the cut-throat competition between monopolistic companies, or the division of the world among the major imperialist powers.' Die Linke is 'a new social democracy', criticised for its programme in which 'the working class has no role in the conquest of political power. It talks of "winning majorities" and "democratic socialism" that could be achieved within the "democratic" structures of the German constitution and a "social state governed by the rule of law".'*

5.5. Capitalising on the electoral success of 2012, with a view at 2014

The elections did not stop the struggles but left them scattered. The closure of Ford in Genk led to a slightly larger mobilisation, with a protest demonstration of 20 000 people on 11 November 2012. And on 14 November 2012, a Europe-wide 'action strike' took place. When ArcelorMittal announced the closure of seven of its twelve cold-rolling mills on 24 January 2013, with the loss of 1 300 jobs, workers mobilised under the slogan of "*nationalisation*". The demonstrations on 21 February and 14 March were a continuation of this desire to mobilise in a united front against job losses and the government's austerity measures, often despite the reluctance of union leaders who wanted to "give Di Rupo time". Sometimes, the PTB even perceives "a timid shift to the left" in the SPa – one never knows.¹ But Di Rupo wasted no time in implementing his austerity programme.

Meanwhile, the Assembly convened by the FGTB-Charleroi in February 2013 welcomed the CNE-Hainaut's endorsement of the May 2012 Appeal.² And at an enthusiastic meeting of 400 people in Charleroi on 27 April 2013, a *Support Committee* of the left-wing parties was set up. In the pages of *Solidaire*,³ Antonio Cocciolo, leader of the Hainaut-Namur metalworkers, called on the parties to "*be close to the workers' delegations*".

The PTB sustains these movements. On the occasion of the demonstration on 21 February 2013, *Solidaire* published a report on the nationalisation of Mittal.⁴ The party is part of the Support Committee set up by the FGTB-Charleroi Meeting. There is discussion about '*a call for another political relay*', and when the FGTB-Charleroi publishes its brochure on '*8 questions*', *Solidaire* publishes an interview with Daniel Piron, in which is mentioned the "*political alternative*", which must "*pursue a left-wing policy*".⁵ But while several sectors of the left are already considering joint participation in the 2014 elections, Hedeboom is not interested: "*before talking about the ballot box, we need to build a common dynamic in these areas that have been abandoned to the right*".⁶ The PTB's main concern is to capitalise on the party's electoral success in October 2012, with a view to the triple elections on 5 May 2014 (European, national and regional).

Meanwhile, the PTB senses "*a new wind blowing on the left*"⁷ And Hedeboom becomes increasingly popular.⁸ At the end of December 2012, he has the pages of *Le Vif/L'Express* at his disposal.⁹ He takes the opportunity to explain what "*a communist party of our time*" is. Regarding Ludo Martens' book, *Le Parti de la Révolution* (The Party of Revolution), "*it is a reflection of an era*". For Hedeboom, "*the post-1989 period was difficult for all Marxist parties in Europe. Most of them disappeared. This created a siege mentality. Faced with ideological bombardment, the PTB locked itself into dogmatism in order to maintain the organisation's existence.*" Currently [2012], a revolutionary change in society means that citizens must have the right to question the municipal council.

1 *Solidaire* 04.04.2013

2 CNE: Centrale Nationale des Employés - National Employees Union (TN)

3 *Solidaire* 24.04.2013

4 *Solidaire* 21.02.2013 ; pour une « *sidérurgie intégrée et publique* ». (for an "*integrated and public steel industry*"). See also *Solidaire* 06.06.2013

5 *Solidaire* 26.09.2013

6 *Solidaire* 02.05.2013

7 *Solidaire* 09.05.2013

8 *Solidaire* 28.02.2013

9 Raoul Hedeboom : "*Le PTB n'est pas un parti de Bisounours*", (The PTB is not a party of Care Bears.) *Le Vif Express*, 13.12.2012. <http://www.levif.be/info/actualite/belgique/raoul-hedeboom-le-ptb-nest-pas-un-parti-de-bisounours/article-4000221220060.htm> The article was then republished on the PTB website, dated 17.12. 2012. We quote the article as *Hedeboom-Vif-Express*, op. cit.

As for class struggle, Hedebeuw *"does not deny that Belgian history has been punctuated by violent moments of confrontation between social movements and the authorities. [...] But in the context of Belgium today, we clearly reject violence."* This clarification should be compared with that of the same Hedebeuw in 2001, during D14: *"Broken windows are violence, agreed. But that is nothing compared to the violence of losing a job. As far as I know, there weren't 12,000 broken windows in Brussels. On the other hand, there were 12,000 job losses at Sabena, almost on the orders of the European Union."* (§3.5.1.)

In international politics, *"before, the PTB behaved a bit like the embassy for everything that was done in the world in the name of socialism. That's over now. The North Korean model, dynastic, militarised, undemocratic [...]. We are no longer going to spend all our energy analysing the history of the USSR and Cuba."* And for Hedebeuw, *"from Belgium, it's not up to me to tell Venezuelans what they should do."* Actually, we are guided by *"a principle enshrined in the United Nations Charter: no interference in the internal affairs of a country"*. The death of Hugo Chávez on 5 March 2013 will not even be mentioned in *Solidaire*.

In February 2014, Mertens explained that *"in the election campaign, we are seeking two things at once: votes and money for the party. And success makes us more attractive."* However, there is a danger. *"After an initial electoral success, more people join us spontaneously. So, at the end of 2012, we decided to slow down and to develop a consolidation phase in 2013, with reinforced Marxist training in the party groups. This is because accelerated membership growth leads to a social-democratisation of the party 'at the bottom'."* [...] *"It is a question of developing a language that people understand. The party's success in doing so would explain the unexpected success of his book."*¹ For the *Solidaire Prize* is selected a book published by the *Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt (CADTM)*, *"Who benefits from debt?"*,² but it is limited at posing the question.

In April 2014, when a journalist asked Hedebeuw whether the *"14 billion tax revolution"*³ proposed by the PTB was realistic, Hedebeuw called on *"famous economists"* from the bourgeoisie (Thomas Piketty, Joseph Stiglitz) to explain that the issue was political and that it was necessary to *"consider a wealth tax"*. Regarding *"employment subsidies"* (6 billion) and *"social security contribution relief"* (5 billion), the PTB *"is calling for an audit"* to determine whether these 11 billion have created jobs.⁴

5.6. May 2014: adapting to public opinion in order to enter Parliament

After the 2013 school holidays, with the triple elections (federal, regional and European) of May 2014 on the horizon, the PTB is fine-tuning its approach. A *"back-to-school interview with PTB President Peter Mertens"* and the *Manifesta* festival (21 September 2013) provide an opportunity to take stock.⁵

In terms of policy, it is still *Tax Millionaires*. On the other hand, democracy is about people's participation, participatory democracy, put into practice by the PTB through *"starting our election campaign with a large-scale public survey"*. The aim is to interview 40 000 people. In short, the PTB will gear the content of its election campaign towards what people prefer to vote for; it is indeed *"an unapologetic left-wing party, a Marxist party with strong principles, but with the flexibility necessary to*

1 DKP, op. cit.

2 *Solidaire* 15.08.2013

3 *Le Plan chiffré* de février 2010, voir §5.2.1.

4 *Le Soir* 26.04.2014

5 *Solidaire* 19.09.2013 ; 26.09.2013

count in the 21st century", as defined at the 8e Congrès in 2007/2008.¹ The matter is to adapt the programme to the consciousness of the workers in order to cast a wide net, rather than seeking to raise this consciousness, necessarily inspired by the bourgeois ideology, to a revolutionary perspective. On the other hand, Mertens does not forget to point out that "*the model of a party with open tendencies and ostentatious careerism considerably undermines its striking power.*" Just look at what happened in Germany: "*Die Linke and the Greens lost a third of their voters. [...] Die Linke mainly showed its internal divisions.*"

In concrete terms, "*in the North, there will be an artificial duel between Kris Peeters and Bart de Wever, and the South will focus on the PS*". The goal is to have "*two elected representatives at the federal level, or at least Hedebouw in Liège*".

The classic themes are back on the agenda. In six years of campaigning for a 6% VAT on energy, the PTB had collected 225,000 signatures.² "*Today, all parties are joining us in criticising the notional interest that we have been denouncing since 2005.*"³ At this point, it is not yet a question of "*twisting the knife in the wound of social democracy*", but there is no shortage of criticism of Di Rupo's policies

The PTB participates in the third day of the *Socialists Round Table*, (§ 5.2.1. and § 5.3.3.) in Antwerp, with the Trotskyists of the SAP and "*several representatives of traditional parties*". And with the *Socialistische Partij* (SP) of the Netherlands. (§4.2.3. and § 5.4.), with Emile Roemer who agrees with Mertens agree that "*we are not a salon left*" and congratulates him for "*managing to build his party*".⁴

At the end of 2013, stock is taken.⁵ "*The electoral survey was the first key to success*" for the October 2012 elections (52 elected representatives). Among the new members of the PTB are Michaël Verbauwheide, former president of the *Federation of French-speaking Students*,⁶ and Herman Van Rompuy's sister (Tine). Good candidates for May 2014. And "*we obtained a 6 % VAT rate for electricity*".

This is also an opportunity for Hedebouw to publish a book of its own: *Première à gauche* (First on the Left), in December 2013. And the *Moustique* magazine opened its pages to him.⁷ In it, we discover a rather curious concept of social classes, the criterion being whether or not one needs the PTB: "*the class that needs the PTB [...] is much larger than one might think. It is the class of working people, and that's a lot of people. Basically, we defend 97% of the Belgian population. The others, rentiers and other speculators, don't really need us. They're Millionaires.*" However, the latter have nothing to fear from a revolution: "*They should wait and see 1% of their fortune taken away by Taxing Millionaires.*"

The PTB's *Small Pocket Book*, "Priorité de gauche" (Left-wing Priority), (§4.2.4.) has been reissued accordingly, now as *Revamped PTB Pocket Book*. In addition to updating the quantities⁸ and an update of Peter Mertens' photo, the slogan of reducing VAT on energy is given greater prominence; *Tax Millionaires* is introduced as the title of a chapter; An "Eco" chapter is added;⁹ And *Society on a human scale* is now identified as *Socialism 2.0*, adding that it is a society "*where banks fulfil a public*

1 *Solidaire* 26.09.2013

2 *Solidaire* 10.10.2013

3 Hedebouw, in *Mise au Point* 1.9.2013, published then on the PTB-site

4 *Solidaire* 7.11.2013.

5 *Solidaire* 5.12.2013

6 *Solidaire* 12.9.2013

7 *Moustique* 23.12.2013 - www.moustique.be/actu-societe/267786/raoul-hedebouw-tout-ce-quon-veut-dynamiter-cest-le-debat-texte-integral

8 The number of activists rose from 4000 to 7700, and the number of councillors from 15 to 52 elected representatives.

function instead of speculating and where key sectors are under social control. Where the community once again has control over production, and where human needs and the capacity of nature can be planned".

In February 2014, Peter Mertens has the opportunity to explain to communists from the DKP (in Germany) *"that a trade union, formerly guided by the Parti Socialiste, is now with us in the election campaign, pushing the PS onto the barricades and bringing us votes. [...] The goal is to obtain two federal MPs and one MP in Flanders and one in Wallonia. Our surveys revealed three topics of interest: 1. poverty; 2. employment; 3. taxation policy."*¹ (Mertens also points out that the results of the survey (the order of people's concerns) came as *"a surprise"* to him. One wonders why.

9 The Marxist definition of *infrastructure* is highlighted: *'All prosperity has two resources: human labour and nature.'* But the PTB's conclusion, far removed from Marx's, is that *'We must protect both.'*

1 DKP, op. cit.

6. A "democratic" (bourgeois) party

In the preceding chapters, we have followed the various stages of this metamorphosis announced in the introduction. A conclusion is now beginning to emerge. The PTB has become a respectable party for the bourgeoisie, a party integrated into the capitalist system, a bourgeois party, which will finally have its place in parliament, not as a party that criticises this bourgeois institution, but as a party that finds its place there, like the latest arrival. Let us look at this in more detail.¹

6.1. The PTB-GO, rival to the major parties

In January 2014, the PTB announced an electoral coalition for the triple elections (European, federal and regional) on 25 May, with the CP [Communist Party] and the LCR [Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire - Communist Revolutionary League, with Trotskyist origin in France]: the "PTB-Gauche d'Ouverture" [PTB-GO - PTB-Open to the Left].²

In Flanders, the KP [Kommunistische Partij] had already supported the PTB list in the elections of 13 June 2010. And in Liège, the PTB had already been marching every year with the CP on May-Day since 2010, with Hedebouw as the speaker at the rally.³ As for the LCR: she had already expressed in November 2013 its willingness to campaign with the PTB.⁴

For the LCR, the PTB-GO would be a concrete expression of the dynamic launched on May-Day 2012 by the trade unionists of Charleroi.⁵ This is also the interpretation given by another appeal, signed by prominent figures in support of the PTB-GO, under the title '*There are appointments that must not be missed*'.⁶ The FGTB Charleroi did not sign this appeal. Although Carlo Briscolini, president of its regional branch, "*welcomed the fact that three left-wing parties had been able to come together, with the support of independent public figures*", he distanced himself (in the name of the so-called "*principles of trade union independence*"), adding that "*after the elections, we will be behind them to monitor them, based on our ten-points emergency programme*". As for the FGTB Hainaut-Namur metalworkers they decide to "*vote for the anti-capitalist left*", and some (including Caterpillar) "*went further, calling for a vote for PTB-GO*".⁷

The PSL [Parti Socialiste de Lutte - Trotskyist] is trying in vain to be invited into the coalition, and supports it. The *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung*,⁸ which compares the PTB's situation somewhat with what is happening in Germany and notes a "shift in the PTB", is perceptive enough to understand that the PSL was not welcome in the PTB-GO because it was "also working on building a party", unlike the PC and the LCR.

1 This is what Lenin calls a bourgeois workers' party, using a term already used by Engels: a party with a working-class base, a petty-bourgeois leadership and a bourgeois programme. See V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*, October 1916.

2 We joins a translation for the Parties identified by acronyms that reflect a French name. - MR, CdH and PS are expressions of "Liberals, Catholics and Socialists respectively, in the traditional '3-pillar' system" in Belgium) TN

3 *Solidaire*, 22.4.2010 See also <http://grand-barnum.blogspot.be/2010/05/discours-de-raoul-hedebouw.html>

4 www.lcr-lagauche.org/listes-ptb-go/

5 27 January 2014 - <http://www.lcr-lagauche.org/go-go-go-les-listes-ptb-go-gauche-douverture/>

6 <http://www.lcr-lagauche.org/il-est-des-rendez-vous-quil-ne-faut-pas-manquer-2/>

7 www.lcr-lagauche.org/ivan-del-percio-fgtb-caterpillar-nous-appelons-a-voter-ptb-go/

8 *Belgiens Linke auf dem Sprung* - 18.5.2014

www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/sonst_publicationen/rls_onl_Belgiens_Linke_auf_dem_Sprung_140518.pdf

Other left-wing groups in recent years – Rood!; VEGA; MG – remain on the sidelines. But the PTB does not hesitate to make agreements, given the need of support, with parties that can hardly be considered left-wing. The policy of post-election regrouping in Brussels with *Pro-Bruxsel*, the *Pirate Party* and the *BUB* in order to exceed the electoral threshold is a tactic not only to get "one elected representative" for the PTB, but above all to have "all the elected representatives" from this alliance, knowing full well that, when seats are allocated, these parties are unlikely to get any, whereas the PTB could lose elected representatives by including the PSL in this bargaining.¹

The first polls quickly gave the PTB-GO a significant lead. As the polls confirmed the PTB's breakthrough, the major parties, particularly the PS and the MR, took them into account. The PTB could even become a bargaining chip in the rivalry between traditional parties, as the Greens have sometimes been for a quarter of a century.²

Initially, the PS reacted with haughtiness: "*The far left has always existed in the political landscape. And it is true that, for the moment, there seems to be a media phenomenon surrounding the PTB.*"³ (It should be remembered that in 2008, Di Rupo welcomed at home Marco Van Hees, already a well-known figure in the PTB, to congratulate him on his book.⁴ And that he suggested that "those who want to cast a protest vote against the capitalist system and who really do not want to vote for the PS should vote not for Ecolo but for the Belgian Labour Party, the PTB).(\$ 4.3.) For Philippe Moreaux, "*they have captured a large part of the popular militancy, which has left the PS for the PTB. It's annoying, but it's a reality.*"⁵ In the FGVB, Anne Demelenne believes that "*the PTB has its 'raison d'être'; it is a party that promotes debate.*"⁶

But when an elected PS in parliament defects to the PTB⁷ and polls confirm the PTB's breakthrough, the tone hardens. Benoît Lutgen (CdH - *Centre démocrate Humaniste* - *Parti Social-Chrétien* before 2002; *les Engagés* from 2022 on) warns against "*the rise of extremism*": the FN in France, the PTB, the right wing here.⁸ In a duel between De Wever and Magnette, the latter compares his opponent to the PTB: "It's a way of saying that he doesn't want power, just like the PTB."⁹ Rupo feels to be attacked by the PTB and says: "It's a real scandal when a party that claims to be left-wing does not attack a right-wing party. Unacceptable! It's an illusion to think that the PTB can do anything for this country. It favours the alliance between the N-VA and the MR."¹⁰ PTB himself rejects the image of a spoiler attacking the PS. In April 2014, in a *Letter to Progressives*, he stated that "*Voting for PTB-GO is useful for the left against the liberals.*"¹¹

According to the newspaper *Le Soir*, the municipal elections show that "*the decline of the PS is not linked to the rise of the PTB. [...] It is its right-wing policies that are weakening the left.*" For the PTB, on the other hand, "*the PTB-GO is already strengthening the left, because every time the PTB-GO rises*

1 See *Le Soir* 27.02.2014 ; 12.06.2014

2 For instance, in 1999, the Greens, with 15% of the vote, enabled the Liberals, in alliance with the Socialists, to end the Catholics' uninterrupted presence in government for half a century (the rainbow government).

3 *Le Soir* 28.01.2014

4 *Priorité de Gauche*, op. cit. p. 226

5 *Le Soir* 31.01.2014

6 *Le Soir* 15.01.2014

7 On 3 February 2014, Brussels MP Sfia Bouarfa left the PS to join the PTB. *Le Soir* 4.02.2014.

8 *Le Soir* 29.03.2014

9 *Le Soir* 22.04.201

10 *Le Soir* 26.04.2014

11 *Lettre aux progressistes* : "*Nous renforçons la gauche.*" (We are strengthening the left) - 29.04.2014 - <http://ptb.be/articles/lettre-auxprogressistes-nous-renforcons-la-gauche-0> *Le Soir* 01.05.2014 echoed it We quote it below , as *Lettre aux progressistes* op. cit.

*in the polls, the other parties' programmes shift slightly to the left. The PS, and even the CdH, are now calling for a wealth tax. [...] The presence of the PTB-GO in parliament will be useful to the whole left, to those who are fighting, to those who are doubting, to those who despair of politics and to those who are trying to change the course of the traditional parties."*¹

On the other hand, the MR considers the PTB more as an ally, because it takes votes away from its historic opponent in Wallonia. In February 2014, Charles Michel said that the PTB had become "*a useful vote on the left*".² And at the end of April, Reynders said that the PS's real interlocutors were the MR, the other French-speaking parties and the PTB. He said he could "*understand that the PS feels uncomfortable with the emergence of a real left-wing party*".

6.2. The bourgeois media take care of it: the "dining room" and the "kitchen"

In March 2014, Pascal Delwit, professor at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at the ULB,³ came to the rescue of the bourgeois media in response to the PTB's poll ratings with a 384-page book – *PTB Nouvelle gauche, vieille recette* (PTB New Left, Old Recipe) – which "*presents the history of the PTB and its network of organisations, the context that led to its creation, and offers a specific analysis of this party in the contemporary period*".⁴ In an earlier study by the same author on the PTB,⁵ (from 2011), the conclusion was that *Since its profound transformation [at the 8e Congrès in 2008], the PTB seems to have largely abandoned any ambition and even any public doctrinal references. At this stage, the electoral impact is small but real in certain areas.*⁶ Moreover, the leaders are betting on a medium-term impact. The new book will be much less forgiving of this 'communist' party.

Delwit's thesis is now that the PTB is still as communist as ever, but that it hides this in order to better appeal to voters. He develops this idea with the image, widely used in the commentary, of a restaurant where you can only see what is happening '*in the dining room*', without having access to what is cooking '*in the kitchen*'. The image comes from an explicit statement by the PTB itself: "*We make a distinction between what happens in the dining room and in the kitchen. The best chefs do not reveal all their secrets.*"⁷

In May 2014, Daniel Tanuro (LCR) responded to "*Professor Delwit's damp squib*".⁸ He agreed with Delwit on the PTB's Maoist past, but argued that "*stirring up this past*" would do nothing to help understand what it is today. He criticises Delwit – "*a prisoner of his thesis of cosmetic change*" – for a sterile Manichaeism that prevents him "*from grasping the factors that set the PTB in motion and continue to drive it forward*". Tanuro then addresses "*the open questions*" (not considered by Delwit). A response must be given to the speech made by the FGTB-Charleroi on May-Day 2012. 'How will the PTB manage this situation, given that it presents itself as the political representative of the trade union movement as a whole, across all tendencies? One indication that 'things have changed

1 *Lettre aux progressistes* op. cit.

2 *Le Soir* 25.02.2014

3 A PCB activist in his youth, unsuccessful candidate for rector in 2010, and considered close to the PS.

4 Presentation by the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of the ULB.
The book is published by Luc Pire, 2014, and costs €24.

5 About ten pages in *La gauche de la gauche*, op. cit.

6 In the 2010 national elections, the PTB-PvdA exceeded the fateful 1% threshold for the first time, with 1.94% in Wallonia, 1.48% in Brussels and 1.38% in Flanders.

7 *8e Congrès*, op. cit. p. 92. Delwit attributes the image to Ludo Martens.

8 www.lcr-lagauche.org/le-petard-mouille-du-professeur-delwit/

significantly' is that the PTB is now interested in ecology, in which Ludo Martens was not. The same applies to *'the challenges posed by feminist and LGBT struggles'*. And if PTB members are engaging in more in-depth strategic debates (which Delwit does not see), it is because they are "confronted with demands from the 'restaurant floor'. [...] Aided in this by its openness (the 'GO'), the PTB deserves credit for putting the real problems of the 99% at the centre of the election campaign: tax justice, social justice, employment, class justice, the climate..." In any case, the LCR *'starts from the observation that the members and leaders of the PTB are intelligent, thinking people'* who prefer "joint action and debate on the challenges to be met in order to bring about the anti-capitalist force that workers need".

A week later, Delwit responded that the LCR was thus trying to justify its decision to support the PTB's lists, while "no political or ideological document is used to contradict [his] statements."¹ To which Tanuro replies that Delwit is sidestepping "the key debate on a number of 'open strategic questions' that the PTB is and will be faced with". On the eve of the elections, on 23 May, a debate was organised between Delwit and Tanuro, chaired by Henri Goldman, editor of the journal *Politique*.²

At the same time, Professor Paul Wynants, professor of contemporary history at the University of Namur, joined the debate with an article entitled *À la gauche de la gauche* (To the left of the left) in *La Revue Nouvelle*.³ Delwit's thesis was said to be "in line with a Leninist directive that combines flexibility in tactics with firmness in principles", and the alliance with the PC and the LCR was "unnatural". The author notes that "ultimately, the PTB stands out as an exception among European organisations of Maoist origin: it has not been wiped off the map, nor has it abandoned its fundamental principles".⁴

The political magazine *Uitpers* compares the evolution of the PTB with that of the Socialistische Partij in the Netherlands, (§ 4.3.2. and § (5.4.) *which has also been renewed*."

The Cercle de Lorraine, the prestigious *Brussels Business Club*, rightly traces the PTB's "transformation" back well beyond the 8e Congrès of 2008. But it would still be a question of communication strategy, and the Cercle agrees with Delwit's thesis: *"The PTB – a Marxist-Leninist and Maoist party founded in the 1960s – is not a new party. It was following an internal crisis in May 2003 that the PTB decided to adopt a completely new communication strategy. It obscures its Marxist-Leninist identity, its revolutionary project, its poor regard for representative democracy, and presents only its 'bright side' to citizens and the media.* Le Cercle even deemed it appropriate to invite Professor Delwit to a conference reserved for members (admission €50).⁵

The *Cercle de Wallonie* also invited Prof. Delwit to a conference the day after the 25 May election.

La Libre announced the PTB-GO initiative on 27 January 2014, giving a voice to the participants (PC, LCR and independents) and emphasising, for example, that *"the entire Charleroi regional branch of the FGTB will also support the party"*. But a week later, after meeting with Delwit, the newspaper corrected itself, pointing out, for example, that Ludo Martens wrote "Another Story of Stalin", and that *"Hedebouw and Pestiaux are children of party members. It is therefore difficult to say whether they have really changed"*.⁶

1 A comment on Tanuro's article, published on the LCR website

2 www.quefaire.be/debat-nouvelle-gauche-509353.shtml

3 *La Revue Nouvelle*, April-May 2014 / No.4-5

4 It must be said, however, that this author's research into the origins of the 'turning point' is based, at least, on interpretations that are sometimes questionable. "In 2003, the PTB took another step forward: it submitted two 'front lists', one focused on a Sabena trade union leader in Flemish Brabant and BHV, the other on an alliance with the European Arab League of the controversial Dyab Abou Jahjah in Antwerp." See above § 3.7.

5 However, the Conference did finally not happen

6 *La Libre* 3.2.2014. The exact title of Stalin's book is 'Another Look at Stalin', a slight nuance.

On 15 March, *Le Soir* published a four-page investigation on the subject, giving a voice to Hedebeuw and other participants on the lists who were not from the PTB, immediately posing the question: "*But what is the true face of the Marxist party?*" And it would indeed be a "*party with two faces: in the media, friendly and present on the ground and among the most disadvantaged; internally, clinging to old references.*" Apart from an interview with Hedebeuw, the newspaper also gives a voice to other participants on the lists. Christian Panier, honorary judge and lecturer at UCL, "*fully accepts the Marxist label of the PTB, in the same way that other parties call themselves liberal or Keynesian,*" but "*Marxism has been diverted from its purposes [...]. Without the great bourgeois Engels, there would have been no Marx.*" The trade unionists interviewed are much more concrete. Youssef Handichi, a bus driver, recalls that "*in all the actions carried out by the STIB, the PTB guys were there.*" And Frédéric Gillot, FGTB delegate at Arcelor Mittal, says that "*at Arcelor, there were 10,000 jobs at stake. The PS wanted to limit the social damage. He had to prevent that.*" Two weeks later, the newspaper echoed Delwit's comments under the headline: "*The PTB has two faces, outside and inside.*"¹ The next day, the PTB decided to respond to Delwit's book on its website and take a stand on "*Professor Delwit's imaginary adversary*".² At the end of April, *Le Soir* – already predicting that "*the PTB, the last unitary party, would thus win four seats in the Federal Chamber*" – once again gave Hedebeuw a platform.³ And a few days later, the PTB punctuates in its *Letter to Progressives*: '*We are strengthening the left*'.⁴

According to *Télé Bruxelles* (3 April), Hedebeuw and Mertens "*have succeeded in recent years in an unprecedented marketing operation (they will hate the term): radically changing the image of a microscopic Marxist party perceived as sectarian into a multifaceted movement that is militant, offensive but open, protesting but sympathetic, recognised by the media and desirable to many voters.*" That said, "*it is not easy to grasp what the PTB really is,*" but Delwit's book "*provides a clear and unambiguous picture of what this party is.*" The columnist states, in passing, that he is aware of the difficulties Delwit had to overcome, since he himself was able to "*note that a document cited during a radio interview (with Josy Dubié) which attested to the revolutionary nature of the party (i.e. not very compatible with parliamentary democracy) was no longer accessible a few days later*".

And interest extends beyond Belgium's borders. Not only is *L'Humanité* (PCF) enthusiastic, with "*Something new on the Belgian left*"⁵ The newspaper *Le Monde* drew on the analyses of Professors Wynants and Delwit to analyse the situation on the eve of the election⁶ and came to the rather surprising conclusion that the PTB-GO "*could threaten the supremacy of the Socialist Party in Wallonia and Brussels.*"

Finally, it should be remembered that within the radical left, analyses of the change in the PTB are often highly impressionistic: they boil down to "*the abandonment of Stalinism*", which is enthusiastically welcomed, without taking into account that Khrushchev's policy was just as

1 *Le Soir*, 3.04.2014

2 David Pestieau – *L'adversaire imaginaire du professeur Delwit* - (Professor Delwit's imaginary adversary) - *Solidaire* 4.4.2014 - Hereafter referred to as *L'adversaire* op. cit.

3 *Le Soir* 26.04.2014

4 *Lettre aux progressistes*, op. cit.

5 03.02.2014 www.humanite.fr/monde/du-nouveau-dans-la-gauche-belge-558281

6 17.05.2014 www.lemonde.fr/europeennes-2014/article/2014/05/17/en-belgique-la-percee-des-anciens-maoistes-du-ptb_4420508_4350146.html

bureaucratic and Stalinist.⁷ And the change only came about at the "8e Congrès" (2008), when new leaders took over.

The PTB's "success" is often attributed to this "*new communication strategy*", even within the left. As if it were due to Hedebeuw's technical skills, for example. But this strategy, far from obscuring an identity, actually reveals a change *in identity*. Communication is "improving" because the content has become more acceptable to the bourgeoisie, and is therefore being relayed by the mainstream press. The change of logo, abandoning the hammer and sickle, is not a graphic trick to "be less shocking". The logo changes because, precisely, the message conveyed by the logo changes, because the PTB's programme changes, because the PTB abandons the reference to the Russian Revolution of 1917 in its programme.

6.3. The PTB enters the federal parliament

In the May 2014 elections, the PTB finally won two seats in the federal parliament, but they were not the two expected ones, Mertens and Hedebeuw. It was the specialist Van Hees who entered alongside Hedebeuw. Never mind, after the victory, the PTB website's home page showed Mertens and Hedebeuw saying "*251,276 times thank you*". The slogan "*we are one, wij zijn één*" (§5.3.1.) used in the campaign to distance itself from the N-VA's community squabbles, now highlights an image on the front page of *Solidaire* of the two leading figures of the PTB, Mertens and Hedebeuw. And "*in June, [the two elected representatives] will be touring the country with Peter Mertens, the president of the PTB. And Peter Mertens 'did not have the media visibility as Raoul Hedebeuw on the French-speaking side. He will therefore also take the opportunity to get to know the members and supporters in the south of the country better.'*"¹

The same issue of *Solidaire* does not fail to publish the photo of Mertens with the King, leaving no doubt that the PTB, and its "president", are now playing in the big leagues. And, noblesse oblige, upon the death of Jean-Luc Dehaene on 15 May 2014, the PTB mourns him and pays tribute to him.²

7 Khrushchev praised Stalin for his effectiveness in the fight against Trotskyism, before criticising him for his "cult of personality".

1 *Solidaire* 5.6.2014

2 The PvdA website stated: "*De PVDA+ heeft met droefheid kennis genomen van het overlijden van Jean-Luc Dehaene. Wij drukken hiermee ons diep medeleven uit aan Celie, zijn kinderen, zijn kleinkinderen en aan iedereen rond hem. We wensen hen veel sterkte bij het afscheid van hun dierbare. Hij was een politicus die op eigenzinnige wijze mee zijn stempel op het land heeft weten zetten.*" -

The PVDA+ has learned with sadness of the passing of Jean-Luc Dehaene. We would like to express our deepest condolences to Celie, his children, his grandchildren and everyone close to him. We wish them strength as they say goodbye to their loved one. He was a politician who left his mark on the country in his own unique way." The PTB is saddened by the death of Jean-Luc Dehaene. We would like to express our deepest condolences to Célie, his children, his grandchildren and everyone around him. We wish them much strength as they say goodbye to their loved one. He was a politician who, in his own way, helped to leave his mark on the country.

<<http://pvda.be/artikels/bij-hetoverlijden-van-jean-luc-dehaene>> [reference no longer valid in 2014]

7. Is the PTB Marxist?

During their "search for a coherent theory" (§1.7.2.) the young people of the SVB (§ 1.4.1.) were labelled *Marxists*. What is the truth of the matter?

7.1 The "Marxism" of Ludo Martens' time

These young people could not avoid getting involved in "*squabbles in which everyone invoked his socialism*", and very quickly they came to the conclusion that, "*as Engels said, socialism has become scientific and must be treated as such.*"¹ In their study, however, they entered into an at the time ongoing controversy, that of the wave of the *Cultural Revolution* in China, which soon took precedence over research into the very origins of scientific socialism, as developed by Marx in 1848 in *The Communist Party Manifesto*.

In 1967, in their first political publication, *13 Mei*, (§ 1.4.1) the young people of the SVB referred to the exploited class as "*the least privileged in society*".² But the gendarmes batons motivated them to embark on "*a great expedition in search of that dear stranger, socialism*".³ "And in their 1969 *guide in Marxist theory*, the *Dokument 69*, (§ 1.7.3.), they set out to develop "*socialist theory, from Marx to Mao Zedong*"⁴

From their first search on for a coherent theory (§ 1.7.2.), in 1968, Mao Zedong's *Four Contradictions*, (§1.1.) were their reference point. But they gave a version "adapted to our countries", in which the terms *proletariat* and *bourgeoisie* were removed and class contradiction was softened.

The second contradiction, *between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie within capitalist states*, at the time cited first, becomes that "*between the ruling capitalist class and the working class of the people, the workers, employees, intellectuals and small independents*".

On the other hand, internationalism, dear to Marx, has nothing *proletarian* about it for them. It is formulated in a Maoist-Stalinist way in terms of blocs and *progressiste* bourgeoisies in the Third World. The third contradiction, *between oppressed countries and imperialism*, is formulated as that "*between highly developed capitalist countries and national movements in the Third World that rebel against the exploitation of their people.*" And a commentary insists that these contradictions must be understood as a whole, intertwined with one another. "*It is an internationalism that determines all liberation movements.*" As an illustration: "*The Congo is the nerve centre of Africa, where the Americans kicked the Belgian colonialists out.*"

And when Mao abandoned all reference to social classes with his *Three Worlds* theory, these young people followed suit.

The *Communist Party in the making*, alias AMADA, was from the outset neither *Marxist* nor *Leninist*. In its approach, it did not go back to the Manifesto of 1848.⁵ These adjectives were attributed by those who watched from the sidelines. If a label is needed, the party rightly considered

1 Kwarteeuw, op. cit. II.1

2 "*the anti-democratic plenipotentiary powers [of the Vanden Boeynants government] which have been attacking the least privileged members of society for months*". (Segers, op. cit. I.2.)

3 Kwarteeuw, op. cit. II.1

4 Kwarteeuw, op. cit. III.2

5 The "*problems they faced*" dates back "*in France to the 1870s*" (Kwarteeuw, op. cit. II.1.), to "*the first proletarian revolution, 1871, the Paris Commune*" (Kwarteeuw, op. cit. III.2. *Dokument 69*).

In 1993, Martens and Merckx stated that the *Manifesto* should be among the first lessons on Marxism. (Kwarteeuw, op. cit. II.1) But this was only to provide - in an abstract way - a good reference point in these *squabbles*.

itself *Maoist*. One clarification, however. With a consistency rarely found in other Maoist groups, the role of Stalin, claimed by Mao Zedong, was fully assumed by Ludo Martens. They were therefore *Maoist-Stalinists*. The banner "*Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin-Mao*", proudly displayed, was in reality an arrow pointing towards the last names mentioned.

At the 3rd PTB Congress in 1988, in the first issue of the journal *Etudes Marxistes*, the young party showed a commendable concern for advancing the consciousness of the working class: "*In the current circumstances, developing class consciousness means [...] making it clear that workers must organise themselves independently, pursuing a revolutionary policy [...] It means making people understand the vital necessity of strengthening the Communist Party and the mass organisations that fight against certain aspects of capitalist and imperialist reality.*" The question remains as to what "revolutionary policy" is proposed. The party understands "*independent organisation*" as the Stalinist concept of "*the need also to create a Popular Front*". For Lenin, "*The leaders of the petty bourgeoisie 'must' teach the people to trust the bourgeoisie. The proletarian leaders must teach the people to distrust the bourgeoisie.*"¹

As for the "*need to strengthen the party*", this was also inspired by Mao's *Cultural Revolution*. For SVB activists, "*the revolution needs intellectuals who are capable of developing theory*". But according to *Dokument 69* (§ 1.7.3.), it is a question of "*allowing oneself to be reeducated by the workers in order to assimilate their points of view*". This is a vision diametrically opposed to that of Lenin. The working masses have the ideology and way of thinking of the ruling class. And for Lenin, "*since there can be no question of an independent ideology developed by the working masses themselves in the course of their movement, the problem arises only in this form: bourgeois ideology or socialist ideology. [...] The spontaneous development of the labour movement leads precisely to its subordination to bourgeois ideology.*"² The *Cultural Revolution*, on the other hand, the model for the SVB, is imbued with a moralising attitude that pits the peasant working hard from morning to night against the student sitting comfortably in his office chair. For the SVB, it is up to intellectuals to lift their bum to "help workers formulate their demands" and make "a very important contribution to the revolution" by studying the economic and financial publications of the bosses. "*The decisive criterion for determining whether an intellectual is revolutionary, non-revolutionary or counter-revolutionary is whether he is willing to integrate himself among the workers and peasants, and whether he actually succeeds in doing so.*"³ Ludo Martens and Kris Merckx note that before 1969, "*Flanders had never had a revolutionary movement among its intellectuals, but now, for the first time, a generation of students had emerged that wanted to be revolutionary.*"

In 1991, Jo Cottenier and Kris Hertogen explain, in a manual intended for the training of cadres,⁴ what Marx had elaborated in 1848 in the *Communist Party Manifesto*: "*The production relations are the basis for the division of society into classes. Under capitalism, there are two antagonistic classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. One lives off the exploitation of the other, an exploitation that is inextricably linked to private ownership of the means of production.*" The manual also denounced a reformist response: "*The crisis demonstrates the failure of capitalism, [as well as] the failure of reformism and its Keynesian economic theories. [...] All ideologies of 'gradual conquest' of the state and*

1 Lenin, *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution* - April 1917, point 8. The quotation marks around the first "must" are Lenin's.

2 Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* Chap.II.b

3 Kwarteeuw, op. cit. II.4

4 Jo Cottenier and Kris Hertogen, *Le temps travaille pour nous..* (Time is on our side.). A book published on the occasion of the 4th PTB Congress (1991).

economic power are crushed by the facts. But the manual stops there. It is reserved for a small core of cadres and has little influence on what is published in *Solidaire* or in their mainstream literature. It overlooks the historic task of advancing the consciousness of the proletariat for its historic task of overthrowing the bourgeois state and seizing power, an essential condition for building an alternative society: socialist.

In 1993, the PTB mentioned "*the failure of a system based on private ownership of the means of production.*" In January 1995, the PTB Political Bureau stated that "*we certainly cannot harbour any illusions about the possibility of 'reforming' capitalism through the redistribution of wealth.*"¹ And on May -Day 1996, Ludo Martens recalled that "*The basis of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is private ownership of the means of production.*"² For Ludo, it is this "*profound historical vision [that] enables our party to be clear-sighted and firm in its daily struggles.*" (§ 3.3.2.)

So much for the characterisation of the 'system' as the culprit of poverty. How to remedy it is a whole different ballgame, a problem for which Marxism – that of Marx – provides a guide that the commendable efforts of our young people in the SVB have failed to discover: the seizure of power by the proletariat, the path put into practice in 1917, at least in one large country, under *Leninist* leadership. For our young people, the only reference to the power that the proletariat must conquer with its organisations was the name of the newspaper, AMADA.³ (§-1.8.1.) And it disappeared with the founding of the PTB, when the newspaper became *Solidaire*.

7.2. The 'Marxism' of the renewed PTB

In the course of its evolution, the PTB takes into account the labels by which others refer to them. At the 7th Congress (2002), "*it goes without saying that the PTB remains faithful to Marxist-Leninist principles*". (§3.6.) And at the 8e Congrès, it still declared itself Marxist (but already without Lenin).

In fact, the label is not an obstacle to its acceptance by the bourgeoisie. Long ago, the bourgeois press reduced the role of this revolutionary leader, Karl Marx, to that of a prestigious economist. Another matter altogether are the adjectives concerning Lenin, Mao, Stalin or Trotsky. The PTB is putting aside the cumbersome legacy of Maoism and other isms. "*It's over with 'isms', Stalinism, Maoism, Trotskyism.*"⁴

But although the PTB has never been, beyond its declarations, Marxist in the sense of the 1848 Manifesto, it is clear that the ideological orientation of the PTB has changed during this metamorphosis, which we have described as a seventh *struggle between two lines*. (§3.4.)

A first indication of this appeared already after the disappointing results of the 1995 elections, a few months after the 5th Congress, when the election results began to serve as a compass. For Herwig Lerouge, (§3.3.1.), "*our current election results also reflect the political, ideological and organisational flaws discussed at the Fifth Congress. [...] we must set our objectives based on the 4 % that we should be able to achieve.*"

The PTB describes itself as socialist. "*Socialism has become a necessity for the very survival of humanity.*" (§)4.2.3. But what do they mean by "socialism"?

1 *Etudes marxistes*, n° 26 - 15.01.1995.

2 At this point, however, the moralising tone is already apparent. It is a question of "*employer selfishness*".

3 *Alle Macht Aan De Arbeiders* - All power to the workers. See chapter 2. [TN]

4 *Knack-Van Duppen*, op. cit. (2007)

7.2.1. PS-style socialism, encompassing all classes

In 1991, Jo Cottenier and Kris Hertogen explained that "*Under capitalism, there are two antagonistic classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. One lives off the exploitation of the other, an exploitation that is inextricably linked to private ownership of the means of production.*" (§ 7.1.) And ten years later, the PTB was still selling the Communist Party Manifesto on the streets. (§ 3.5.1)

With the *Renewal*, this perspective, which at least questioned "the system", is considered outdated

For Hedebeuw, the 8e Congrès (2008) was nothing less than a "re-foundation" of the Party, where "*the question is re-establishing a different balance of power in the capitalist society in which we live*" (§ 4.3.)

The class struggle is outdated. Now it's about "*fighting against the Americanisation of our society.*"¹

The Marxist vision must give way to a perspective of harmony among all classes, which was already the dream of certain "*progressiste*" industrialists such as Owen and Fourier, before Marx was even born. For Peter Mertens (§ 5.4.), replacing capitalism, which has "run its course", with socialism is like replacing feudalism with capitalism.² In 2009, if he still mentions the "*class struggle*", it is to parody it: the "*new class struggle*" between capitalist producers and capitalist speculators.³ And in 2013, Raoul Hedebeuw introduced a whole new concept of social classes, the criterion being whether or not one needs the PTB. (§ 5.6.)

Meanwhile, with two federal MPs, the PTB makes no secret about its intention to become the *socialist* reference point for workers, *in opposition to the liberals*, as an alternative to a *Socialist Party* that has been thoroughly bourgeois since years but has recently lost much of its appeal among our class. In 2012, four months after Di Rupo took the helm of a government well integrated into capitalist society, Peter Mertens was already putting forward the PTB's candidacy to implement the same 'socialism' in a more left-wing version: "*Our party is in a phase of acceleration: there is a place to be taken to the left of social democracy.*"⁴

Nevertheless, in March 2014, David Pestiau replied to Professor Delwit that "*the PTB makes no secret of the fact that it is Marxist.*"⁵

7.2.2. Private ownership of the means of production

For the renewed party, the owners of the means of production (piously renamed "*the fortune*") become "*professionals*" (§ 5.3.4.) that are therefore entitled to their share, provided they pay tax. And when Peter Mertens published his bestseller *Comment osent-ils ?* (How dare they?) in 2012, *capital* income had the same rights as *labour* income. (§5.3.4.) Any class antagonism is replaced by the fair distribution of tax between "*capital income*" and "*labour income*", justifying the "income" of the bourgeoisie, obtained through the exploitation of the proletariat.⁶ And it is the PTB's Research Department that will decide what is "fair"

This is what Kautsky already denounced in 1908: "*The old proletariat, impoverished [...] wanted nothing more than a share of the riches of the rich, a different distribution of pleasures and not of the*

1 Knack-Van Duppen, op. cit. (2007)

2 It should be remembered that the main thesis of Marx and Engels' *Manifesto* is precisely that the replacement of capitalism by socialism cannot happen in the same way as the replacement of feudalism by capitalism. The seizure of power by the proletariat is necessarily a prerequisite for the construction of socialism, whereas the bourgeoisie was able to develop its mode of production within the feudal state.

3 *Priorité de gauche*, p. 142.

4 *Solidaire* 1.3.2012

5 *L'adversaire*, op. cit. see § 6.2.

6 *Comment osent-ils ?* op. cit. - p.24

means of production; a plundering of the rich, and not a change in the mode of production".¹ On the other hand, capitalist logic, rooted in the Christian tradition, dates back to the very origins of that tradition. Jesus praised a wealthy owner of the means of production who managed to multiply those means.²

Of course, in 2012, Herwig Lerouge still complains that: "*neither in the Manifesto of the European Left nor in its statutes is there any reference to private ownership of the means of production.*" But this hint of orthodoxy is for "*the kitchen*", published in the theoretical journal *Études Marxistes*,³ to satisfy the nostalgia for the good old days among a few former cadres. It is not something that one dares to assert in the media, and even less something that one tries to convince workers of.

7.2.3. A xenophobic "internationalism" dictated by the UNO

What about Marx's insistence on the union of proletarians of all countries? According to Hedebouw, "*before, the PTB behaved a bit like the embassy of everything that was done in the world in the name of socialism. That's over now. [...] We are no longer going to spend all our energy analysing the history of the USSR and Cuba.*" Now, we are guided by "*a principle enshrined in the United Nations Charter: no interference in the internal affairs of a country*". (§5.5.) Not even interference in what our class is doing in another country? A strange kind of proletarian internationalism.

This rejection of proletarian internationalism is cruelly evident for years in a xenophobic stance towards undocumented migrants. We are willing to *help* these unfortunate people who "*are not dangerous, but are in danger*"⁴ but ultimately, regularisation is reserved for those who meet certain "*clear and precise criteria*" defined by the bourgeois state, and the others are not welcome.

Of course, one has good relations with "sister parties" in other countries. But even that will increasingly be reserved for "*the kitchen*". And there, there is no problem with paying lip service to a certain orthodoxy. (§ 3.1.)

7.2.4. The role of the state

Although the young members of the SVB took an interest in Lenin's *The State and Revolution* in 1969, (§1.7) this had little impact on the policies of the renewed PTB. The bourgeois state and its institutions are not considered to be instruments serving the bourgeois class. Peter Mertens cites the "*good example*" of Argentina, where the state intervened in 2008 to renationalise the pensions that it had privatised in 1994: "*From 2003 onwards, a third of elderly people were no longer receiving any pension [...]. If the state had not intervened, this figure would have continued to rise.*"⁵ For Mertens, it is the government [of Van Rompuy, in 2009] that "*must play an active role in promoting employment*



1 Karl Kautsky, *The Origins of Christianity*, 1908 - chap. II *Society under the Roman Empire*.
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1908/christ/index.htm>
http://www.nodo50.org/ciencia_popular/articulos/Cristianismo.pdf

2 *Gospel* according to Luke 19:2-23. Jesus even recommended paying tribute to the coloniser of his country. (Luke 20:25)

3 *Études marxistes*, No. 100 - 2012

4 According to the placards distributed at demonstrations.

5 Hedebouw-*Première à gauche* - p. 37 (See § 5.6.)

and creating himself jobs in the public sector". (§4.2.5.) The problem, however, is that "*the Di Rupo government lives in a kind of bubble, surrounded by bankers and technocrats from the FEB and Voka*", and that "*the authorities have been duped by the banks*".

During the early elections of 2010, Marx and Engels were called upon to help convince people to vote, but while for these authors it was a matter of "*protesting against the existing state*", for the PTB, "*the [existing] state must reassure the people and disarm the speculators*". (§5.2.2)

In the kitchen, (§ 6.2.) the participation of a communist party in the bourgeoisie's executive power is sometimes rejected in theory. In 2012, in the theoretical journal *Etudes marxistes*,¹ Herwig Lerouge, speaking about the Party of the European Left (PEL), rejects this participation, pointing to the failure of the PCF under Mitterrand, *Die Linke* in Germany and Blum's *Popular Front* in France. But in practice, this participation has always been accepted for the Third World when it comes to "true" communist parties (in communion with the PTB). This is the case for sister parties in Latin America where, for example, the PCdoB participates in the governments of Lula and Dilma. And in 2006, the PTB cited the Syrian Communist Party as an example, with "*four parliamentarians and one minister in the government*" of Bashar Al Assad,² whereas two weeks earlier it had again criticised the *Linkspartei* in Germany for its "participation in government".³ In Europe, it would be different.

However, when the possibility for such a participation began to arise in concrete terms for the PTB, it is no longer really a question of principles. In 2007, the PTB again denounced that a vote for Ecolo was "*increasingly a vote for a government participation*", a participation "that, *today*, is not justified," (in 2007).⁴ But in 2013, when asked this question in an interview, Peter Mertens replied: "No, except at the local level: in Borgerhout, to block the NV A."⁵

In this district of Antwerp with 40,000 inhabitants, the PTB participates "*in the management of the district of Borgerhout in coalition with Groen and the SPa, the only district of opposition to the N VA*".⁶ Mertens adds that there is no question of forming such coalitions at a higher level: "*Not going again the path of the social democracy*".⁷

As for Hedebeuw, he will clearly state in 2012 that it is a question of opportunity.⁸ He does not rule out participation in a government, "*when we can influence the balance of power*", which, according to him, was the case for the Communist Party in Blum's *Popular Front* government in the 1930s, contrary to what Lerouge claimed. Anyhow, beyond the municipal level, for the moment, the PTB's vocation is to "*influence the government*".⁹

1 Herwig Lerouge - *The European Left and the crisis / The participation of communist parties in government: a way out of the capitalist crisis?* - *Etudes marxistes*, No. 100 - 2012

2 *Solidaire* 10.05.2006

3 *Solidaire* 26.04.2006

4 *Solidaire* 06 06 2007

5 *Solidaire* 07 11 2013

6 David Pestieau, *L'adversaire*, op. cit.

In this district, the PTB obtained 17% of the vote and 4 seats in the Municipal Council in the October 2012 elections, "*better than the Open Vld and the CD&V combined*".

See <http://ptb.be/articles/soiree-elections-anvers-un-resultat-dont-naurait-pas-ose-rever>

7 Ne pas refaire le chemin de la social-démocratie *Solidaire* 07.11.2013

8 Hedebeuw-*Le Vif-Express*, op. cit., 13.12.2012 - See § 3.2.

9 *Le Soir* 26.04.2014

7.2.5. *The party of the broad masses*

According to Dokument 69, "*The revolutionary socialist movement consists of two components: on one hand, the struggle of the working class masses against the bosses and the capitalist system, and on the other hand, the scientific theory of socialism, developed by revolutionary intellectuals.*"

This could be seen as the distinction made by Lenin between "*the organisation of workers and the organisation of revolutionaries*".¹ But the Dokument 69's point of view has nothing to do with Lenin's.

Lenin distinguishes between the broadest possible organisation of workers, of all tendencies, infested with the ideology of the ruling class, and the organisation of a party with a clearly defined programme, adopted by its members after joint deliberation on the current and historical needs of our class, the proletarian ideology. A party that will then work within the organisation of all workers, respecting workers' democracy in its mobilisation, in order to convince about its programme a vanguard, which in turn will win broad support for the essential task of taking power through the organisation of the proletariat, guided by the party.

For the PTB, it is the party itself that must serve as the organisation of all workers, and the party's programme is therefore adapted to the diversity of tendencies within the labour movement, which is contaminated by the bourgeois ideology. Over the years, the role of the PTB's intellectuals has increasingly become that of a research department tasked with identifying the views of workers in order to formulate a programme that will appeal to a broad spectrum of voters, the number of votes obtained determining which is the *correct line*, resulting from the ideological struggle against other current trends or possibly also against the "*deviations*" within its own ranks.

If in 1979, "*the Labour Party must always educate the working masses in the spirit of its consistent programme so that they take a clear orientation in their struggle against the domination by the monopolistic capitalism and by imperialism*",² in 1997, "*the alternative to which the rebellious masses aspire already exists*," the PTB, which "*has been building itself for thirty years.*" (§ 3.3.4.) And in 2014, it is a matter of applauding the Party's elected representatives when they speak in the Municipal Council or in Parliament.

For Peter Mertens, "*when we arrive in parliament, we are obviously first and foremost the voice of workers and social movements.*" Of course. But for the PTB, it is not a question of denouncing the manoeuvres of this "bourgeois democracy's chicken coop" as Rosa Luxemburg put it. It is about taking there the relieve of the social movements. "*Our path is Street-Council-Street. [...] That's how we appear in the media. [...] Start with people's needs, bring their demands to the Councils, be accountable to the population.*"³ This is an approach that had already "*proved successful in Zelzate*".⁴

Citizens must therefore mobilise to support their elected representatives. Raoul Hedebouw detects in those mobilisations "*the establishment of a balance of power, whereas in the current democratic system, the opposition's proposals, even if they are constructive, are systematically dismissed out of hand by the majority*". And "*instead of getting lost in committees and playing the sterile game of majority versus opposition, we prefer to put our energy into mobilising citizens by trying to make them*

1 Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* Chapter IV.c

2 Articles 101, 102 and 108 of the Founding Programme, quoted in *Etudes marxistes*, No. 26 – An article by the Political Bureau of the PTB

3 *DKP*, op. cit.

4 A comment on the website <<http://ptb.be/articles/percee-du-ptb-52-elus-dans-tout-le-le-pays>>-[outdated in 2019]

*understand the issues at stake.*¹ This is how the PTB-GO! elected representatives in Parliament (§ 6.1.) will have to "*change the course of the traditional parties*".²

For the moment, lacking sufficient representation in parliament, the PTB's mission is to "*influence the government*".³ And it believes it can do so, insofar as it is developing its research department and is supported in these policy by social movements.

It is in this context that the need for "*more democracy*" should be understood. For Mertens, this means "*citizen participation in neighbourhoods [across all social classes] to define priorities in society*". It involves "*to start the election campaign with a broad public survey*" (§5.6) to define the issues that will give votes.⁴ It is in this perspective that is judged "*the negative experience of 2003 when we decided to run in the elections in the north of the country with the Resist list*". The "failure" is attributed to the fact that "*we did not listen enough to the party's grass-roots*".⁵ The party had supported an organisation that could overshadow the party and reap the electoral rewards for itself. On the other hand, support for the *Maria list* gave rise to the development of the workers' own organisational consciousness, bypassing the party. (§3.7.2)

The 'mobilisation' then took the form of campaigns to gain support for the PTB's 'projects', drawn up by its Research Department. And in the struggles on the ground, which developed anyway since the class struggle cannot be eliminated by decree, they were supported insofar as they added fuel to the party's fire. For the PTB, it is a question of pandering the ideology of the exploited masse - which is that of the ruling class - rather than fighting it.

This concept of replacing the organisation of the whole class by the party is also evident in the PTB's assessment of China. Even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, socialism would still exist in China, despite its economy being integrated into the global market, because it is led by a party that is still socialist. (§4.4.2.) It is the party that defines the character of the whole society, not the social structure of production. ***

7.2.6. The relation with the trade union bureaucracy

The PTB's policy of bringing all workers together under its banner obviously does not eliminate by decree the existence of workers' organisations. But the policy will be decisive for its *relationship* with trade union leaderships, a relationship that has undergone many changes over time.

AMADA went from the good relations of its first interventions at Ford Genk in 1968 (§ 1.5.) to the sectarianism of *Mijnwerkersmacht* (§1.6.) in the miners' strikes in Limburg (1970).

During the strike at the Boel-Temse shipyard (1971), the *Communist Party in the making* initially denounced the union leadership, then supported its militant delegates, and its own activists joined the union (§1.9.). And so happened during the dockers' strike in 1973 (§1.9.).

The "*fight against sectarianism*" was emphasised when the Party became PTB in 1979, (§ 2.1.) a fight of which the history has then been marked by ups and downs ever since.

The 1991 training manual (§7.2.1.) criticises the programme of the FGTB and the CSC, conceived "*as a slow and steady progression towards social equality and economic participation within the existing capitalist system*". It denounces the fact that "*the FGTB leadership is very ingenious in devising*

1 *Le Soir* 21.06.2014

2 *Le Soir* 01.05.2014

3 *Le Soir* 26.04.2014

4 *Solidaire* 26.09.2013

5 See Peter Mertens - *Solidaire* 09.01.2008 - The 8e Congrès calls this diagnostic "a step forward in terms of democracy".

projects for state intervention, projects which, in the end, open the floodgates of supporting big capital. (§ 012) The Manual talks about *the reformist illusion of a slow growth in power sharing with the capitalists.* (§ 014) It denounces the "consultation policy" of the trade union bureaucracy in the FGTB and the CSC. During D14, in 2001, the PTB launched a fierce attack on the trade union bureaucracy. (§3.7.)

But these criticisms are mainly for internal party consumption. When the *Maria list* - made up of trade union activists in conflict with their leadership, and supported by the PTB in the 2003 elections, - comes on the foreground (§ 3.7.2.), the PTB regrets it.

With the *Renewal*, the PTB began to unreservedly support the bureaucratic leaderships of the FGTB and the CSC. In his May-Day speech in 2006, Boudewijn Deckers praised the trade union leaderships. (§ 4.1.) And finally, at the 8e Congrès, in 2008, (§ 4.3.) the PTB, a "flexible party", "*changed its attitude towards the trade unions*". In the trade unions, "*there is no contradiction between the grass-roots and the top*".¹

From now on, the PTB's policy is to occupy as many leadership positions in the trade unions as possible. And to achieve this, it is prepared to do anything to please the higher authorities who must facilitate the process.

This tactic reflects a strategic orientation that has been deeply rooted in the party since it started to be PTB. And it is in this respect that the PTB has remained profoundly Stalinist. The PTB does not have - and has never had - a policy of promoting the autonomous organisation of workers with their organisations based on workers' democracy. Any movement within the class is supported only as long as it does not escape from the PTB control.

This is the bitter conclusion, in particular, of the end of the MRS, (§3.3.4.) where ultimately any anti-bureaucratic movement was channelled into the maze of the courts, relying on the skills of the PTB's lawyers.

1 8e Congrès, op. cit., p. 103

8. Epilogue

As announced in the Prologue to this text, we conclude with some reflections on the subsequent evolution of the PTB after its entry into the federal parliament in 2014. While in September 2006 the party was already boasting that it had gone from being the largest of the small parties to the smallest of the large parties,¹ it now surpasses one of the large parties in Wallonia.

8.1. The Solidarity Congress: "updating the vision about socialism".

After entering the federal parliament, the PTB celebrated a *Solidarity Congress* (Congrès de la Solidarité), with closure on 15 June 2015, in order to "deepen" the changes of the 2008 *Renewal Congress*. While in 2008 the reference to the Russian October Revolution of 1917 (the hammer and sickle) had already been replaced by a logo with a star and a red arrow, copied from the logo of the *Party of the European Left* (§4.2.3.), in 2015, "updating the vision of socialism under the name of socialism 2.0, the party logo changed: in the star, the arrow became green and, in addition to the basic red flags, the PTB also adopted multicoloured banners expressing the link between the various social movements."²

"The Belgian Labour Party has become a mature party. [...] It exists since 1979, but had to wait until 2014 to gain a quarter of a million voters and enter Parliament."³ Its roots go back to "students inspired by Marxism, who united [...] within the SVB in 1967". However, there is no trace of Maoist influence in this account of the party's history.⁴ Nor is there any mention of the leading figure behind its origins, Ludo Martens.⁵

The new version of socialism, *Socialism 2.0*,⁶ was already announced in the *Little Pocket Book* as "a society tailored to people". (§ 5.6.) And the Congress confirms what Mertens had already discovered. (§7.2.1.) With the progress of the struggles, "the community will then be able to regain control of production" within capitalist society, just as "feudal society gave way to capitalist society".⁷ There is no need for the proletariat to seize power beforehand, for a dictatorship of the proletariat. It is a question of working together, across all classes, to develop "a world on a human scale". And while in 2008 it was "the power of transnational corporations and their major shareholders (owners) that must be challenged" (§ 4.2.3.). in 2015, the existence of private ownership of the means of production is not being questioned. The only requirement is that the *community* should have oversight of key sectors of the economy and "limit shareholder profits" according to the needs of society. It is therefore sufficient that "the [bourgeois] state becomes the majority shareholder".⁸ Of course, the PTB criticises "a political system where corruption is present and facilitated by traditional parties that have allowed a

1 *Solidaire* 27.09.2006

2 See the brochure *Il était une fois* (Once upon a time), available at <https://www.ptb.be/il_etait_une_fois_le_ptb>, p. 55. We cite the brochure as *Il était une fois*, op. cit.

In the same brochure, a *Report* about this Congress is available under the tab 'Congrès de la solidarité du PTB de 2015'. We refer to this Report as 'Congress 2015', op. cit.

3 *Congress 2015*, op. cit. p.146

4 The only mention of a cultural revolution (p. 65) concerns that of 'the new right'. And the only reference to Maoist parties (p. 154) concerns *the others*, those 'emerging from May 1968, on the verge of disappearing'.

5 A Google search on the PTB website at the end of 2019 returns no results for the word *Martens* relating to Ludo, whereas there are some 300 results for *Peter Mertens* and twice as many for *Raoul Hedebouw*.

6 *Congress 2015*, op. cit. p. 167

7 *Congress 2015*, op. cit. pp. 176-178

8 *Congress 2015*, op. cit. p.180.

public company to be run like a multinational", and proposes a "*Public Democratic Enterprise*". But in the meantime, Damien Robert currently sits as a *PTB executive* in the board of Enodia, the parent company of the problematic Nethys.¹

The term '*class struggle*' does not even appear anywhere in this 2015 report. In fact, the PTB has a very specific concept of social classes, which are called upon to respect each other. An appendix on *the social structure of Belgian society* is available on this subject.² The Marxist definition of the two fundamental social classes with antagonistic interests - the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (forced to sell their labour to the former),³ "*a world where those who work do not earn and those who earn do not work*",⁴ - is replaced by "*a complex set of social classes and strata*", defined by the size of one's purse,⁵ a definition expressly rejected by Marx.⁶

8.2. Internationalism

Internationalism is, of course, "*an essential element of socialism*". But in version 2.0, it is no longer proletarian internationalism. "*The struggles of different peoples against imperialism and the experiences of building a socialist society in socialist countries are part of a great collective experience.*"⁷ And it is a matter of "*left-wing [bourgeois] governments*" that, in Latin America, "*are challenging the neo-liberal doctrine and are focusing on a fairer distribution of wealth*". With policies that "*are the result of a choice: to place the poor at the centre of the national budget*".⁸ And when workers lose confidence in such a government, which ultimately places the burden of crises on their shoulders, it is fashionable to denounce a supposed putsch orchestrated by imperialism. Class antagonism is replaced by an analysis in terms of blocs. "*Emerging countries are challenging the hegemony of the United States.*"⁹

In this dispute, the UNO remains the supreme guide. Regarding the Zionist state of Israel, the PTB is willing to denounce "*illegal*" settlements, i.e. those that contravene UN provisions. It protests against Trump's amiability towards Israel and supports the "*right to free expression*" of initiatives such as BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions), to the point of tabling a draft resolution in the Chamber for Belgium to sanction Israel's "*illegal*" colonial policy.¹⁰ But the boycott has its limits: there is no question of challenging the very existence of this racist state, the executioner of the Palestinian people. In August 2015, PTB parliamentarians voted in favour of ratifying an agreement concluded in 2013 between this state and Belgium.¹¹

1 *Le Soir* 12.11.2019

SudInfo 14.11.2019 - The Province of Liège holds 52.39% of Enodia's capital.

2 *Congress 2015*, op. cit. p. 237.

3 See K. Marx and F. Engels, *Communist Party Manifesto*, 1848

4 This definition is from Silvio Marra, in his book *Moi, Silvio de Clabecq, militant ouvrier* (I, Silvio de Clabecq, labour activist), published by Agone, 2019, p. 13

5 '*A small economic elite of wealthy families constitutes the upper layer of Euro-millionaires and business owners.*

6 K. Marx, *Capital*, Book III.

7 *Congress 2015*, op. cit. p. 234

8 <https://www.ptb.be/_d_o_vient_la_victoire_de_l_extr_me_droite_br_silienne>

9 *Congress 2015*, op.cit. p. 44

10 Draft Resolution of 22 October 2019.

11 Draft law of 31 August 2015. This involves granting work permits to the relatives of members of the diplomatic representation in the host country.

And as for the revolution of the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula and the liberation struggles in the region, the PTB believes that Wallonia can safely supply Saudi Arabia with weapons to fight them.¹²

8.3. From "a party of cadres" to "a party of members"

The *Renewal*, now updated, is described as "*an essential step in the transformation of the party from a party of cadres to a party of members*".²

The form of organisation that a party takes is dictated by the programme it intends to implement. A party that claims to combat bourgeois ideology among the proletariat will not have the same form of organisation as a party that claims to spread widely by adapting its programme to this ideology, "*thinking in terms of the majority*".³

The Bolshevik Party was a party of cadres which, on the basis of scientific socialism (Marxism), fought bourgeois ideology and the false consciousness prevailing in the working class, through an organisation that worked professionally within it. (§7.2.5.) The renewed PTB considers it a mistake that "*the party was identified as a party that defended the history of the Soviet Union almost uncritically and without nuance*".⁴ One wonders how far back this *history* goes? Back to Lenin? The PTB in the days of Ludo Martens was a party of cadres,⁵ despite fundamental errors in its assessment of what scientific socialism, Marxism-Leninism, was. (§ 1.7.3.)

With the *Renewal*, the party became a party of the broad masses (§ 7.2.5.), but that did not mean that there would be no more cadres. The 2015 Congress book devotes an entire chapter to this. (*The importance of cadres and why there are still too few of them.*)⁶ But the tasks assigned to them change.

The cadres of the Bolshevik Party worked within the autonomous workers' organisation, the Soviets, which ultimately adopted the Bolshevik programme by a majority vote and took power in Russia, an essential prerequisite for moving towards a socialist society. The PTB's leaders must *set the line within* this membership-based party: "*Have a good in-depth discussion followed by a good synthesis and good decisions that will then be valid for a number of years*". In order to move toward socialism, the PTB claims to be the organisation that workers has only to join as members. (§ 7.2.5.) It is a question of "*transforming at the electoral level the influence it has developed within the world of work*".⁷ And the party adapts its programme to this end.

8.4. A xenophobic party

At the beginning of the 20th century, when European nations were at war with each other, the so-called socialist parties (of the Second International) told their workers that they had to go and kill their class comrades from the enemy nation on the battlefields. In the 21st century, these nations no

12 Raoul Hedebow in *Jeudi en prime*, RTBF 7.1.2016

2 *Il était une fois*, op. cit. p. 48

3 *Il était une fois*, op. cit. p. 24

The PTB attributes to Marx the rather vague statement that "*In every epoch, the dominant ideas are those of the ruling class.*" (*Congress 2015*, op. cit. p. 172) But for Marx, the essential point is that this ruling class has powerful means at its disposal, including its political parties, its press, etc., to maintain and reinforce in the dominated class this false consciousness, these dominant ideas, contrary to its interests.

4 *Il était une fois*, op. cit. p. 160

5 The renewed PTB knows this. '*Furthermore, the party expressly states [in 1976] that, given the circumstances, it cannot be anything other than a "party of cadres" and therefore not a broad "party of members."*' (*Il était une fois*, op. cit. p. 24)

6 *Congress 2015*, op. cit. p. 142

7 *Il était une fois*, op. cit. p. 30

longer wage war against each other, but against countries on other continents. And this time too, the workers of these attacked countries, the victims, are declared enemies who threaten the workers of the European nation and must therefore be kept at bay.

This xenophobia is openly declared by far-right parties, but the very principle of restricting access to the territory of a European nation at war is publicly displayed by all parties in parliament, including the socialists. And it must be acknowledged that the *Socialism 2.0* party is no exception.

The renewed PTB rejects *discrimination, racism and the far right*.¹ It deplores the fact that every year, thousands of migrants pay with their lives for attempting to cross the borders of Fortress Europe.² But it does not propose that it would be enough to let these people buy a ticket to come to our country, by opening the borders to migrants from all over the world. When, in the last week of April 2015, "1100 migrants died in the Mediterranean", the PTB only called for "measures to enable rescue operations to be organised. How will the Belgian government contribute to making the crossing safer?"³

« Les frontières ouvertes, ce n'est pas la solution »
On vous entend peu sur la migration. Le PTB au pouvoir, y aura-t-il encore des rapatriements forcés ?
Oui, mais il faudra définir des critères objectifs. Pas comme aujourd'hui. Il en existe déjà...
Holà, c'est quand même à la tête du client. On n'hésite pas à renvoyer des gens dans des pays dangereux comme le Soudan. Le rapatriement n'est pas la solution. J'ai travaillé deux ans à Kinshasa, j'ai compris qu'on n'arrête pas quelqu'un qui veut partir, il faut résoudre les problèmes sur place. Nous sommes les seuls à dire que les flux mondiaux sont dus aux guerres impérialistes... Francken fait le malin sur les réfugiés, or c'est lui qui a voté les bombardements en Libye, qui a généré le chaos, les flux !

Votre solution, c'est l'ouverture des frontières ?
Non, même si la défense des gens qui fuient les guerres, cela reste notre ADN. On est pour des régularisations selon des règles précises.
On parle beaucoup des futures migrations climatiques...
Ça montre que l'Europe mirador n'est pas possible. On ne va pas pouvoir gérer les rapatriements. Il faut débattre du statut de réfugié climatique. Mais il y a un tabou complet sur les causes de la migration. Ce n'est pas la fermeture ou l'ouverture des frontières qui la régle, les gens décident de partir car c'est la guerre chez eux.
Que faire alors ?
Il faut aider les pays du Sud via les accords commerciaux, leur permettre d'être protectionnistes. Mais le FMI et la Banque mondiale l'interdisent.
M.BMÉ ET D.CI

The party denounced a policy that "keeps thousands of undocumented workers in illegality and insecurity".⁴ But it did not propose their outright regularisation. It only demands "objective criteria" (set by the Belgian state) to decide who is not a threat to the nation. And even more, when asked whether the PTB in power would still impose forced repatriations, Raoul Hedebouw's answer is "Yes". "Open borders are not the solution."⁵

And what about class solidarity among workers ? It is only "in a broad and long-term perspective: that of a different society, that is no longer focused on the 1% of super-rich. A society for and by the other 99%." ⁶ When Marx and Engels said, "Workers of all countries, unite," it was a call to action for the immediate future, not a beautiful dream for a distant future.

8.5. An alternative for a PS lacking credibility

With the 2008 crisis, the possibility for the bourgeoisie to make further small concessions diminished. However, she managed to strongly develop the false consciousness of xenophobia, especially in the north of the country. And after a succession of four governments between 2007 and 2010, a new party emerged during the early elections of 2010, the N-VA, now a 'democratic'

1 Congress 2015, op. cit. pp. 65–68

2 Congress 2015, op. cit. p. 67

3 PTB website, 28 April 2015

4 Congress 2015, op. cit. p. 67

5 Raoul Hedebouw in *Le Soir*, 22.08 2018.

6 Congress 2015, op. cit. p. 69

instrument⁷ of the ideology of "*eigen volk eerst*" (our own people first), which until then had been the preserve of the so-called *far right*.

The bourgeoisie is reluctant to abandon the age-old three-pillar model,¹ which includes the PS and its trade union arm, the FGTB. In January 2011, "*given the country's budgetary difficulties and Belgium's wage handicap vis-à-vis its neighbours, the social partners agreed only on very limited wage increases*".² And after 538 days of caretaker government, it still preferred to entrust the PS with the difficult task of stemming popular discontent, installing Di Rupo at the Rue de la Loi (the government residence) on 6 December 2011.

However, the loss of prestige of the social democracy among the working class continues. This was illustrated in 2012: a breaking with the PS by Daniel Piron on the May-Day speech and followed by the FGTB of Charleroi. And for the PTB, this is an opportunity to present itself as an alternative, particularly in the elections scheduled for 6 June 2014.³ In these elections, the rise of xenophobic false consciousness in Flanders and the confirmation of the PS's loss of prestige once again raised the question for the bourgeoisie of breaking with the three-pillar system.⁴ On the other hand, the renewed PTB has been elevated to the rank of a respectable party, respecting "democratic values", with two elected representatives in the federal Parliament. And its real ability to divert popular discontent into parliamentary meanderings, a task that has become increasingly difficult for the PS, finally opens up the possibility for the bourgeoisie to abandon this centuries-old three pillar system.

And it works.

Less than a week after the elections, when the management of Delhaize-Belgium announced the elimination of 2500 jobs and 14 stores, the workers spontaneously went on strike. The PS ministers, still in office for day-to-day matters, met with union delegations to "*set up a working group to find a solution*". And the PTB? It limited itself to lecturing the bosses.⁵

Two months later, on 21 August 2014, BM&S workers, who clean SNCB carriages on a subcontract basis, went on strike against the dismissal of five comrades. The CSC sent in strike breakers. The PTB was absent from this mobilisation, and when the strikers wanted to be present at the *Manifiesta* festival with a stand, the security service chased them away.

On 11 October 2014, a federal government was formed on the basis of the two winners, the MR in the south and the N-VA in the north.⁶ A week later, the PTB organised a *Protest Parade* from which trade unions and workers' political organisations were excluded, so as not to disrupt the '*good-natured atmosphere*'. It channelled discontent into *citizen* initiatives, set up by theatre actors, such as *Hart boven Hard / Toute autre chose*, carefully erasing any class perspective and mobilising *citizens* outside their workplace. This policy would add fuel to the electoral fire.⁷

7 The N-VA becomes the country's leading party, with 17.4% and 27 seats, ahead of the PS (13.7% – 26 seats) and the CD&V (10.85% – 17 seats) in the federal Parliament.

1 Liberals, Catholics and Socialists [TN]

2 The AIP project - *Le Soir* 19.01.2011

3 The Caterpillar delegation (in Charleroi) calls for a vote for the PTB. And for the PSL, this is a golden opportunity to have a "workers' representative in parliament".

4 The N-VA increased its number of seats in the Chamber from 27 to 33, while the PS lost 3 of its 26 seats.

5 "*It is socially unjust, but also economically very dangerous. Lower wages mean lower consumption. [Employers] are sawing off the branch they are sitting on.*" - *Solidaire*, 03.07.2014

6 With the support in Flanders of the Christian Democrats (CD&V) and the Liberals (Open VLD)

7 In the October 2018 municipal elections, the PTB increased its number of municipal councillors from two to 35 in the Brussels-Capital Region, and it postulated in 16 of the 262 municipalities in Wallonia. In Herstal (Liège), it obtained 24% of the vote.

On the other hand, through its presence in Parliament, the PTB has managed to score a victory in terms of mobilisation. Since June 2019, the *Blouses blanches* (White Coats - medical staff) had been taking to the streets every Tuesday, and this mobilisation finally led to the unanimous approval by the Chamber on 21 November 2019 of an emergency *white coats fund* amounting to half a per cent of the budget. The PTB can therefore take credit for this, having initiated an amendment to the provisional twelfths to this effect.

And of course, for trade union matters, there is always the FGTB. On the first anniversary of the new government, Marc Goblet reassures the bosses: "*The FGTB has its troops under control! First of all, it should be emphasised that if we make action plans, it is to stay within a framework... precisely to avoid excesses.*"¹ It is now up to the PTB to keep an eye on things, in good agreement with Robert Vertenueil, Goblet's successor since June 2017, who did not fail to congratulate the PTB on its victory concerning the white coats.²

8.6. Holding positions in the trade union bureaucracy

In its new role of stemming popular discontent, the PTB is acting on its own way within the trade union movement. In 2008, it already argued that there was "*no contradiction between the grass-roots and the leadership*". (§4.2.3.) And in 2015, "*the PTB is regaining credibility within the trade unions, now that it has finally abandoned its pedantic and irritating confrontational stance.*"³ Gaining credibility means gaining positions within the trade union apparatus, which cannot be done without concessions.

At the end of 2015, after three months of scattered struggles and strikes against the *Galant Plan*, which aimed to save three billion euros in the SNCB budget,⁴ a 48-hour strike notice was filed by a joint trade union and communitarian front (CGSP-ACOD and CSC-ACV)⁵ for 6 and 7 January 2016. But a week before the strike, the joint front split and only the CGSP (the French-speaking socialists) in Brussels maintained the walkout. However, several CSC union members, as well as Dutch-speaking members, still took part in the pickets. One point of the Galant Plan specifically concerned the elimination of passenger care agents on certain lines, and among the agents concerned, Jordan Croeisaerdt, at the forefront of the fight, was fined €1700 by a bailiff during a track occupation. A vast solidarity movement immediately rallied to his support and, initially, the Brussels leadership of the CGSP, where the PTB had managed to replace PS trade unionists, did not dare to remain on the sidelines of this movement of sympathy and even assumed the cost of the fine.⁶ However, further sanctions were subsequently imposed on Jordan,⁷ who was making progress in organising the union rank and file against the management's persecution. The peak of the demonstrations in support of Jordan had passed and the PTB union leadership then refused to organise a mobilisation in his defence. It should be noted that Jordan, a former PTB member, had left the party four years earlier in another struggle in which he denounced the party's betrayal. Furthermore, it was the SNCB that paid the union officials salaries, and it threatened to cut them if they continued to support the rebels.

1 News broadcast, 1 p.m. RTBF, 20.10.2015, quoted in *En Lutte* 101 (November 2015).

2 RTBF-info 22.11.2019

3 *Il était une fois*, op. cit. p. 48

4 Jacqueline Galant was Minister for Mobility and the public railway company, SNCB

5 Respectively French and Dutch *Socialist* and French and Dutch *Catholic* trade unions. [TN]

6 The bailiff penalty was finally lifted by the company's management.

7 On 11 April, he was given a very serious sanction: *a three-month suspension from duty.*

8.7. "Allies" in Parliament, also on the far right.

End December 2019, Peter Mertens gave a joint interview, in the weekly magazine *De Zondag*, with Tom Van Grieken, the figurehead of the far-right party Vlaams Belang (VB).⁵

Mertens agreed to this, *"given that it is the second largest party in Flanders"*. And he appreciates the VB's parliamentary support for the PTB's projects. Mertens recalls that *"two years ago, he proposed a minimum pension of €1,500, which was widely discarded at the time, but that now everyone was taking up the idea, including the VB."* He is delighted that *"the same will happen with the millionaires tax in the near future"*.

One wonders how that kind of media coverage can help workers advance in their consciousness, bombarded every day by the xenophobia that Van Grieken did not fail to defend loudly and clearly in the interview.

5 *De Zondag*, 22.12.2019, pp. 4–5

Appendix: Opus citatum

Here is a list of references cited several times in the text as 'already cited' (opus citatum - op. cit.). Each reference is followed by the paragraph and note numbers of the first mention, with details about the reference. When the paragraph occupies several pages, the footnote number may be on the list of any of those pages.

The list is sorted by order of first mention (left column) and alphabetical order.(right column).

Tielens et Iven, op. cit.-----§ 1.2. n.2	8e Congrès, op. cit.-----§ 4.2.3. n.2
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Ford-Genk, op. cit.-----§ 1.5. n.1	Ervaringen, op. cit.-----§ 1.7.3. n.1
Le Parti de la Révolution, op. cit.-----§ 1.6. n.5	Ford-Genk, op. cit.-----§ 1.5. n.1
Knack-Van Duppen, op. cit.-----§ 1.7.1. n.2	Hedebouw-Vif-Express, op. cit.-----§ 5.5. n.9
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Hommage_Merckx, op. cit.-----§ 4.3. n.7	Lettre aux progressistes, op. cit.-----§ 6.1. n.11
Comment osent-ils ? op. cit.-----§ 5.3.4. n.1	Priorité de gauche, op. cit.-----§ 4.2.4. n.5
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Congrès 2015, op. cit.-----§ 8.1. n.2	Willockx. op. cit.-----§ 1.4.3. n.5

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