



A principled party
A flexible party
A party of the working people

8th congress PTB

ptb

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M. Lemonnierlaan 171
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Tel : +32 (0) 2 504 01 10
Fax : +32 (0) 2 513 98 31

E-mail: ptb@ptb.be
Website: www.ptb.be
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Contents

Introduction 7

Chapter 1 The future belongs to socialism 15

1. The right-wing offensive 16
2. New developments 19
3. Socialism: a global response 28
4. Today's PTB: principled and flexible 37

Chapter 2. A principled party 41

Introduction 43

1. Marxism 46
2. The future belongs to the working class 52
3. A society without exploitation 54
4. Social action, reforms and fundamental changes 58
5. A modern communist party 61
6. An internationalist party 64
7. Executive decisions 65

Chapter 3. A flexible party 69

Introduction 71

1. Tactics, a fully-fledged part of Marxism 71
2. Tactics are an art.
Thirty recommendations for good tactics. 75
3. The party's profile is defined by ourselves.
People not profit 96
4. Particular attention for trade union tactics 98

Chapter 4. A Party of Working People

Introduction

1. We want to become the Party of Working People
2. How and where should we build the Party?
3. An Active Party, a Party of Members
4. The Different Levels in the Party
5. In the PTB, Everyone has the Right to a Suitable Education
6. What has to be changed in order to achieve these Aims?

Chapter 4. The party of working people 103

Introduction 105

1. We want to become the party of the working people 105
2. How and where to build the party? 108
3. A party of active members 114
4. Different levels in the party 116
5. In the PTB, everyone has the right to education according to his/her needs 122
6. What still needs to be changed to be able to achieve these goals? 124

Notes 127

Introduction*

With 360 delegates, constituting 80 per cent of the total number, we have reached the quorum for this plenary session. The congress has been going on for more than a year, with excellent results. We received no less than 171 discussion reports from the base groups and sections. 335 delegates took part in 36 sector commissions and more than 250 written amendments were handed in. This is the work style of the PTB. If we do something, we do it thoroughly.

The most important aspect of the congress is the fact that the discussions and debates show an enormous potential. A refreshing wind in these times of nationalist aberrations and shaky interim governments.

The PTB occupies a unique position in the political landscape, and the challenge to the Eighth Congress was to renovate the party in depth in order to enable it to develop from that unique position.

A unique position, indeed. More people than we imagine are concerned about what society is. Authorities withdrawing from healthcare, education, and public services. Pace of production,

* Concluding speech by Peter Mertens, in name of the Congress Bureau, at the plenary congress session concerning this document.

flexibility and stress. The cold pursuit of profit dominating everything. The threatening financial crisis. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Malika explained this for everyone this morning: “The uniqueness of our party lies in the fact we have a backbone. A social project. A socialist ideal”. This is what we talk about in our first two chapters.

A unique position, indeed. Today 369 delegates from all over the country are assembled here in this room. From Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels. People of Belgian, Spanish, Italian, Moroccan, Turkish and Chilean origin. As Nadia already put it on this platform: “We are *the only national party* in this country, and this very session is a political statement against the De Wevers and Maingains of this country” (nationalists from Flanders and Wallonia). Everything that divides us weakens us. A unique position, indeed. This is no ratification congress where everything has been decided in advance. We do not function with backroom arrangements or with lobbies. We work *democratically*. The PTB is a transparent party, a glass house. Many party members were enthusiastic about the respect for differences of opinion, for the seriousness of the debate. This is the congress of all the party sections and of their 460 representatives. The congress bureau itself is enthusiastic about the unity reached concerning the renewal of the party. At a next plenary session we will examine the question of democracy within the party in depth, defining it in our new party rules.

A unique position, indeed. Henri talked of a party able to play the accordion. That’s straight to the point. The PTB is a *flexible party*. We do not work according to fixed dogmas or unchangeable blueprints. We do not work in the past. We work

today for tomorrow's world. We do not work with numbers, we work with people. And so, indeed, we need the flexibility of an accordion player in order to cope with the many preoccupations of today's world. That is the subject of Chapter 3.

A unique position, indeed. Those present at this session will have felt the *soul* of our party. Look at those who have spoken on this stage. We have now about 3000 members and we aim to reach 5000 in the short run. We do not need to engage an expensive polling office in order to find out what our public is. We do not have to move a bit more to the centre, a bit less to the neighbourhoods, a bit more towards luxury flat dwellers and a bit less towards firms, according to what the opinion polls say. We know what party we are. We meet our people in the districts, in factories and offices, in schools and social organisations. We are a *party of common working people*. As Christine put it: "The party it's you, it's me, it's us". This is what chapter four is about. A unique position, indeed. Today it's considered right to present trade unions as conservative powers sticking to formerly acquired rights. But safeguarding and expanding social security, indexation of salaries and wages, paid holidays, pensions, free speech, the right to strike, is not conservative but progressive. Therefore *strong trade unions* are needed. With tens of thousands of shop stewards defending people behind the scenes day after day. Just as Alain from Caterpillar and An from the Sidmar cleaning women related today. No, the PTB is not a trade union. No, our party doesn't intend taking the place of trade unions. But yes, we will help to give a political meaning to the best within the trade unions. In the name of the congress bureau I want to thank all the delegates very cordially. This is your congress. And from the basic assumptions

approved today in the text *Principled party, flexible party, party of the working people* we will be able to act out our unique position in the years to come.



The future belongs to socialism

Chapter 1.

The future belongs to socialism

Content

1. The right-wing offensive 16
2. New developments 19
 - 2.1. The wounded eagle (the North American economy). 19
 - 2.2 A European Union with curtailed wings 20
 - 2.3. The North American giant gets embroiled in the Middle East 22
 - 2.4 New economic powers are asserting themselves in the South 23
 - 2.5 A fresh wind is blowing over Latin America 26
3. Socialism: a global response 28
 - 3.1. Social-economic: increasing exploitation and impoverishment 28
 - (a) *In Europe and in Belgium* 28
 - (b) *In the world* 30
 - 3.2. Democratic: dismantling of democratic rights 31
 - 3.3. Ecological: Destruction of the environment for the coming generations 34
 - 3.4. Socialism has become a necessity 36
4. Today's PTB: principled and flexible 37

Chapter 1 The future belongs to socialism

We are optimists. It's not that the world is turning into a better place to live in. Contrary to previous generations, many parents today fear that their children will have a lower standard of living than they had.

Being in employment no longer guarantees security. The job for life no longer exists. We are heading for a job market with temporary, ultra-flexible, short-time and underpaid jobs. A university degree is no longer a guarantee of stable employment. The next generations will have to work longer to receive minute pensions.

Insecurity is threatening other areas of life too. Two-tier health care is becoming a reality: buying expensive private health insurance may soon be the only way of guaranteeing proper health care. Finding living accommodation is becoming very difficult, unless one is prepared to pay off loans over a 30 to 40 year period. Energy and water are becoming luxury products.

Insecurity is not confined to our country. World scale problems are piling up.

Global warming is increasing rapidly and there are no adequate measures taken to cope with it. In more and more places the danger of a war breaking out is growing. And our governments are sending troops all over the world more and more often, thus increasing the risk of war.

The world we are now proposed is less safe, less peaceful, less democratic and less healthy.

We are optimists because we believe that another world, a socialist world, is not only necessary but will also become possible during the course of this 21st century.

1. The right-wing offensive

Since the seventies reactionary, right-wing forces have taken the of- fensive, thus determining the world we live in today. This right- wing offensive is based on two crucial events of the second half of the twentieth century.

1. At the beginning of the seventies, world capitalism plunged once more into a deep *structural* economic crisis, marked by overpro- duction (factories are able to produce far more than they can sell) and by high unemployment. This crisis is not a temporary phase but is linked to the very structure of the system and con- tinues to determine the economic context.¹

We owe it to Karl Marx to have pointed out the causes of such crises. They originate in the anarchic character of the cap- italist production system. Each individual capitalist invests his money in a given sector of activity and produces as much as he can, without any planning at the level of society as a whole. He seeks to produce ever better, ever more², at an ever lower price³, in order to conquer an ever increasing part of the market. Each capitalist operates in this way without taking into account what his com- petitors are doing. The driving force of the capitalist economy is not the needs of people, but maximum profits for capitalists. Production for the free market takes place in condi- tions of com- plete anarchy.

At a given moment the equilibrium between the different sectors of production is broken. The purchasing power of the workers fails to keep up. Available markets are exhausted. Suf- ficient outlets can no longer be found for certain products. This is the crisis of overproduction⁴ bringing in its wake bankrupt-

cies, closures, unemployment and a free fall of the purchasing power of the population.

It is at the heart of this anarchy that the fundamental contradiction of capitalism is to be found. On the one hand production is increasingly socialised: the products leaving the factories are the result of the work of thousands of workers. But on the other hand the means of production⁵ (i.e., the factories and machinery) and manufactured products remain the private property of a small group of big proprietors, large shareholders and people of private means.

After World War II capitalism went through a period of stabilization during the fifties, and even expansion during the *golden sixties*. In this period workers struggled more and more often to increase their rights (for example a thirteenth month) or to increase their wages (with demands of rises of 3, 5 or 10%).

The crisis of the seventies changed the situation. Employers started an offensive against the most important gains of the working class. In order to maintain a continual growth in profits, salaries, working conditions, social security and public services had to be dismantled.

Today, the struggle movements of workers and their trade unions aim mainly to keep their social, economic, trade union and political gains.

2. Socialism in the USSR (the Soviet Union) and in Eastern Europe was, from the very start, subject to attack from two sides. From the inside by those who dreamt of restoring capitalism. From the outside by the western Great Powers, who dreamt of recapturing eastern markets.

Finally these anti-communist campaigns culminated in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁶

At world level, the balance of forces swung in favour of the United States, the European Union and Japan – the capitalist Great Powers. They were finally rid of the only force which stood in the way of their world domination.

Since then the employers have attacked the gains of the working class with increasing arrogance. At the same time the US and its allies have launched an attempt to recolonize the countries of the South.

These factors too put the forces for progress on the defensive.

The 7th Congress of the PTB Workers Party of Belgium analyzed these developments in its “Theses on Europe” and its “Thesis on globalization”. With this Eighth Congress we want to highlight more recent developments, allowing us to add more nuances to some theses and to correct others.

The global balance of forces remains in favour of reactionary and right-wing powers. However, these Powers are facing several crises as well as the resistance of peoples which arises in an unequal manner in different parts of the world. In the South especially, political and economic forces are developing which threaten the absolute domination of the US and its allies. The last few years have exposed all the more clearly the inherent failures of the capitalist production system.

2. New developments

2.1. The wounded eagle (the North American economy).

The North American economy is increasingly dependent on products manufactured abroad, especially in the South. A quarter of a century ago the situation was totally different. In 1973, almost everything was made in the US itself. Nowadays manufacturing in the US is producing only half of what is necessary, while products imported from developing countries account for more than a quarter of the total. This is the cause of the US's enormous trade deficit, a deficit⁷ which reached almost 800 billion dollars in 2006, i.e., 6% of the GDP⁸. If this happened in any other country IMF experts would immediately be dispatched to reorganize the economy.

But as long as the US can rely on its status of international superpower it can make up for this deficit through an annual inflow of foreign capital. In 2006 this inflow was estimated at 800 billion dollars, i.e. more than 6% of the GDP. *It takes only one major financial crisis for this fragile equilibrium to collapse.* As financial speculation (including stock exchange speculation) becomes increasingly widespread in the world economy, each financial crisis can shake the whole capitalist system to its foundations.⁹ The stock exchange crisis hitting the USA since August 2007 has spread to the whole world. Economic analysts are expecting a still worse situation.¹⁰ Nobody can exclude any longer that the capitalist world economy will face a large recession in the very near future.

2.2 A European Union with curtailed wings

Seven years ago in Lisbon the leaders of the EU adopted the objective favoured by Europe's big industrialists: to become the most competitive knowledge economy in the world by 2010. However, the EU is unable to catch up with the US. This is because the latter continues to increase its productivity, to subsidize its firms and to dismantle its social sector still further.¹¹

It is true that the EU has been enlarged with new members from Eastern Europe. The problem is that the establishment of these countries is often closely allied with the US.

The expansion of the European Union has thus increased its internal contradictions. So the EU has to choose. Strengthening its unity – which is only possible by compromising with the pro-US forces in its bosom – or alternatively increasing its competition with Washington, which would threaten its unity. Up to now the first option has been chosen.

The EU has the ambition to establish its own military 'defence' to serve its interests. At the moment, however, it is within the framework of NATO¹² (headed by the US) that European troops are deployed in Afghanistan.

France and the Netherlands were two of the rare countries to submit the draft 'Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe' to a referendum.¹³ This Treaty imposed the laws of the market and capitalist competition as the only possible economic system. A massive 'No' vote brought this project to a halt. Today the governments want to introduce a new draft Treaty which they do not want to submit to any referendums.

Up to now the leading European circles have succeeded in pushing through their antisocial measures, though this does not

happen easily. Opposition struggles do not always reach the level needed for doing away with these measures. But they do slow them down, putting off their application and sometimes limiting the extent of the effects desired by the big employers and by governments. In the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and elsewhere the trade unions have called strikes against the proposals for lengthening careers, dismantling retirement systems, against wage freezes and measures hitting the unemployed.¹⁴ In France, students and workers halted the project for youth jobs (*Contrat première embauche*, CPE). The workers of the new member states, formerly socialist, are making the bitter experience of what it means to join the European Union. They lost their social security, free education and health care, their job security. Trade union opposition movements are emerging, as in the Skoda factory in the Czech Republic.

Against the unity of the employers the unity of the workers is needed. Globally, the unification of struggle movements on a European level lags far behind. The attacks on pensions and social security, like the privatization of public services and many other measures, are decided centrally, be it by the European Union or in the headquarters of the big firms. In most cases the trade unions react in a disorganised way, although there are some positive experiences which show the direction to be taken. In January 2006, a first European struggle, by the Dockers, succeeded in blocking a draft Directive entitled 'Port Package' which was aimed at dismantling their status. Trade-union opposition led to important modifications being introduced into the Bolkestein draft organizing competition in the services area in Europe.

2.3. The North American giant gets embroiled in the Middle East

Following the attacks which took place on 11 September 2001 in New York – and in Washington (Pentagon) –, President Bush announced his new doctrine of ‘preventive warfare’. The US claimed the right to use any means necessary to prevent the emergence of any forces which might threaten their superiority or get in the way of the fulfillment of their strategy. G W Bush’s administration fabricated lies to justify a new war against Iraq. The purpose of this war, as for the war in Afghanistan, was to guarantee US domination over oil supplies. At the same time they would be able to control supplies to their European, Japanese and Chinese competitors. Nevertheless, their overwhelming superiority in arms and financial resources does not lead to easy victories for the US and for NATO. Today Washington has to admit that its troops are totally bogged down. In Iraq, at least 3 800 US soldiers have lost their lives and over 27 000 others have been seriously injured. The resistance is growing day by day. In order to escape unavoidable defeat, Washington is attempting to provoke ethnic and religious conflicts.¹⁵

In Afghanistan NATO occupation forces are also facing growing resistance.

Israeli aggression against Lebanon in 2006 was a total failure. Their attack was carried out with the full support of the US, which has always considered Israel to be its bridgehead in the region. What Israel was supposed to do was to snuff out nationalist Lebanese and Palestinian resistance and open the way to war against Syria and Iran. This has been the long-term strategy of the US for domination of the Middle East. But for the first

time in 60 years, the Israeli troops had to go back home empty-handed. This defeat of the Israelis and the US in Lebanon has weakened the US strategy of dividing the Lebanese people along religious and ethnic lines. It also strengthened Arab nationalist resistance in that country.

The aim of global domination promoted by G W Bush and the extreme right in Washington has suffered serious reverses. Countries and peoples wishing to take their own futures in hand have shown that the great capitalist powers are not invincible.

2.4 New economic powers are asserting themselves in the South

In 1949, when the national-democratic revolution¹⁶ obtained its victory, China was an extremely poor country, dominated by colonialism¹⁷ and feudalism. In the beginning of the fifties China started on its path to socialism. Since then China has continued to assert its socialist identity. Socialism as understood by Marx and Engels would inevitably replace the capitalist system once it had reached a high level of development. But this was not the case in the China of the fifties. In 1949 the gross national product per inhabitant was only a quarter of that of Africa.

Capitalism only existed on a small scale, mainly in the old colonial concessions. Today's China is still a developing country. Notwithstanding an industrialized coastal region the majority of the population still lives in the country. China belongs to the group of medium poor countries.¹⁸ A period of transition was thus needed.

Today 70% of the 500 Chinese firms with the highest turnover are public companies or companies controlled by the state.

Their capital represents 85% of the total of these 500 firms. The socialist state possesses or controls the strategically important sectors. Other sectors have been reprivatized. The government encourages the formation of private businesses, Chinese or foreign. China is developing a market economy, controlled to a certain extent by the state.

These reforms offer possibilities, but also present dangers. Thanks to these reforms China has rapidly been able to increase the standard of living of its entire population – today more than 1.3 billion inhabitants. However, at the same time the laws of the system of private possession of the means of production (thus of capitalism) and of the market are making themselves felt. Inequalities are growing, between rich and poor as well as between town and country. The number of capitalists is increasing and this can threaten socialism. History will show if the Chinese communists can further develop socialism, in an immense country of the South, in a correct and creative way.

Today China has become the third exporter of the world. At the same rate of growth of about 10% a year the Chinese gross national product will pass the GNP of the United States before the middle of the 21st century.

By allowing China to enter the World Trade Organization¹⁹ the United States, the European Union and Japan hoped to control the Chinese economy. They now see the failure of this strategy.

China acquired new technologies and the know-how to produce by itself in every possible field. China was thus able to get tens of millions of farmers out of poverty and to help the whole country progress. This also allows China to develop economic relations with an increasing number of countries in Asia, Latin-America and Africa, offering them the possibility

of decreasing their dependence on transnational companies – a substantial help for these countries. China is involved in a number of projects for development in Africa²⁰ in exchange for raw materials, especially oil. For the first time in modern history, Africa has the chance of developing independently. Western powers were relying on being able to strengthen their control over the South in order to exploit to the hilt its resources and markets. But they cannot prevent China from developing privileged trading relations with their former ‘private hunting grounds’, these being in Africa in the case of Europe, and Latin-America in the case of the United States. Trade between countries of the South with India and Brazil is also increasing

Many workers fear that these new economies threaten their jobs. It is true that some people have in fact lost their jobs following the relocation of their companies or because of competition from cheaper foreign goods. But on the whole this fear is not justified. The reforms and economic growth taking place in China benefit the world economy. Numerous studies prove that vigorous development in the big countries of the South creates such a level of demand for goods produced in our countries that far more jobs are created than are lost.²¹

It is increased productivity (unending increase in the intensity of work and in flexibility, the introduction of ever more productive machines, etc.) which is by far the major cause of loss of our jobs. In reality the phenomenal growth of the Chinese economy has stimulated the demand for Western goods, thus increasing global employment.²²

With the Soviet Union dismembered, the White House hoped to reduce Russia to dependency.²³ Washington has done everything possible to weaken it, tear it apart and provoke separatist wars

within its borders, as in Chechenya. The US has extended NATO to the Russian border and has encircled it with military bases.

But Russia has come back.²⁴ Its economy benefits from enormous natural wealth, such as natural gas and oil, and numerous minerals. The big business class, headed by Putin, is attempting – not without success – to reclaim for Russia its status as a world power.

Several new organizations fostering economic, political and even military cooperation strengthen the tendency towards independent development. One example is the Shanghai Organisation for Cooperation. Its members are China, Russia and four Central Asian Republics, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Pakistan, Mongolia, Iran and India have observer status, and with the exception of India they have applied for membership.

These recent developments favour a multipolar world.²⁵ The US has claimed the role of leading power for over 60 years and has behaved as the world's gendarme. It still claims to have this role, but the gap between its ambitions and its actual ability to fulfill them is deepening all the time. This can only encourage developing countries to take charge of their own destinies.

2.5 A fresh wind is blowing over Latin America

For over a century Washington has considered Latin America as its backyard.²⁶ Every attempt at liberation has been drowned in blood. Only Cuba was able to free itself of this grasp. However, following the 1959 revolution it remained for many years an island of anti-imperialism and socialist construction, isolated in the middle of the American continent.

In 1998 the Bolivarian²⁷ Hugo Chávez won the presidential elections in Venezuela. He promised to use oil revenues in order to develop the country. He kept his promise and has won every election ever since.²⁸

On 18 December 2005 the Bolivian people elected Evo Morales as president. This peasant leader united the indigenous people and the working class of Bolivia in the course of several struggles. He put an end to the theft of the country's natural gas by US-American transnational companies and established special relations with Cuba and Venezuela.

ALCA (the American Free Trade Zone), the plan for global economic domination of Latin America dreamt up by the White House met with failure. Venezuela and Cuba responded with anti-imperialist cooperation, namely ALBA (the Bolivarian Alternative for America). Later on Bolivia and Nicaragua joined them.

Washington's hold over its 'backyard' is now weakened and threatened. This does not at all prevent it from trying to destabilize the governments of Venezuela or Bolivia and enter into bilateral agreements for free trade with countries such as Colombia or Peru.

The different nationalist and anti-imperialist movements and currents in the world tend to strengthen each other. The resistance in Iraq and Afghanistan has countered the military ambitions of the US which threatened Cuba, as well as Syria, Iran, the people's republic of Korea and Venezuela. China's economic development would be seriously disadvantaged if it could not count on oil supplies from Nigeria, Sudan and Venezuela. Trade with China, on the other hand, helps Cuba, Venezuela and several other countries to overcome obstacles such as blockades set up by Washington.

These positive developments do not prevent the global balance of forces remaining largely in favour of the multinationals and the reactionary political powers. These developments are nonetheless breaches which stimulate progress in the struggles for another world in which there will be neither oppression nor exploitation.

3. Socialism: a global response

With the fall of the Berlin wall the smooth talkers from Washington, Berlin and London promised a peaceful future. The society debate was settled once and for all, and the capitalist mode of production was the only possible one, according to their deafening doctrinaire thinking. Since then, however, the world has undergone a setback on the most essential levels, social-economic (increasing exploitation and impoverishment), democratic (demolition of democratic rights) and ecological (destruction of the environment for the coming generations).

In other words, we cannot leave the society debate to those who have brought us social, democratic and ecological setback. The situation of an ever growing part of the world population compels us to propose an alternative. Socialism has become a necessity for the survival of mankind.

3.1. Social-economic: increasing exploitation and impoverishment

(a) In Europe and in Belgium

Over the last twenty years, there has not been a single field – whether it is employment, working conditions, health, education,

housing or pensions – where social progress has been achieved. On the contrary.

The governments of the European Union have resolutely taken the road of Americanization. This was the goal set during the Lisbon summit in June 2000, where, in order to surpass the US economy, they planned to dismantle the established benefits and rights of the workers, letting them drop to the US level. The effects of these policies became manifest very soon.

In 2004, 16% of the citizens of the European Union lived under the poverty threshold, while 8% of employed people belong to this poverty category.²⁹

Over the past fifteen years, the part of workers' salaries in the overall revenue³⁰ of the Eurozone dropped from 68% to 65%. This difference of 3% represents billions of euros in dividends and profits.

The bosses are making profits at an unprecedented level. Shareholders of Belgian corporations have seen their dividends increasing by 10% a year over the last ten years. Yet, this increase in profits has not been a consequence of the conquest of new markets... The capitalists' increase in wealth has essentially been the consequence of:

- the intensification of labour (increase in productivity),
- the practice of outsourcing (including abroad),
- the use of insecure contracts (temporary work, short-term contracts),
- the decline in real wages (especially the indirect part, paid to social security),
- the practice of relocations to lower wage countries,
- the lower prices of certain raw materials.

All European countries are rushing forward to meet the Lisbon objectives.

In Belgium the Generation Pact³¹ has substantially reformed the pre-retirement system making it now mandatory to remain available on the labour market until the age of 58 years.

From 2008 on, early retirement will not be possible before the age of 60 years. The purpose is to extend working time by five years, while there are more than 100 000 young people unemployed.

However, a next wave of attacks on workers' rights is already upon us. Under the term 'flexicurity'³², the European Union wants to impose a reform of social law to make labour contracts even more flexible. The aim is to review protections against employment dismissal, to strengthen control over the unemployed, to generalize further low-paid contracts and to introduce more flexibility in wage agreements and working hours.

At the same time, the European Union is pushing member countries to privatize and liberalize all sectors that used to be state monopolies (railways, postal services, transports ...) as much as possible.³³

The European Union has already been pushing for the liberalization of the service sector and is intent on doing the same for the social sectors. This means creating new markets for private monopolies, but at the expense of employment, working conditions and services provided to the population.

(b) In the world

The record of globalization since the overthrow of socialism in the USSR is disastrous.³⁴ Today, 54 countries are poorer than in

1990. Out of these 54 countries, 17 are located in Eastern Europe and in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).³⁵

Meanwhile, the incomes of the 500 richest people in the world exceed those of the 416 million poorest people...

In 34 countries, life expectancy is decreasing. Today, life expectancy in Africa south of the Sahara) is even lower than it was thirty years ago.

In 21 countries, a larger section of the population is suffering from hunger, even although we have the means to feed many more than the current world population decently.

In 14 countries, the proportion of children dying before they reach the age of five has increased, although medical progress could save the vast majority of them.

In 12 countries, primary school enrolment has receded. Illiteracy is increasing although the most modern education techniques exist.

Cuba helped Venezuela eradicate illiteracy in just a couple of years. Yet, such an accomplishment, on the part of a small socialist island, has been impossible to duplicate over decades in countries dominated by western transnational companies. These only take into account scientific and technological progress as tools to increase profits and worker exploitation.

3.2. Democratic: dismantling of democratic rights

In the euphoria following the fall of the Berlin wall the 'end of ideologies' was also proclaimed. A debate about society was no longer needed, capitalism had won. But as the euphoria decreases and the contradictions become more serious; more and more repressive measures are being taken to silence each societal al-

ternative. Democratic rights such as trade union rights, the right to organize and liberty of expression – acquired by almost 100 years of workers' struggle – are coming under fire.

In Belgium – and this applies to the rest of Europe too – the government and employers are attacking union rights to an ever greater extent. They respond to strikes by imposing financial penalties at the picket lines. Militant representatives are sacked and if a tribunal declares their dismissal to be illegal, the employers are able to ignore the verdict. As in France, the Government wants to attack the right to strike by laying down minimum service obligations.

While market freedom allows transnational corporations to settle wherever they want in the world, governments encourage nationalism in order to divide people and push their anti-social policies through more easily. The European Union has developed the concept of a Europe of regions. In Belgium, nationalism is being used like a Trojan horse to attack social security, the right to work, wages. It is used to weaken the trade union movement and to undermine democratic rights drastically. In addition the measures taken to turn the European Union into Fortress Europe reinforce the racism propagated by the extreme right.

The European Union has drawn up a list of so-called 'terrorist' organizations, which include several national liberation organizations as well as communist ones. Member countries have passed 'anti-terrorist' legislation which enables them to persecute people simply for belonging to a given organization. Turkish and Belgian militants have been sentenced for this in Belgium notwithstanding the fact they had committed no crime here.

Rightist forces are pushing towards fascism under the cover of the 'struggle against the crimes of communism and class struggle'. In some East European countries they have rehabilitated their fascist past, threatened militant union organizations and banned communists. An example is the Czech Republic where the government has banned the Czech

Communist Youth (KSM) because it stands for public ownership of the means of production and is opposed to the privatization of those enterprises which are still state-owned.

Thanks to a mobilization of communist and democratic forces, an anti-communist draft resolution failed in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in January 2006. Small victories have been secured in Belgium and elsewhere.

The military defeats of the great powers do not mean they are prepared to withdraw.

The contradictions between the countries of the European Union do not prevent them from arming to defend their own interests in the world to the utmost.

The US superpower will never abandon its ambition of dominating the world, whatever the means it has to resort to. The preparations being made in the US to produce mini-nuclear weapons show they are envisaging even more destructive terrorization. The US is carrying on its Iraq war which has led to the death of at least 655 000 Iraqi civilians between March 2003 and July 2006. The Bush administration knows it is losing the war, but the need to control the region and its oil prevents it from ending its involvement.

3.3. Ecological: destruction of the environment for the coming generations

Over the course of this century, global warming will lead to an increase in average surface temperatures, as well as extreme localized temperatures. Global warming induces a reduction in snow cover and ice sheets, as materialized by the rapid melt-down of glaciers and polar ice caps.

Drinking water supplies are decreasing. The rise in sea level and rainfall increases the number and extent of floods. Hurricanes become more frequent, more destructive and affect more areas.

All of this causes destruction of crops, thousands of casualties and hundreds of thousands of ‘climatic refugees’.

Our climate has always changed and will continue to change. But these extreme climate variations and the pace at which these changes have been occurring during the last decades are primarily due to human intervention. Only very little time is left to human societies and nature to adapt.

The environment is also threatened by deforestation, water and soil pollution, contamination by waste and chemical, biological or nuclear pollutants...

About 50% of environmental pollution is caused by industry and energy producers. Energy producers have a direct interest in stimulating energy consumption or increasing its price, even to the detriment of the population. Industrial corporations view energy saving measures as harmful to their profits and only consider them to the extent they can lead to a competitive advantage. In order to increase profits, these corporations, while relocating production to low wage countries, need to ship goods over thousands of miles to reach the consumer, causing tremendous

pollution through truck and plane transportation. These corporations reduce their stocks and practise the just-in-time principle, which causes goods to be in constant transit in trucks and planes. These practices are possible because they fit the logic of the system, which is dominated by the quest for profits.

Of course, capitalist states and their governments endorse this logic. They consider environmental issues primarily as a pretext to impose new burdens on the workers. Either they attempt to blame southern countries for these problems: they either buy credits, allowing them to pollute as much as before, from less industrialized countries (Africa), or they demand that China, India and other newly industrialized countries limit their pollution first, with the clear aim of delaying their development.

There is no other issue but the mobilization of workers, trade unions and community organizations to demand urgently needed measures, such as:

- The generalization of the best available industrial techniques to impose a maximum limit on greenhouse gas emissions.
- Massive investments in the public sector (public trains, express regional transportation systems, buses, underground trains).
- Laws restricting long-distance transportation of goods to rail and waterways.
- A plan to promote the transition to renewable energies.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to resolve the problem of environmental destruction in general, and global warming in particular, in a society where the decisions on matters of production and infrastructure are taken by private corporations, only according to their best interests. Such a global problem can only be addressed in a society where states are in charge of the long

term planning of the economy, in a coordinated manner. Such a plan will be made according to the people's interests, as opposed to the interests of investment bankers, and will plainly take environmental considerations into account.

3.4. Socialism has become a necessity

The large transnational corporations have reached such a size that they lead or control a level of production equivalent to that of several countries. A gigantic and increasing number of workers throughout the world are employed by them. Goods are manufactured in Europe, Asia or North America from raw materials coming from Africa or the Middle East, then to be transformed in Asia, Europe or America.

Never have so many workers throughout the world participated together in the creation of wealth, never has production been socialized to such an extent. But never, on the other hand, has the property of the large firms been concentrated in so few hands.

However, instead of serving the interests of the majority of the population, these large firms seize the larger part of the profits for the benefit of their shareholders.

This fundamental contradiction is at the heart of all social contradictions. Thus, the development of technology should allow the alleviation of toil, the reduction of the intensity of labour and should secure work for a much larger number of people. But what is happening actually is just the opposite. Those who have work toil at risk to their health while the unemployed find it ever more difficult to live decently. Our society produces more wealth than it has ever done, yet the number of poor people is increasing and health care has become too expensive for many.

Socialization of production on a world scale also brings globalization of anarchy in production. Throughout the world job insecurity is at an unprecedented level. A rational redistribution of work is necessary to guarantee jobs for all workers at guaranteed wages in order to satisfy the needs of all people. Such global planning is impossible in a society dominated by transnational corporations.

In their search for maximum profit, the US, the EU and Japan support their transnational companies.

Pharmaceutical and other Western and Japanese transnational companies supported by their governments claim the right to patent medicines capable of curing dozens of illnesses. This allows them to charge high prices for medicines which are essential to the survival of a large proportion of the population.

How, under these circumstances, could equal exchange between the countries of the North and the South even be imagined?

How will it be possible to deal with environmental and climatic problems under this system which functions essentially on the basis of profit and unrestrained competition?

For this reason the power of transnational companies and their big shareholders must be questioned.

4. Today's PTB: principled and flexible

The evolution of society places us before a double task. The renewed PTB wants to be, in the coming period, principled as well as flexible. In a rapidly changing world we need a strong backbone. Our Marxist analysis and our commitment to socialism

define the identity of our party (see Chapter 2). At the same time we need flexibility and openness in order to be connected with the reality of people, to make them aware, to mobilize and to organize (see Chapter 3) and to transform our party into a true party of the working people.



A principled party

Chapter 2. A principled party

Content

Introduction 43

1. Marxism 46

1.1. Understanding the universe, the world and mankind 46

1.2. Understanding history 47

1.3. Understanding class struggle 48

1.4. Understanding the economy 49

1.5. Understanding the socialist experience 49

2. The future belongs to the working class 52

3. A society without exploitation 54

3.1. The economy 55

3.2. Politics and the State 56

3.3. Ethics 57

4. Social action, reforms and fundamental changes 58

5. A modern communist party 61

6. An internationalist party 64

7. Executive decisions 65

Introduction

This chapter is about our principles; our political, ideological and organizational foundations. The next chapter is about our flexibility, our open attitude and tactical skills. Both are linked. The body needs flexible arms and legs but a strong backbone as well. Without that backbone we only have the flexibility of a rag doll.

What is this *backbone* of the Party?

1. We can link the big issues of our times – poverty, unemployment and stress, hunger, lack of drinking water, war, the exhaustion of the earth – with our comprehensive *Marxist analysis*.
2. But it is not sufficient to link these issues. The point is to come up with a comprehensive response and solution. A *socialist society* offers guarantees for sustainable social progress, people's participation, peace and protection of the environment. This is the objective we pursue.
3. In order to achieve that objective, the Party is building on a number of *ideological and organizational principles*.

These three aspects determine our *identity* as a party. They distinguish us from the traditional parties. They make the Party strong and dynamic. Parties that 'forget' their principles crumble away. You cannot be 'a bit more' principled, or 'a bit less' principled. As a party, you are principled or you are not.

Some comrades say the Party's most important challenge is to be more open, more flexible and to be more tactical. That is

wrong. The Party's most important challenge is to be principled *and* flexible, both simultaneously. Those who dissociate openness and tactics from principles will evolve towards increasing compliance with the reign of Capital.

This is not a new danger. History teaches us that the principles are easily lost in the name of tactics and flexibility. In 1885 the Belgian Workers' Party was established.³⁶ The BWP had a number of socialist principles but these were – especially after the first electoral victory in 1894 – easily given up.³⁷ Today, it is worth-while to have a look at this process.

Very quickly, *a dislike of debate and socialist theory developed*. “Only the immediate is of interest to me”, Anseele, one of the leaders at that time, said. He adapted to the events of the day and wanted to determine his attitude according to the situation. The characteristics of the capitalist system, the objectives of socialism, the long-term interests of the working class... were all quickly ‘forgotten’ in favour of the (real or imaginary) opportunities of the moment.

In spite of the Party rules, power in the Party tilted towards the members of parliament, to the detriment of the elected leadership, the General Council. The members of parliament *put themselves above the Party leadership*. They began to put Parliament or their own interests ahead of their work for the whole.

The Party became *a party of parliamentary legalism* instead of a party of class struggle. The Party became apprehensive of the labour movement. It appealed for calm. It enabled the big strikes of 1902 and 1913 to be brought to an end without any achievements. The labour movement was more and more considered as a potential electorate instead of a force capable of achieving a socialist revolution.

The *vision about the future* of society and about socialism *evaporated*. The Party's logic became: "Don't rock the boat, that will cost us votes". Voting rights for women were rejected because they were 'not popular'. When the socialist textile worker Emilie Claeys continued to advocate them, she was expelled from the Party.

The BWP developed a theory that it could lead our country to socialism through a majority in parliament. It would take over the levers of society step by step through the parliament. In fact, the BWP limited the theory and aspirations of the Party to reforms. It prevented the workers' movement from developing, from making more in-depth analyses, from broadening its aims. The Party degenerated into reformist short-sightedness. It turned away from what Marx had written: that a revolution was needed to end the rule of Capital.

As the BWP abandoned socialist principles, it also *abandoned the support for the anti-colonial struggle*. From 1900 on, the BWP advocated a "positive colonial policy". Together with the leaders of the big firms, the Société Générale, Union Minière etc., the BWP leadership advocated the transfer of the Congo, which was king Leopold II's private property, to the Belgian state, effectively abandoning the right to self-determination of the Congolese people.

When World War I was imminent, the Party leadership chose against peace and for war.³⁸ It chose against internationalism and for an alliance with its own bourgeoisie. The War, with its battle fields in West Flanders, was a war for the redivision of colonies and spheres of influence. The Party voted the war credits without batting an eyelid. Chairman Vandervelde called the War "a holy war for justice, freedom and civilization". A war which was to cost more than 10 million lives...

These lessons from the history of the BWP are useful. They expose the dangers still existing now. A member of our Party, who was active in the Communist Party for years, confirmed this: “I experienced this discussion, among others as editor of *De Rode Vaan* (The Red Flag), in the CP. The tendency to promote the concept of the ‘flexible party’ endlessly, ending up as a club without any principles, ruined the Party.”

1. Marxism

The temporary worker’s concern about his future. The post-man’s anger about his long shifts. Family problems because of long and flexible working hours. The old man’s loneliness in a home for the aged. Aggression as a result of stress and uncertainty. Parents’ concern that their child won’t be enrolled in school...

So many questions and problems! All nonetheless related. The answer is built on a comprehensive analysis of people and society, a world outlook. The PTB’s world outlook is called *Marxism*. The foundations of Marxism were laid by Karl Marx, his friend Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Lenin. Marxism consists of five major *components*. Together, they form one consistent and harmonious system:

1.1. Understanding the universe, the world and mankind

We aspire to an objective and scientific attitude. We start from recent scientific developments.³⁹

We try to understand nature, man and society as they ‘are’. We do not look for explanations outside reality.

Nature, man and society are continuously in evolution and development.⁴⁰ The world is constantly on the move. This movement is the result of the dynamic relation between all elements, their interrelations and contradictions, a continuous process of leaving a certain state and entering another one. We look at things in their context, as part of a whole. Isolating things from their context gives a deformed view. This philosophy is called *dialectical materialism*.

1.2. Understanding history

Man needs food, clothes and shelter to survive. He has to be productive. This production, particularly the social relations in production, is the basis of our society.

If we wanted to summarize the life of modern man in a book of 100 pages, 90 pages would describe a collective way of living, and ten pages would be about societies based on the exploitation of man by man, with the last ten lines describing capitalism. Mankind lived for more than 100 000 years as hunter-gatherers in a primitive economy.⁴¹ Because of the development of new technology, this changed less than 100 000 years ago.⁴² Since then people have been able to produce more than just a reserve supply for in-between seasons or bad harvests. Some groups gained the capacity to appropriate for themselves the surplus of others. The egalitarian character disappeared; society was split into classes, the exploiters and the exploited. The hiring of armed men, the investment in new technology, the declaration of new laws, in short a state, became necessary in order to secure the surplus.

The state did not originate as a neutral organism surrounding society but as an instrument of power for the ruling class.

The economy forms the foundation, the infrastructure of society. The political and ideological institutions form the superstructure. Scientific and ideological developments and class struggle are the driving forces of world history. This conception of history is called *historical materialism*.

1.3. Understanding class struggle

In slave society and later in feudal⁴³ society and capitalist society... each time a small group appropriated the surplus for itself. Societies evolve, nothing remains the same forever. In a relatively short span of time one kind of society can change into another: when the old order of society has become too restrictive for the development of science and technology and the existing mode of production. Tensions between classes come to the point where social relations have to change. At a time like that we speak of revolution. That is how, between 1750 and 1850, in continental Europe, feudal society made the transition to capitalist society. The bourgeoisie took over from the nobility. In other words, people make their own history.

In this new bourgeois society, new classes emerged. Large-scale industry brought the working class into being. Marx and Engels introduced the insight to the young working class that major social change could only be the work of the working class itself. No, socialism was not born from the imagination of dreamers, but was the inevitable result of developments in modern society. Marx and Engels replaced dreams with science. They taught the young working class to have self-esteem: social change is always achieved by working people of flesh and blood,

by the workers and their thousands of leaders and representatives on the shop-floor, who are active in the factories in days of struggle but also in more difficult times.

Class struggle is a political struggle, for power in society, not a struggle to take over the existing system, but to establish a new state and society and to dismantle the old forms.

1.4. Understanding the economy

One class produces the wealth, the other class appropriates it: that is exploitation. In capitalist society this is done through surplus value. The worker sells his labour power to a businessman. His work is paid for with the wage he needs for his daily living, his training, his health, his home... But the value of the worker's labour is higher than his wage. This surplus value is pocketed by the businessman; that is how he makes a profit. In the capitalist system every businessman has to aim for the highest possible profit. If not he will succumb to his competitors. That is why he demands more intense and flexible labour, why he is always restructuring, why he is looking for the cheapest raw materials, why he wants longer working days and the largest markets. While his production increases, the real purchasing power of the workers is decreasing. Crises of overproduction are the result. This is what we call the *political economy* of Marxism.

1.5. Understanding the socialist experience

The efforts to realize another world than the capitalist one are not new. That's why it would be absurd to forget the experiences of struggle and socialism in the past.

The socialist countries had to establish themselves in very difficult circumstances and starting from backward and feudal social relations. They exerted enormous efforts to develop productive forces, without colonial exploitation. They eradicated unemployment and adopted the most progressive labour policies. They launched massive literacy programs⁴⁵, realized the right⁴⁶ to education and equal rights for women. They founded the first national health services and made health an inalienable right. Socialism had to be established in the context of a permanent conflict against global capitalism. This had important consequences. From the very first day the Soviet Union was confronted with interventions, economic blockades, political and military encirclement, subversion, sabotage and disinformation. The young Soviet Union defeated a military intervention and later on made a decisive contribution to the defeat of Hitler's fascism.⁴⁷ That took a huge amount of force and energy which could not be invested in other sectors.

Socialist construction has, in these circumstances, always been a process. For the European capitalist system to establish itself, more than 200 years and a great deal of violence were necessary. Socialism will also need time. There are no ready-made recipes for building a new society. It is a long historical process, with setbacks and advances; with great achievements but also with serious mistakes.

The velvet counter-revolution, which undermined socialism in the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe has had dramatic consequences. That is also a historical lesson. A large part of industrial and agricultural production was destroyed. Several years were chopped off the life expectancy of the inhabitants of these countries.⁴⁸ The Mafia, child prostitution, alcohol abuse,

organ trafficking, massive corruption, and extreme nationalism emerged. For Western Europe the situation also changed. Once the socialist block had collapsed, an attack was launched against social and political rights. The international balance of power changed. The United States, the sole remaining super- power, started a new aggressive march to conquer the world.

There are two dangers concerning Marxist theory:

Understanding requires study. Understanding Marxism doesn't come spontaneously. This study has to be thorough and not superficial. The first danger is *the underestimation of study and the importance of theory*. Some people have the tendency to talk about the practical consequences immediately and to skip the analysis and discussion. That is wrong. Theory is important for establishing principles, strategy and tactics. It is only if we have a correct analysis that we can put forward the right slogans in different circumstances, the right forms of organization, and the right proposals for action.

Others have a tendency to focus on theoretical and analytical discussion only, without transforming it into political and tactical orientations for actual practice. That is the second danger: *the separating of study from practice*. Study serves to improve practice. And practice will bring forward new problems, which need new answers. Marxism is a living science. It is continuously in evolution. It is not a collection of formulas. It is not a cookery book; so many pounds of this and so many pounds of that. It is essential to master theory thoroughly and to apply it creatively in the current conditions. This is how a theory becomes richer and more varied. It is true for any scientific discipline: practice, with a great deal of *trial-and-error*, brings progress. Anyone forgetting this will become rigid and dogmatic.

2. The future belongs to the working class

Today's working class is different from 150 or 200 years ago.⁴⁹

It has become more *international*. It is confronted with transnational corporations instead of national companies competing for local markets. The transnational corporations are competing for world markets in a global production process. Ford Motor Company, even without its subcontractors, has more than 350 000 workers in 96 different countries.

The working class is experiencing an increasing *integration of intellectual and manual labour*. The past few years, information, communication and transportation technologies have undergone enormous development. The production process demands more technological knowledge, making the distinction between blue and white-collar workers arbitrary in many sectors: everyone is involved in production.

The working class has become *dispersed*. Big companies where tens of thousands of people worked together have given way to large production systems. This has taken place because of the massive outsourcing of tasks. In the neighbourhood of the big companies, tens of suppliers, subcontractors, HR recruitment offices, and small firms of pseudo-self-employed workers have set up shop, leading to a threat for the trade union tradition and the collective spirit of militant sectors.

The working class has also become *more diverse*. More than half of those working in the public sector are employed on a contractual basis. Several formerly public sectors have become independent or have been privatized: private management has been introduced and working conditions have become harder.

This is the case for nurses in hospitals, postal workers, teachers, certain civil servants...

We have an all-encompassing vision of the working class. A *vision that unites* and not one that divides. Whether it is about the steel workers from Forges de Clabecq, the ‘white-coat anger’ movement in health care, the teachers’ movement, the actions of the unemployed, in the restaurants, the banks,... it is one class of people who are working for a salary. In our country this concerns about 4 million people and their families. Becoming a workers’ party means in the first place that these people should feel at home in the Party. (See also chapter 4)

For *strategic reasons* we pay special attention to the large production systems and the key sectors of the economy, to big companies with all their suppliers and subcontractors.

These production networks are the core of today’s economy and they are particularly focused on organization and struggle. They are the places where most people are working together, where they are better trained, organized and disciplined by production. It is where most knowledge exists on modern production techniques and planning. It is where most traditions of struggle are present. For these reasons, they are the most apt to draw the other layers of the working class into the struggle for a society without exploitation.

The working class may have changed, but its *place in society* is essentially the same. It is the large-scale industrial working class which produces and creates wealth. And it is the very small group of stock holders, rent seekers and big capitalists which pockets the wealth and remains in control.

A new society can function without the class of stock holders, rent seekers and capitalists. But there is no society which

can function without workers. The fact that the working class has become more international and has gained more knowledge about scientific and technical developments makes it more capable of creating and ruling this new society. It is capable of controlling the production chain, socializing it and placing it in the service of the whole world. That is why the future belongs to the working class.

3. A society without exploitation

According to the FAO (food agency of the United Nations), the earth is capable of feeding all people in a sustainable way. And yet there are 842 million people who are chronically undernourished and 2 billion people without food security. Every 3.6 seconds a child dies. The cost of eradicating hunger amounts to 24 billion dollars, less than one tenth of the cost of the war on Iraq. In Venezuela, 1.5 million people have learnt to read and write in two years' time with the help of Cuban teachers and the program "Yo, si puedo!" (Yes, I can). Yet this model is not being spread worldwide. On the contrary, public schools are closing all over the world and education is becoming more and more expensive. A fifth of all adults in the world are illiterate.

Information technology (IT) and robots are great to make the working day less stressful. And yet the opposite is happening: those who work have to work harder and longer and be more flexible.

The development of sustainable energy and the rational use of it should be a priority for all governments. A great deal of money is needed for research in this field. And yet the technologically

most powerful country prefers to inject billions of dollars into the military industry which threatens mankind and the planet.

Present-day globalization provides no solution. On the contrary, it brings about the globalization of maximal profit.⁵⁰ It threatens mankind and the planet. We want another world, a socialist world, with regard to the economy, politics and ethics.

3.1. The economy

Thanks to IT, the United Nations were able to develop new programs to map the needs of the world's population: *mapping people and their needs*.⁵¹ The transnational companies in the energy, food, health, transportation and communication sectors have grown so big that it would be possible to make a rational plan for how to meet these needs. These big transnational companies, however, are in private hands and have to strive for maximum profit. Companies don't close because they make losses, but because they don't make enough profit. Big Pharma⁵² for example, does not think about patients but about money. And it will continue to do so as long as it is in the hands of big shareholders and banks.

We are for the *social ownership of the most important means of production*. That means that big companies, big landholdings, agribusiness, means of communication and transportation will be put under collective ownership.

We want a *plan economy at the service of society and in balance with nature*.

The social ownership of the big means of production unites the different companies for a common goal. It ends anarchy in production. A division of labour and means of production based

on a plan becomes possible. The plan is made with the active participation of the whole working population.⁵³ It focuses on essential questions and allows decentralization, autonomy, creativity and personal initiative as much as possible.

3.2. Politics and the State

“If the freedom of enterprise is running counter to the freedom to live, which of them has to be curbed?” That is what the journal *The Lancet* wrote about the usurious price setting of big companies for medicines against cancer.

The whole system is geared towards the defence of the ‘freedom to make super profits’. The big companies have an enormous influence, through 101 networks and hidden entries to the organs of the State and to the classical political parties: through lobby groups, through the *revolving door*-system that gives politicians a seat on the Boards of companies and managers a place in the party bureaus etc. The working class is allowed to vote but doesn’t have a real say about work in the factories, life in the neighbourhoods, the organization of education, care for the elderly, health care.

The State is keeping everyone’s life under watch. There have never been so many means to keep the people in check: cameras, social security cards, electronic cards, bank cards, satellites, etc. *Big Brother is watching you*. The freedom of the trade unions, the freedom of speech, and the freedom of organization are threatened. And the State keeps judicial and police powers on standby to suppress any opposition movement when needed. There is another, much richer vision of democracy, a vision that supposes another State. Does democracy not mean: people’s

participation, power to the people? This means that working people have a say in essential aspects of the organization of society. At all levels: neighbourhoods, workplaces, regions and countries. It also means participation in the planning of the economy, the organization of education, science and technology. It means that a new judicial and police apparatus should be put in place, which should be more democratic. Representatives should be paid an ordinary wage, they should be accountable to voters and removable. And this means the socialist State should have the right to defend itself against aggression and subversion. In short, it means political power will be wielded by the working people. That's what we call a *socialist, participative democracy* and a *socialist State apparatus*.⁵⁴

3.3. Ethics

In our society, everything, literally, is for sale. Human beings are tested for their utility, like any other product. The cold indifference of easy money de-humanizes social relations and creates an environment in which human life is more and more perceived as lonely and isolated. Instead of existing for the development of people, mass media are being used as a social placebo.

Moral confusion, the commercialization of culture and relations, irrationalism, growing egoism, cruelty in human relationships, adaptation to war and violence: these are the characteristics of a society in decline.

The features of tomorrow's world – a planned economy, a participatory democracy and a socialist state – already show that other norms and values are possible. Capitalism creates individualism, while socialism creates solidarity. Capitalism abandons

people. It encourages an attitude of ‘every man for himself’ and pits people one against the other. Socialism, on the other hand, aims at integration, collectivism, humanism, internationalism and anti-racism. It envisages honesty, modesty, justice and responsibility.

It is in this spirit that 38,000 Cuban doctors are rendering voluntary medical assistance in 92 countries. With Medicine for the People, our doctors are making similar achievements on a smaller scale. This already gives us a glimpse of the features of the society of tomorrow we are dreaming of. We must influence mass media positively, as well as education, neighbourhood councils and trade unions, in order to encourage society to be receptive to human values. We are working for the victory of truth over lies, of solidarity over egoism, of peace over war, of development over underdevelopment, of culture over illiteracy, of life over disease and death.

4. Social action, reforms and fundamental changes

Will we soon be working 10-hour working days and 50-hour working weeks? How much will our pensions amount to? To what extent will we still have the right to strike tomorrow, and to express our opinion freely? ‘Free-market’ Europe, which is nothing but the Europe of the big monopolies, is undermining many of our social and democratic rights.

The conflict over the rights we have obtained is not new, it is a continuous class struggle. The labour movement has obtained great results: the right to organize, to strike, to vote, social security, paid holidays, the eight-hour working day... all

through relying on its own strength: by organizing, making people aware, waging action and building up a more favourable correlation of forces. Fundamental improvements have never been accorded without struggle or (international) pressure. At the same time, any achievement is also partly a concession by the establishment, ‘to prevent worse’. This means that no achievement is final and complete. What has been obtained today can be under attack once again tomorrow.

Our call is not: “We will solve it for you”, but “Take your life into your own hands. Organize, mobilize, become conscious!” Our role as a party is to help in organizing, mobilizing and raising people’s consciousness. It is the people themselves, in their offices and schools, in the neighbourhoods and the workplaces, who will move and be active for bigger or smaller changes. Such practical changes are needed to improve living and working conditions. At the same time, the fight to obtain those changes is in itself a ‘school’ for discovering the force of collective action and learning how to give a political orientation.

In the years to come, our Party will mainly be active on five themes: social progress, democratic rights, international solidarity, peace and protection of the environment. In none of these fields will the achievements be sustainable as long as capitalist monopolies exert their power. But the various fields in which people are active, will finally converge into one great movement for societal change.

That will not happen automatically. We will have to work for it. Reformists want to divide and confuse the movement with concessions and charity, they want to demoralize it and divert it from class struggle. Our Party tries to find slogans that heighten the level of consciousness of the movement. We propose forms

of organization aimed at enhancing the movement's fighting power, we launch proposals for action which will draw as many people as possible into the movement.

Indeed, tomorrow's world, socialism, will not fall from heaven, it will not come as a free gift from above. It will be the result of a long period of conflict between the two major enemy camps directly confronting each other in several domains: the class of capital owners and the working class. In the end, the working class will hold power, at the expense of the propertied class. This is what we call the transformation of society, a socialist revolution.

In today's Europe, we are still a long way from that situation. History teaches us that the transition from one society to another is only possible – broadly speaking – if two conditions are met.

First, *the situation must be ripe*. This happens when the propertied class is seriously divided and is no longer *able* to rule as before, when major parts of the population can no longer tolerate its rule, when the people *can* no longer live as before, and massively move into action – which is quite rare in 'peaceful' periods.

The situation can be ripe in periods of major crises: in times of war, as at the end of the First and the Second World War in Europe; or in times of the collapse of the stock market system, as in the winter of 2001 in Argentina.

There is a second condition. Not only must the situation be ripe, the working class must also be prepared. In a situation of major crisis, the working class has to be sufficiently organized: in people's committees, trade unions, neighbourhood councils, mass organizations (of women, youth...). And it has to be

sufficiently conscious, in order to be able to achieve the transition to socialism. The maturity of the working class and the power of mass action depend to a large extent on the capacity of its vanguard, of the communist party. This second condition, the subjective condition, was largely absent at the end of World Wars I and II in our country.

5. A modern communist party

The PTB is no classical or traditional party. We subscribe to a party concept of the new type, which is defined by *our goal, our analysis, our tasks and our working principles*.

The goal. The party brings together all people pursuing a socialist society, a society with no exploitation of man by man. We organize to reach that historic goal.

The analysis. The party enables us to make a strategic analysis, based on the Marxist world view, and to adapt it creatively to the situation in our country. Study, discussion, assessing and generalizing experiences, overcoming unilateralism and errors, assistance and training: all those things are necessary. And all of that is only possible within a collective entity, the party. This also allows the efficient transformation of new insights into a political and tactical orientation for common practice.

The tasks. We strive to effectively transform the demands of the working people into struggle, organization and consciousness, to gather the best experiences and to generalize them.

Arouse (raise consciousness): people learn in different ways. Most people learn mainly by accumulating their own

experiences. Experiences acquired through collective social action are the richest ones. But they are insufficient. Understanding of the functioning of society, of its history and its future do not emerge spontaneously. The party continuously tries to merge the workers' movement with Marxist ideas. In order to do so, the party needs to be firmly rooted among the working people, and look beyond their immediate interests.

Organize: collective social action is an important venue for people to get together, to get organized and, often, to surpass themselves. In order to give a permanent character to such experiences, it is necessary to have permanent forms of organization, such as mass organizations. In order to further consolidate and advance the experience of the most active people, it is necessary to strengthen the party itself. The party is the highest form of organization.

Mobilize (lead the class struggle): struggle is the motor of change. Our party is a party of activists. We stimulate social action.⁵⁶ Social action can be very broad and encompasses petitions, meetings, popular assemblies as well as strikes, occupations, demonstrations, etc. It is in struggle that large groups of people learn most and fastest. The same is true for the most active organizers. Our aim is to discover, to develop and to give orientation to all kinds of struggle.

The working principles. The force of the party is not only defined by its ideological unity, but also by the collective force of all its members. You can break a finger, but not a fist. That is why we use principles such as the unity of will and action, the principles of the majority and the minority, and the principle that practical conclusions are binding for everyone.

The working principles of the party are defined in the party's Rules. Every member receives the Rules. Every active member

declares his agreement with the fact that the party functions according to its rules.

The basic organizational principle of the party is *democratic centralism*. This consists, among other things, of the following fundamental organizational principles:

- The election of the leading organs, from bottom to top. The right of each party unit to recall its elected leadership, within the limits laid down in the party rules.
- The party creates a venue for all ideas to be expressed, and for as many members as possible to participate in the collective work, the analysis, the decisions and the activity of party units.
- We take decisions within a democratic framework of debate and discussion, on the basis of the proposals that have been collected, the best experiences, our political program and a Marxist analysis. We resolve differences of opinion in a correct way. We take decisions by consensus or, if it comes to a vote, by majority. The minority abides by the majority.
- The decisions made by the leading organs and party officials are binding for the entire organisation. Once a decision has been taken, it is jointly implemented by everyone. Such discipline is needed in order to implement successfully the complex tasks of arousing, organizing and mobilizing, of politics and tactics. Fractions or groups which organize on the basis of other decisions or other political platforms are not allowed.
- The leading organs have the duty to render accounts on a regular base. They reply to the opinions and criticisms formulated by party units, in order to improve party work. Decisions need to be assessed in time, and summing-ups have

tobe made. Practice – what have been the results? - is the major criterion for any assessment.

- Each party organization has the right to make decisions and take initiatives in its own field. Initiative and decision-making are encouraged within the framework of the statutory principles, of the party’s political line and of the decisions of the higher organs.

6. An internationalist party

From the moment Marxist theory began to make inroads into the workers’ movement, internationalism has been an essential element of the movement. “Workers of all countries, unite” became its slogan. The unity of the world of the workers, as against the common interests of the world of capital, became known as *proletarian internationalism*.

Today, the capitalist world is more than ever international in its thinking and action. It is fighting for the control of world markets and natural resources. Siemens counts 426,000 workers in 78 countries, not counting the subcontractors. Never before have so few stockholders exerted control over the fruits of labour of so many workers from so many countries.

The working class can only triumph as an internationally united force. The international unity of workers is more important than national unity. The point is how to realize this unity practically. Internationalism is also a basic attitude with which to look at the world. We want to transfer this attitude to the orientation and the practical initiatives of the party.

The party is part of the *International Communist Movement*.

7. Executive decisions

The Eighth Congress gives the new Central Committee, and the party as a whole, the following mission:

1. In the coming period, to give special attention to the broader dissemination of our socialist view of society.
2. To set up an Education Commission of the Central Committee that must assure education on all levels: for friends and sympathizers, for consultative members, group members, militants and cadres (see also Chapter 4).
3. To stimulate all comrades to have ambitious objectives for study. We encourage (young) comrades to make contributions to the development of a present-day Marxist view in various fields.
4. To base all political and tactical proposals on an in-depth analysis. We reject contempt for theory. On the other hand, we want theoretical discussions and debate to result in proposals for improving our practice, in the short and the long run. This has then to be made concrete in slogans, forms of organization and models of action.
5. To work more actively with our theoretical review *Marxist Studies*. We want to elaborate a plan for a broader dissemination and a better use of the review. We want to maximize the use of the theoretical website www.marx.be and of the Docu Marx Centre in Brussels, which has acquired a unique position in the distribution of Marxist and progressive publications on various subjects (social, economic, philosophical, and scientific,...).
6. We want our portal website www.ptb.be also to contain a section on ‘societal debate’ and ‘Marxism’, as a way to more

profound analyses; FAQs on socialism; debate on capitalism and socialism; calls for educational activities, schools, the Marxist University; publicity for *Marxist Studies*; etc.

7. We want this societal debate also to have a place in the weekly newspaper *Solidaire*.
8. We want to produce a simple brochure, based on our slogan ‘People not profit’, to explain our vision of society. Socialism in 10 questions and 10 answers, so to speak. Starting from the real problems the workers are experiencing today, but also resolutely geared towards the future: socialism as the alternative.
9. We want to ensure that the work in the broad working class remains the basis of party work, and that, within the working class, sufficient attention is given to the strategic sectors of the economy and to the major production systems (see also Chapter 4).
10. We want internationalism to remain a cornerstone of party work, to be translated into practical initiatives and proposals. We want the party as a whole to see itself as part of the functioning of the International Communist Movement.
11. We want all party units to conceive their activities in the framework of the tasks of arousing (raising consciousness), organizing and mobilizing (carrying out actions). The entire party has to become a party of activists, directed at activities among the working people.
12. We want all party units to adapt creatively the democracy and discipline of democratic centralism.



A flexible party

Chapter 3. A flexible party

Content

Introduction 71

- 1 Tactics, a fully-fledged part of Marxism 71
 - 1.1. Strategy and tactics are like Siamese twins 71
 - 1.2. Tactics are not the objective;
tactics serve the strategy. 72
2. Tactics are an art.
Thirty recommendations for good tactics. 75
3. The party's profile is defined by ourselves.
People not profit 96
4. Particular attention for trade union tactics 98
 - 4.1. Our basic attitude is to reinforce the trade unions 98
 - 4.2. We promote the fullest possible democracy
in the trade unions 99
 - 4.3. We work for the greatest possible unity
of the trade unions 100

Introduction

A flexible party is a party that is able to adapt itself to the circumstances it operates in. It is the opposite of a rigid party, which acts invariably in the same way, irrespective of the political or organizational situation.

A flexible party is not a party without principles. On the contrary, a better comprehension and insight into principles (Chapter 2) allows us to react in a more flexible and creative way on issues like politics, organization and actions in everyday practice.

Some party members think it is only necessary to be principled. This is not correct. The most important task of the party is: to be both principled and flexible. There is a connection between these two parts. A body needs a strong spine. But also flexible limbs. Without the latter, the principled attitude turns into a skeleton (a spine without flesh, without living matter).

1. Tactics, a fully-fledged part of Marxism

1.1. Strategy and tactics are like Siamese twins

Reflecting on strategy means: knowing the way we want to go and what our long-term objectives are; knowing how we will reach these objectives and who will be our allies and enemies. Every organization, institution, or party has its strategy. In the previous chapter we explained the essence of our strategy. In summary:

1. We strive for socialism.
2. We are working on the relations of forces through raising consciousness, organizing and social action (mobilization).

3. We are a party of the working people.

Reflecting on tactics means: finding the best suited way and methods to progress in that direction. Submerging people with ‘great truths’ or ‘our complete program’ does not help us one step forward. We want to master the art of getting people’s minds and hearts moving. The latter occurs when people gain experience by backing a cause, when they start organizing themselves and start social action and struggle. For this reason it is essential to take into account the existing relation of forces, with the ideological circumstances and the level of conscience.

For our party this means: more attention to:

- slogans and demands that fit the situation, more attention to issues which get working people moving
- different forms of struggle, more attention to achieving small victories.
- adapting our communication, for *heart and mind*, in content and form, in language and image, with clarity and creativity, combining seriousness and humor.
- flexible forms of organization and initiatives which make the party more accessible, more attention to good functioning inside existing mass organizations (trade unions in the first place) and to correct cooperation with allies (front building).

1.2. Tactics are not the objective; tactics serve the strategy.

Your tactics are judicious if you know when to attack and when to defend. And they will change according to the situation. A team that always uses the same tactics in all situations will lose.

A team that always recklessly attacks will get the door slammed in its face. A team that only knows how to defend will never score a goal. The ABC of tactics is therefore: know your own strengths and weaknesses and those of your enemy, be able to take chances when they arise and to withdraw whenever necessary.

Our party currently wants to take two matters into account:

1. Globally, we are at a defensive stage (see Chapter 1). The working class has been forced on to the defensive and is continuously undergoing attacks against its standard of living, its past achievements, its living and working conditions. The whole of society, the media and the dominant ideology are pushing towards individualism, to ‘everyone for him or herself’ at the expense of the collective. This has a major impact on consciousness and on the relation of forces.

Our tactics must deliver a better answer to this situation. The party will only be the vanguard if it is able to win the hearts and minds of the masses. This requires appropriate methods. Wrong tactics (e.g. ultra-leftism) may arise based on a wrong judgment of the relation of forces, if we are blind to new circumstances and want to continue working ‘as in the old days’. Routine and a rigid attitude would be the result, everyone sticking to proven formulas, without looking for ways to make sure our politics can bring about an effective break-through.

2. Being defensive does not mean we cannot win any victories. We want to be more selective concerning our objectives and then work on them, resolutely and up to the end. We want to unite our strengths, instead of starting small fires which die out as quickly as they flare up. We want to make a better

distinction between our complete program and what we can bring about now.

We should call it a victory if the party is able to achieve something. We must not forget to cash in on our realizations (some examples: the reduction of the garbage taxes and the reopening of the city-owned swimming pool in Herstal, the reduction of the parking tax and the household taxes in Zelzate, better miners' pensions in Limburg, the large price reductions for cholesterol reducing drugs by the kiwi-action, keeping open the post office in Ghent, the sanitation of the Moretusburg neighbourhood paid by the polluter Umicore, the maintaining of the emergency ward Hoge Buken in Hoboken, the decontamination of the environment in Genk, etc.)

Tactics have always to remain subordinate to strategy. Our aim is to continue progressing towards our strategic goal. Tactics should help us in taking steps forwards. We are no populists thriving on cheap successes and demagogy. Our tactics must aim to elevate, not to bring down. In other words, *tactics are not a goal in themselves.*

We need the art of tactics in order to:

1. make people active against intolerable situations and exploitation.
2. make people more conscious about the society we live in as well as about the existing alternative.
3. help people in working together and organizing on a permanent basis. Permanent organizing is possible in mass organizations (of youth, women, the peace movement, international solidarity, environment...), in trade unions and in the party itself.

2. Tactics are an art. Thirty recommendations for good tactics.

Tactics are an art. Tactics have their own laws and rules. Everyone can learn them and improve his or her abilities. Tactics are important for the Party as a whole. Tactics count for each and every unit of the Party and for every rank and file group. But tactics are also important for every communist individually: how do I behave with my co-workers? How do I participate in the trade union? How do I act in my neighbourhood, at my kids' school, in my sports club?

We want everyone to use these thirty recommendations as a *checklist*. If we train ourselves in this, it will mean a big step forward for the whole Party.

1. We consider tactics as an art for the party.
2. We consider tactics as a political art.
3. Every tactical move must be grounded in a sound analysis.
4. We always base ourselves on a sober and objective analysis of the relation of forces.
5. In order to develop correct politics and tactics, we base ourselves on democracy within the party.
6. We rely on our elected representatives in order to improve our tactics.
7. We use enquiries and contacts outside the party to shape our tactical decisions.
8. We make a distinction between different levels.
9. We think and act in function of the majority.
- 10 We build up as broad networks as possible.
11. We make use of the contradictions among our enemies.

12. We understand the need to zigzag and to make compromises.
13. We want to be able to seize the right moment.
14. We deal with people's practical problems.
15. We achieve practical results.
16. We work towards small victories.
17. We support whatever is positive.
18. We encourage popular, sports and cultural events.
19. We make a distinction between what is external and what is internal.
20. We project recognizable personalities and spokespersons.
21. We are working towards a positive media policy.
22. We choose the subjects of discussion ourselves.
23. We steer the debate to our advantage.
24. We use the strength of a positive example.
25. We speak a direct, clear and simple language, understandable by the people.
26. We let the facts speak for themselves.
27. We speak to *hearts and minds*, we use language and images, with professional materials.
28. On the question of organization too, we don't stick to 'eternal truths'.
29. We encourage a rich diversity of mass organizations.
30. We strive for the widest possible alliances.

1. *We consider tactics to be an art for the party.*

Some comrades wrongly think that good tactics will result in pushing the Party to the background. On the contrary, attention to tactics enables us to put the Party up front in a

correct and effective way. The PTB is *the* party of the working people and that's the way we want to be known.

2. *We consider tactics as a political art.*

There exists a tenacious idea that fighting against sectarianism would be “less political”. The opposite is true. The more you act in an argued, justified and concrete way, the more you can convince and mobilize. The better you “play the piano”, the more you can intervene in a diverse, justified and practical way, the more you can make progress. The lack of capacity to convince or recruit people mostly stems from the use of slogans and stereotyped thinking which show you don't believe them yourself.

3. *Every tactical move must be grounded in a sound analysis.*

Marxism combines a scientific approach with a class outlook.

The kiwi campaign (note: for cheaper medicines through public tender, based on New Zealand's system, hence the name) showed why the scientific approach and the Marxist method are necessary. The kiwi issue touched the heart of the problem, and also struck at the heart (and the wallet) of Big Pharma. Marxism brings the role of the economy, of the production of surplus value, to center stage, permitting us to get to the heart of the matter and bring proposals touching the basic issues. Dirk Van Duppen won the debates because his expertise was irrefutable.

This scientific expertise is an indispensable pillar. In the party we want to get rid of the idea that this would be ‘intellectualism’ or ‘pedantry’. On the contrary, red politics is un-

thinkable without expertise. ‘Red and expert’, these skills are like Siamese twins, one can’t exist without the other. If we were able to determine the agenda ourselves concerning the kiwi model, this is because of our strong expertise: science serving the people and the struggle. This means also there has to be room to work on these skills.

4. *We always base ourselves on sober and objective analyses of the balance of forces.*

At the beginning of every campaign, social action or struggle, we study with accuracy the situation on the ground. While we were preparing the struggle against the Generation Pact (law to make workers retire at an older age) we succeeded in making a correct evaluation of the relation of forces. We had made a correct analysis of our strengths and of the weaknesses of the government. We were able to translate these into adapted slogans, demands and breaking points. At the same time we didn’t underestimate or overestimate the readiness for action.

Leftism, on the opposite pole, takes its own wishes for granted. This is a dangerous mistake. If our wishes don’t come true, we often fall into pessimism and gloom.

If the balance of force is not favorable, it doesn’t mean we have to give up and sigh that ‘nothing can be done’. We can change the relation of forces by basing ourselves on the masses, on our allies in the trade unions and in progressive circles. Precisely in such a situation correct tactics can serve us fully.

5. *For developing correct politics and tactics, we base ourselves on democracy in the party.*

The demands and slogans in the struggle against the Generation Pact were the result of a broad consultation during general assemblies, in the basic groups and militant cores. To conceive our politics and tactics, we want to listen closely to what is living in the party. Our members have plenty of contacts with the people. We have many members who are also members of trade unions, often with a great deal of experience, who are facing tactical issues all the time. They know what takes hold and what doesn't, how to show matters in the best light, how to talk about the most sensitive subjects, etc. We want to take their opinions seriously.

6. *We implicate our elected representatives in order to improve our tactics.*

Every day they are dealing with the concerns of the masses, with the political positions and the internal affairs of other parties. They have to take stands and make alliances continuously. This makes it possible for them to acquire a lot of experience, to be flexible while sticking to principles. We want to use this in the best possible way, instead of tagging it as 'electioneering'.

The main thing is that the representatives themselves stick to principles, that they work under the leadership of the party and organize their work in function of the struggle ('street-council-street' or 'shop-floor-council-shop-floor').

7. *We use investigations and contacts outside the party to shape our tactical decisions.*

Example. In Genk there is a problem with air pollution from the company ALZ. Some made the remark; 'if we attack that

problem the factory might shut down and move to where the environment rules are less strict and where wages are lower. For us, our employment is more important than our environment’.

How should we deal with the contradiction between the people in the factory and those in the neighbourhood? Actually, the people in the neighbourhood also care about jobs. From the very beginning we made contact with the trade union representatives of ALZ. We wouldn’t start anything without their opinion first. We drew up a petition which demanded no other action but that the factory measure the pollution. Then we moved to practical, realistic measures which the district council could take: clean up the school and the most affected parts of the neighbourhood on a regular basis. We gave the people of the area ten practical recommendations to enable them to face the problem themselves. All this agitation finally led to a result: ALZ has built a storehouse to contain the spread of the dust. As result of our action ALZ has taken a measure without any job being threatened.

8. *We make a difference between different levels.*

Amongst the working people more conscious and less conscious groups exist, there are pioneers, those who hesitate and followers. In every struggle the art consists of leaning on the vanguard, winning over the middle group and neutralizing the rearguard. We want to use the most advanced ideas to overcome feelings of weakness and doubt, to refute the ideas of the employers and the government amongst the masses. We want to provide the pioneers with the best analyses and points of view so that they can spread them.

Example. At the end of August 2005, the front against the Generation Pact was still rather calm. It was important to make a correct assessment of the situation. Had the class struggle already silently ended? Was it still justified to make a central campaign about it? Here is the judgment of the Central Committee: “Early retirement remains a sensitive issue, like all polls (ours included) have shown for three years. It is not because people aren’t talking much about it inside the factories that there would not be a simmering resistance. ‘People are not talking about it today, so we should not bother with it.’ This is a-political reasoning. We know that people are against these measures, we also know they haven’t got any accurate information about the precise attack of the government. So it is our task to distribute this information widely and to propose an orientation. In the current period, the campaign about early retirement must be the priority for all the party’s workplace units. Struggle movements don’t develop along a straight line. They make detours and leaps. Calm periods alternate with explosions.”

We must make a distinction between the vanguard, a large middle group and the rearguard. We have to associate continuously with the vanguard and organize it in the Party and in the trade unionist movement, so that the latter is able to give an orientation to the mobilization. We have to draw in the middle group so that it wakes up and develops. We have to neutralize tactically the backward masses. We can’t use the point of view of the rearguard to defend the idea that early retirement ‘is not a concern’, that people ‘don’t want to fight for it’.

9. *We think and act according to the majority.*

In our slogans, models of action and organizational proposals, we always want to take the real level of consciousness of the broad masses into account.

Example. In the issue of the threat of a split of Belgium we have to fully understand how the majority in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels thinks, and take this into account to develop appropriate tactics. This doesn't mean just following the majority. In each part of the country we have various stereotypes to fight against, but everywhere we defend national unity and a stop to regionalization. We use the arguments which take hold, and these may vary according to the region.

10. *We build up networks as broad as possible.*

We do our best to work with the largest possible number of people, even with those who don't agree with us. A large circle of contacts can occur in different places and levels.

We encourage everyone to involve himself in his neighbourhood, in his living environment. Personal contacts are very important to make people progress.

In our workplaces too, we can build up a network around ourselves. We want to pay more attention to new methods of networking. During the Volkswagen struggle there were two websites and one online forum for the workers, in which several Party members took part. During the Opel struggle, an international discussion forum was launched.

These are often interesting methods to reach young people and to build contacts.

Opinion makers, journalists, academics, people from the cultural, artistic or sports spheres often have a broad look

on or an important experience of what's going on. We want to network with them too. The kiwi campaign offers a very good example of this. Doctor Dirk Van Duppen developed his authority through contacts in the trade union movement (particularly the non-profit sector), the KWB (Christian workers movement, not a trade union), the ACW (organization of all Christian social movements) and the Christian Mutual Insurance, in academic circles, among doctors and pharmacists, with representatives of other parties. It is a huge mistake to think that the work at the 'top' would be in contradiction with the work at the grassroots. On the contrary, there is a need for a combined approach that allows a specific space for professors and scientists, journalists, leaders of social organizations, trade union leaders and the trade union rank and file, party members, contacts in all kinds of organizations, etc. We must also have the courage to have contacts with 'high level personalities'. We befriend these people and learn from their tactics.

11. *We make use of the contradictions among our opponents.* Unity among allies, division among opponents is an important practical principle. In the kiwi campaign this was applied in an excellent way. Companies producing generic drugs don't do so out of love for mankind, but to get their share of the profit. But the debate on the kiwi model made it possible for them to take part in the offensive against the power and arbitrariness of Big Pharma. We were able to make use of this contradiction to introduce the kiwi model. The kiwi model was launched after SP.A (Flemish socialist party) Health Minister Frank Vandenbroucke granted a monopoly for the

cholesterol reducing drug Zocor. The president of the SP.A Stevaert quickly endorsed the kiwi model that was causing so much trouble to minister Vandembroeck. This allowed us to be better known to the rank and file of the SP.A and the socialist trade union.

12. *We understand the need to zigzag and to make compromises.*

A good compromise may be necessary to consolidate results after a maximal mobilization. In the struggle to get trade union shop steward Marc Dewachter back into the factory Umicore in Hoboken, we refused a bad compromise because it was implying that Marc should give up his membership of the party. But we did agree to a second compromise which gave Marc the possibility to act as a PTB member inside the trade union. The essential was saved, but the balance of forces didn't allow us to go any farther.

The point is to consider in every case whether the result leads to an increase in consciousness, whether it promotes organization or encourages disorganization, whether the result protects the will to struggle and win or on the contrary saps this will.

In the same vein, there is also the need to preserve unity when the possibilities of continuing the struggle are exhausted. We want to be the last to leave the battlefield, but this doesn't mean we have to end up isolated, continuing to shout in the middle of the desert.

13. *We want to be able to seize the moment.*

This means that at certain moments, when all circumstances are favorable, we have to take the initiative, speed up and not

wait any longer. It's like feeling the right moment to attack during a bicycle race.

The week following the elections was our 'week of the Dutch-speaking press'. Every day we were in the main papers. What had happened? Our good results gave a justification to the journalists already interested in the Party before the elections. The relation of forces within the editors' boards had been modified (very slightly). The week after, they changed again and went back to the policy of silence. Thus we had an opportunity to publicize quickly and thoroughly the renewal of the PTB and to reinforce on a long-term basis the support of progressives such as Tom Lanoye (Flemish author) who had spoken out in favour of us.

The 'new PTB' had appeared! By using that positive opening, we succeeded in opening the door to the media a bit and in defining our profile ourselves.

14. *We deal with people's everyday problems.*

There are no small problems. Revolutionaries are the best advocates for reform, because they are truly concerned about the people's problems, big and small. Our socialist vision of society gives us the conviction we must defend the interests of all wage-earners - blue and white-collar workers and civil servants in a principled way.

What makes us different from reformists is our way of taking action for reforms. Every struggle offers the possibility to activate people. Through collective action, people learn how to take their fate into their own hands. Every struggle brings opportunities of understanding and consciousness (for instance with demands aimed at the huge power of the

monopolies). Every action creates chances for long term collaboration and organizing. Activation, consciousness raising and long-term organizing are vital to achieve a new society.

15. *We achieve practical results.*

We are not selling wishful thinking, we are people who act. That's the way we want to be perceived: as a party that achieves things, which stands close to the people.

The people's clinics of Doctors for the People are still the best example of what we are able to achieve. The lawyers of the Party are committed to the protection of trade unionists and the right to strike, to the struggle of undocumented persons within the front organization UDEP, to the protection of the communist movement. The student section of COMAC (the PTB's youth movement) helps students prepare their exams at yearly collective study camps. The Pioneers (PTB's children's movement) organize school support. The Party organization 'Friendship without Borders' helps refugees and organizes meetings with them during the Christmas period. We want to explore the opportunity of organizing permanent 'social help desks' where people can ask advice on a specific matter, as the Party is currently doing in Herstal about the price of energy. The forthcoming www.ptb.be portal offers broad opportunities to create that kind of contacts.

We want to gather all proposals to apply these examples in a creative way in other fields, in workplaces and in the trade unions in the first place. As for instance selling roses in solidarity with the victims of work accidents, orga-

nized by the C-DAST (Center for Defence and Action on Workers' Health, created by Doctors for the People). Or the struggle against penalties based on 'bad marks' at Ford Genk.

16. *We work towards small victories.*

Small victories are important to protect the people's enthusiasm and capacity for action. They keep the members' morale high and are the best possible promotion for the Party amongst the broad masses. As long as we claim them as victories of the Party of course.

Our best trump card to obtain these victories is by popular mobilization. To gain small victories you must carry the issue through to the end. We don't light straw fires that die down as soon as we leave. We keep our promises.

17. *We support whatever is positive.*

The PTB supports all the legitimate aspirations of the working class. We want to discover the expectations of all working people. These are never 'pure'; there are always 'flaws', like on a rough diamond. We shouldn't be afraid of dust or waste, we have to see the diamond hidden underneath. So we learn to discover positive tendencies and to protect the workers' enthusiasm.

Leftism, on the other hand, focuses on negative aspects only. It is the exact opposite of a communist attitude. Communists don't complain about the negative sides. They support the positive points and use them to overcome or isolate the negative ones.

8. *We support popular, sports and cultural events of the workers.*

In the factory, it is only the relation boss-worker or employer-employee that counts. A large part of the day, a worker works only for the benefit of his employer. Most people have only limited possibilities to use their creativity and skills for other working people. Outside working hours, many workers are active in sports, music, leisure, popular culture. Such activities teach people to work together, to organize and to use their skills in a creative way, to the benefit of other workers.

We totally support these activities and appreciate the commitment of so many people. We also develop such activities ourselves, such as the yearly *Tour de Frans* in Zelzate, which gives the Party sympathizers and members the occasion to unfurl their skills in various activities such as bike hikes, a food rally, urban walks, rifle shooting, a fishing contest, fairs, etc.

19. *We make a distinction between what is internal and what is external.*

The best chefs keep their recipes for themselves, and often in the kitchen matters are more chaotic than in the carefully kept atmosphere of the dining-room. Within the party there has to be sufficient room and attention for all strategic and tactical questions. To the external world we have to know what is essential. We want to concentrate on this in the limited time and space we get in the media, even when journalists are more interested in our internal affairs or in the more difficult points of our program.

20. *We project recognizable personalities and spokespersons.*

They play an important role for the reputation of the Party, in the way people perceive the Party. We want to be a party of ‘living people’ of ‘flesh and blood’. We want to work seriously on the issue of developing young national spokespersons. For every important issue, the Party wants to train an expert who can stand out in debates, in the media. The www.ptb.be portal site can play an important role in giving visibility to our spokespersons and experts. We also want to organize media training for a broad group of cadres.

21. *We are working at a positive media policy.*

On this matter we don’t have all the cards in our hands. In the end, most media remain in the hands of some big press companies and their shareholders.

But it would be totally stupid to conclude we are not able to exert more efforts towards the media. Every base group or party unit can achieve this. Journalists are human beings who can appreciate good (and entertaining) actions, well developed arguments and the good results we can show. On this basis we obtained a slight break-through at the last local elections.

We want to look continuously for possible openings. By making contact ourselves with journalists we got our chance in the *Gazet van Antwerpen*, *Le Soir* and the *election poll* of the VRT-TV. We want to react to current events with press releases, symbolic and entertaining actions during our campaigns (like the coach trip to the Netherlands to buy cheap Paracetamol). We want to use letters to the editor and public forums on news websites much more actively.

22. *We choose the subjects ourselves.*

When we get into the media, the number one rule is that we choose the subject ourselves. We cannot be shooting in all directions, therefore we try to stick to the core of the message. We avoid debates that are lost even before they have started. It is always possible to dodge embarrassing questions when they don't treat a current issue, or because they are a provocation or concern issues which are not easily understandable by a broad public.

This doesn't mean we have to reject all difficult questions. It only means it is up to us to choose what is on the agenda, and that we don't always react to anything.

23. *We steer the debate to our advantage.*

We don't only want to be right, we want it to be recognized that we are right. To advocate a position in a positive way doesn't mean to remain silent on more difficult issues. On such issues we want to find the best angle of attack. The best way to counter the (fascist) Vlaams Belang is to make clear it is the party of the rich and the employers. Their racism and nationalism are just tools to divide people in order to achieve their agenda. We can mark points on difficult issues like racism and refugees when based on personal experiences such as the case of Semira Adamu (a refugee suffocated with a pillow by police officers) or of Angelica (a little girl from Ecuador jailed in a refugee center).

A trade unionist was right to write: "You can never exclude that you will have to undertake a frontal attack on racism. But the important tactical principle is that we must always analyze carefully when to attack and when not. Workers,

who find themselves in an almost permanent situation of conflict with their bosses, are used to that. When will I say this or not; when will I do that or not; how will I say or do that? The will to understand the laws of tactics depends on the will to win, to obtain practical results. Tactics are essentially the search for the correct way – or the detour – the correct means and the right moment to achieve a certain goal.”

24. *We use the strength of the positive example.*

The fact that a tax on wealth exists in France and in the Netherlands contradicts the argument that it would make capital flee the country. Positive experiences of struggle are often much more convincing than many arguments. The success of the Dockers against the *Port Package directive* of the European Union (making it possible for sailors to load and unload ships) or the success of the French youth against the First Job Contract (CPE, allowing employers to fire young people during their first two years of a job) are really encouraging for the rest of the working class.

Example. The ‘cholesterol war’ became a successful recipe once we added the kiwi to it. The idea of the kiwi was brought up by an official of the Christian Mutual Insurance: “Dirk, you have to go and see how they do it in New Zealand.” This way we found an alternative to ‘the mess’ of Minister Vandembroucke, an alternative that is simple, realistic, logical and profitable to both patients and health insurance. The kiwi model. It gave perspectives and a goal to fight for. It formed the basis for a broad mobilization and a broad front.

25. *We speak a direct and simple language, understandable by the people.*

We make everything simple, our material, our activities, so that the people we are working with feel comfortable with it. We want to pay extra attention to avoiding party jargon, to simplifying the message. In language and in image. To the *mind* as well as to the *heart*. With humor as well as with seriousness. Humor is a forceful tool in communication. We can learn from powerful working-class orators like Roberto D’Orazio or Jan Cap, who are far from a rigid bureaucratic language. We can learn also from the way popular leaders like Hugo Chávez are able to get a crowd moving.

26. *We let the facts speak for themselves.*

What’s important in any issue is the facts, facts and facts... so that the reader can draw his own conclusions. People are really able to do so! Some people found Dirk Van Duppen’s book ‘too dry and too distant’. They said: ‘Indignation is missing’. But that was not right. Yes, there is a need for emotion, but as much as possible based on experience, and in a reasonable proportion to the facts. It is right to say we have to affect the reader or the audience: once confronted with the facts, they should “make his blood boil”, as the magazine *Humo* wrote about the book. But you can’t say: ‘Your blood has to boil because I am really angry myself.’ If the reader or the audience draws his own conclusions from your facts, if they make him angry, those conclusions and that anger will be all the more deeply rooted.

27. *We address hearts and minds, with language and images, with professional materials.*

We base ourselves on well documented analyses and issues, leading to irrefutable proposals. This is the work to win the minds. But there is also the work to conquer the hearts, the soul. Personal contacts are of decisive importance. But if you want to reach a larger group of people, it becomes impossible to receive everyone personally, offer them a cup of coffee and patiently tell them your story. That's why the impression people have of you is important. A house style helps to show the soul of the party and makes people feel comfortable, when they come in contact with the Party.

On the portal site, in our weekly paper *Solidair(e)*, in mass leaflets and in the many workplace and neighbourhood leaflets we address not only *minds*, but also *hearts*. A picture says more than ten long sentences. A good headline draws much more attention than a pompous slogan. Images, cartoons, headlines and subtitles in mass leaflets are as important as the text itself.

28. *On the matter of organization we don't stick to 'eternal truths'.* We want to keep searching for forms of organization which fit the circumstances best. Today we want mainly to lower the threshold in order to become the party of the working people (see Chapter 4). Organizational forms can vary depending on the rise or decline of the movement. During the struggle against the Generation Pact we opened the base groups more broadly. Within five months, from October 2005 to March 2006, 483 persons became members of the party, including about 200 trade unionists.

The party wants to offer permanently various types of accessible activities, including family type ones. The *Tour de Frans* is a real popular fair, and the *Café Santé* in Hoboken is a friendly monthly chat organized by Doctors for the People, attended by many sympathizers.

29. *We encourage a broad spectrum of mass organizations. They are of vital importance for people to accumulate experiences.* Aside from the work in existing mass organizations (like trade unions, neighbourhood organizations, youth clubs, international solidarity and peace associations, etc.), the Party can also initiate new organizations. They are active in a specific field of the Party program and attract in that area a broader audience of non-party members. The main mass organization of the Party is the youth organization Comac. Next we have Marianne, the women's organization; the Pioneers, the children's organization; and Friendship without Borders, working with refugees.

30. *We strive for the widest possible alliances.*

In every movement fighting for social progress, democracy, international solidarity, peace and safeguarding of the environment, we develop an active united front policy. Its goal is to reach the broadest and the strongest mobilization possible. United fronts lead mass movements. Co-operation sometimes means compromise regarding the platform, in order to maintain unity. This goes against sectarian tendencies of wanting to be always entirely right.

In the front, we appreciate the positive aspects of the organizations we are working with. The PTB is committed to

an open, honest and confident attitude towards the various partners in the front. If criticisms have to be made, we want to do so with measure. The objective must always be to reinforce the work of the front and its actions.

Playing piano with 30 keys

The intention is to apply a maximum of these tactical recommendations at the same time. A good example was provided by Christine, a basic member from Ghent. She launched a neighbourhood committee to struggle against flood damages.

She used various tactical principles from the very start:

- Assessing that the problem is important and needs to be taken care of (point 14). In the past, people would slam the door in our face when we said we were PTB members. Nowadays, people in the neighbourhood are very positive towards us.
- She collected all the cases (point 10) and addressed the neighbourhood committee with them (point 11).
- The neighborhood committee then had a meeting with the mayor, which was already a victory in itself (point 16).
- They constituted a file with the cases of flooding and its consequences, and formulated demands based on these cases (point 15).
- Acting in a tactical way during the meeting with the mayor (admitting positive points), she was able to project herself as the head of the committee (point 20).

3. The party's profile is defined by ourselves. People not profit

We want to define the profile of the party ourselves. We can work actively towards this. Even if we don't have all elements in our hands, we can work actively towards a positive profile of the party, proposing our party as it actually is. Not as it is described in prejudices, clichés and half truths.

Our profile is expressed by our *baseline* 'People not profit'.

1. *A versatile political party.* A party which establishes itself in the first place as a political party. We are not a trade union pressure group, but a party which, through all its political actions, focuses on the entire working people. Today we are known in the first place as a party with a strong social agenda, a party striving for social justice and international solidarity. A party which campaigns for democratic rights and peace. A party which fights to preserve the environment for the coming generations. A party which wants to put an end to the exploitation of men and women.
2. *A party in which working people feel at home.* A party in which blue collar workers, office workers, civil servants, young people, intellectuals and self-employed people are welcome. A party in which every member feels at home and is proud of. A party to which everyone contributes according to his or her means and on his or her own pace. A party of active members, built up in industrial firms, offices, municipalities and districts. A party of flesh and blood, with its part

of humor. We don't want to be an 'overly serious' party of 'all too serious' people.

3. *A party of (small) victories.* A party which not only knows how to explain matters, but actively takes part in the struggle. Not a party deploring how bad matters are, but which gives perspectives to the working people by helping them to achieve concrete victories.
4. *A transparent party, a glass house.* We have nothing to hide. We don't work in closed rooms or lobbies. We work in an open and democratic way. Our foundations are made of steel, but our house is of glass.
5. *A party that listens.* A party which is working continuously with consultations, with a listening ear to what is going on the factory floor, in schools, in offices or in districts. We remain determined, but no longer pretentious. For this reason we are not the party 'which is always right', nor the party of 'lesson givers' nor the party which has 'a monopoly of truth'.
6. *A balanced party.* We have thorough analyses, points of views and contributions. We let facts speak for themselves as much as possible. We are not a 'black or white' party, nor a party with a discourse full of exclamation marks and superlatives, but still a party which is clearly on the left, which says what it thinks without mincing its words.
7. *A party of action.* No talking heads. A party of deeds which can change things. Like Doctors for the People, with its 50

doctors in 11 people's clinics, providing free health care for their 25,000 registered patients.

8. *A party which is able to cooperate.* Cooperation with the large social organizations and with everyone who fights for social progress, democratic rights, international solidarity, peace and the protection of the environment. The movement for cheaper pharmaceutical drugs (kiwi) is an example of this.
9. *A communist party for today, looking for its own way to go.* Without dogmas or rigid recipes.

4. Particular attention for trade union tactics

4.1. Our basic attitude is to reinforce the trade unions

The trade unions are the main mass organizations of the working class. The trade unions' role is different from the party's role. The party organizes all people who strive for socialism (which of course is not 'the entire working class'). The trade union, on the other hand, organizes almost the entire working class as a class, certainly in our country.

So there is no 'competition' whatsoever between the party and the trade union, on the contrary. The trade union is irreplaceable for uniting the working class in its fight against capital. In a period where division and fragmentation is a central strategy of capital, this task has to be appreciated more than ever at its true value. It is the trade union's task to lead the class struggle, and we work

for the accomplishment of this task within the trade union. The trade unions as a whole belong to the front for social progress, democracy, peace and the environment. Our basic attitude in our entire action must be one of strengthening the trade unions. As a political party, we defend our positions vis-à-vis the trade unions. In doing this, we aim at unity with the immense majority of trade union officials and shop stewards.

The trade union contains various political currents. Many anti-capitalist forces are active in the trade unions, but there are also those who preach conciliation with the system. This contradiction is not a contradiction between the leadership and the rank and file, it cuts through the entire trade union, from top to bottom. As a party, we direct our criticisms at the bourgeois parties which try to push through their positions in the trade unions and which are protecting capital. We know very well that certain trade union officials actively promote this as well. But whenever we utter criticisms, we do so in a tactical way: with restraint, with a positive attitude and based on the positions of the masses. We call for fully developing democracy, thus helping to offer a solution. We positively support the good positions of the trade unions.

In crucial moments in the struggle, the party defends its vision, but abides by the decisions of the majority. This is in contradiction with our own past when we often called for an adventurous policy when there was no basis for this inside the trade union.

4.2. We promote the fullest possible democracy in the trade unions

At the grassroots, there is a lot of anti-trade-unionism. This is often influenced by the capitalists and by the Right, but it is

also the result of fights which have been blocked and of disappointment over decisions made by certain trade union officials. The trade union's tasks are: to unite the workers in the fight against capital and to be an organization which educates towards another vision of society. This cannot be done without developing the broadest possible democracy. All positions must be able to be expressed.

4.3. We work for the greatest possible unity of the trade unions

The division into three 'competing' trade unions is bad for the workers and often leads to unnecessary conflicts and division among the masses. Our tactical approach in the trade unions always starts from the desire for unity. We work for maximum unity and collaboration between the three trade unions and we combat any division of the trade unions along nationalist lines.



The party of working people

Chapter 4.

The party of working people

Content

Introduction 105

1. We want to become the party of the working people 105
 - 1.1. What do we mean by ‘party of the working people’? 105
 - 1.2. Proud of our party, based on practical achievements 106
 - 1.3. Today’s challenge: a breakthrough for working people 107
 - 1.4. If we want to change the world, we must be a party of the masses 108
2. How and where to build the party? 108
 - 2.1. Firmly establish ourselves in the world of labour 108
 - (a) *The factories and offices: our main field of action* 108
 - (b) *Supporting trade unions* 109
 - 2.2. To build local and municipal sections 111
 - 2.3. To seek co-operation and interaction between the various base party groups (workplace and local sections) 112
 - 2.4. To seek co-operation with all those who aspire to a just society 113
 - 2.5. Give priority to youth 113
3. A party of active members 114
 - 3.1. An active party 114

- 3.2. A party with many members 115
 - (a) *Choose sides* 115
 - (b) *Our objective: 5000 members by June 2010.* 116
- 3.3. Different levels in the party 116

- 4.1. Three different levels of commitment 117
 - (a) *The militants* 117
 - (b) *The party base groups* 117
 - (c) *The advisory members* 118
- 4.2. Respect for the rights and commitments of each level 119
- 4.3. You'll never walk alone: Group dynamics 121

- 4. Different levels in the party 116

- 5. In the PTB, everyone has the right to education according to his/her needs 122
 - 5.1. An education course for the base groups 122
 - 5.2. Basic education 123
 - 5.3. Training course on the setting up of a base group 123
 - 5.4. School for militants 123
 - 5.5. School for worker-cadres 124
 - 5.6. School of the 8th Congress - Cadres 124
 - 5.7. Other courses 124

- 6. What still needs to be changed to be able to achieve these goals? 124
 - 6.1. The party 124
 - 6.2. The style of work of the cadres 125

Introduction

Working people, young and old, healthy or ill, with or without children, men and women, French-speaking, Dutch-speaking and people speaking other languages are more and more left aside by the classical political world.

Our party makes a choice, to become the party of working people, more than ever today. A party where workers, blue-collar and white-collar, civil servants, the unemployed, young people, intellectuals and self-employed people feel at home. A party which supports trade unions instead of fighting them. An active party which can be seen in many more places. A party of its members, based on base groups with good group dynamics. A party which is well established in work-places and communities, with a good interaction between both. And also a party which educates and gives more attention to education at all levels.

1. We want to become the party of the working people

1.1. What do we mean by ‘party of the working people’?

In Chapter 2 we stated that we have a global vision on the working class. A vision which unifies and does not divide.

We aim in the first place at the class of workers in the broad sense. In our country this concerns approximately 4 million people and their families.

When we refer to the working class, we do not mean only factory workers but also office workers, public sector workers, nurses, teachers, the unemployed, the retired etc.

To become a party of the workers, a workers' party, means for us that all these people feel at home in the party.

1.2. Proud of our party, based on practical achievements

The PTB (Workers Party of Belgium) came out of the fusion between the left student movement and the workers' movement. (the Ford strike in 1968, the Limburg miners' strike in 1971, the dockers' strike in 1973...). From the beginning active workers' cores were built up, e.g. at Cockerill Yards in Hoboken (ship repairing), the Limburg mines, the shipyard Boel in Temse, the Antwerp port, etc. After ten years of party-building the PTB was founded officially on 4 November 1979.

In the past 30 years the party was built up further, with as guideline a firm commitment on the side of the workers, always in the perspective of a socialist society. When the Berlin wall fell, after the counterrevolution of 1989, the party remained standing. Since 2004 the party has worked on a thorough re- newal movement, confirmed now in the Eighth Congress. To- day the *pride for our party* is based on what we have achieved.

The PTB is now:

- a national party, active all over the country;
- a party with an organized section in 45 large firms, and which is active in about 75 other firms;
- a party active in 22 towns and municipalities, and which has 15 representatives in 8 municipalities;

- a party which publishes two weekly papers, *Solidair* in Dutch and *Solidaire* in French;
- a party which took the initiative to start up 11 free people’s clinics of Doctors for the People, where 50 doctors treat more than 25,000 patients;
- a party with an active youth organization Comac, which is active in 6 universities and several schools;
- a party with dozens of lawyers who work to serve the people and are actively committed to democratic and social rights;
- a party with organizations like the women’s movement Marianne, the refugee organization Friendship without Borders, and with a broad international activity.

1.3. Today’s challenge: a breakthrough for working people

In 2009 the PTB will celebrate its 30th anniversary. We have strong foundations, an excellent organization and broad initiatives. The next step we have to take is to force a definitive breakthrough among the working people. We must *have the courage to question some habits from the past*. Many factory and office workers and civil servants didn’t feel at home because of the high conditions for membership and action. Several working people moved away because they experienced the party as elitist, a party of ‘supermen’. Ordinary people, with their strong and weak points, didn’t identify themselves with a party which was too focused on a restricted group of cadres. We want to change this, and today it is possible for us all to rise to this challenge.

1.4. If we want to change the world, we must be a party of the masses

We need a party which is very well established in all layers of the population. It is these hundreds of thousands of people going everyday to the factories and offices who are the driving force of social change. Their fight for a worthy life is an essential factor in reaching socialism. This is why we must open our doors wide today. We have a solid party, but the number of members is way below what it could and should be.

2. How and where to build the party?

2.1. Firmly establish ourselves in the world of labour

(a) The factories and offices: our main field of action

Blue and white-collar workers in industry and in the important service sectors (postal services, railways, airports, ports, etc.) form the core of the working class. From their strategic position in the production process, they are the principal force in the process of change. For a party such as ours it is essential to have a strong presence in these firms and (public) sectors.

Even if there is a stronger pressure in firms, even if there is massive restructuring and more and more difficult working conditions, it is up to us to be creative and to seek new and good ways to develop the party's work in the factories and production chains. Labour history in our country teaches us that almost all the great movements of struggle started and were led from the largest factories or from the largest sectors. This was

the case for the general strikes of 1932, 1936 and 1960-61. It was the case for the great struggle against the 'global plan' in 1993. It was the case for the great movements of struggle in the sectors of the iron and steel industry, the mines, the shipbuilding. And also for the dockers who prevented European measures to dismantle their rights. And it was also the case at the time of the struggle against the 'Generation Pact' in 2005.

The essential force of the movement lies in the degree of organization of workers in the big factories, because these factories include the part of the working class that is not only dominant in numbers but also has more influence, a higher level of consciousness and more fighting spirit. Each factory must become a fortress for us.

The great challenge is: how to transform the many big factories and offices in Belgium into genuine bastions of struggle for the workers?

Hence the primary concern for the years to come is to win many members in factories and offices. This will increase the party's striking power and its influence on the struggle. We want to build an anti-capitalist current among factory and office workers and in the public sector.

(b) Supporting trade unions

Historically, workers founded trade unions in order not to stand alone against their employer. They united to obtain better wages and better working and living conditions.

Even if the positions of some of the leaders in high positions are sometimes opposed to the demands and expectations of many workers, one thing remains particularly clear today: trade unions are the most important mass organizations of the workers. They

can prevent the accelerated destruction of many social rights. They are capable of extracting new social and democratic rights. They make it possible for many workers to be educated in the ‘school of struggle’, for a society without exploitation. As a party of the workers we have the duty to make the trade unions as strong as possible.

In Belgium 75% of factory and office workers and workers in the public sector are organized in the trade unions, which have 3 million members all together. They are the largest social organizations in the country and have the largest anti-capitalist potential. Many of the direct demands of the trade unions come close to those of the PTB.

For that reason our members must be where the masses of the workers are organized. Our members must, as much as possible, play an active part in the reinforcement of the two largest trade unions.

Thanks to our positive attitude during the ‘Generation Pact’, and by debating on a correct basis with many trade union members and organizers, the openness towards our party has increased. By reinforcing these ties, co-operation is growing.

Shop stewards and trade union militants are the heart of the trade union in workplaces. This is why the support of and collaboration with shop stewards and militants in firms are an essential task for our workplace sections.

Jan Cap’s book, *In the name of my class*, explains the experience of the Boel Temse shipyard. Jan Grauwels’ and Luc Cieters’ book, *The battle of the mines* summarizes the struggle of the miners in Limburg. Finally, Gilles Martin’s book, *Those of Clabecq*, tells the story of the construction of a combative trade union in the iron and steel mills Forges de Clabecq.

To embrace the trade unions is the business of the party as a whole. We encourage each party member to become also a member of the trade union movement. We also want all units and sections to devote the necessary attention to trade union work: the international section, *Medicine for the People*, the young people, the lawyers, etc.

2.2. To build local and municipal sections

If we want to establish our party in a broad way, we will have to set up many sections at a local and district level. It is at this level that tens of thousands of workers, women workers, and young people live whom we do not yet reach now. The workers also experience exploitation in the municipalities and the cities, in their everyday life: high prices for energy, expensive medicines, bad infrastructure...

At the local level there are many needs and many demands, and at the same time many possibilities for the workers to organize and resist (e.g. the many successful actions in Zelzate, Herstal, Hoboken, Deurne, La Louvière, Seraing, etc.). There are the closing down of hospitals, municipal taxes, environmental problems, expensive garbage bags... Many big and small issues which trouble workers and their families. By setting up more local sections we can increase our influence in the districts, the municipalities and the cities. Here too we may obtain victories.

Our elected representatives in the municipal council work according to the following slogan: terrain-council-terrain. Taking action with the population for the solution of their problems remains their principal task.

2.3. To seek co-operation and interaction between the various base party groups (workplace and local sections)

For the members of the workplace sections, the priority field of action remains the factory or the office. However, at the same time we want more co-operation with the local sections and vice versa. The local section can help the workplace section in organizing propaganda and other activities. The municipal sections can also provide members for the workplace section. The doctors of Doctors for the People can intervene in the problems of safety in the factories.

Workplace and municipal sections can be mutually supportive at the local level. Together they can take part in easily accessible activities. A popular festival with 1000 participants in Zelzate, a mussels night in Hoboken or a ball with Nadia and Johan in Herstal are important events. They make the party attractive for a broad group of people.

The members of workplace sections can take part in these activities and bring along their friends.

Some workers, as well as trade unionists, have a special interest for local actions, are active in local clubs. Some prefer being active in their municipality. We want to respect their choice and also to make it possible. At the local level also, there are trade-union activities, third-world groups, committees... They are also important for the party. We invite our members to be active in these various fields as much as possible.

Even when the members of a workplace section are mainly organized in the base party group of their firm, they are invited without any obligation to the most important assemblies of

members of their area or municipality (e.g. on the elections) and we encourage them to take part in local actions (e.g. when a post office is threatened with closure).

2.4. To seek co-operation with all those who aspire to a just society

We want to co-operate with all social organizations and people who commit themselves to social progress, democracy, international solidarity, peace and the safeguarding of the environment.

2.5. Give priority to youth

Youth is the future. We want all base party groups to devote particular attention to the masses of young workers in our country. Many of our members are reaching their fifties. We want all our members to show particular interest in their young colleagues, as well as in the topics in which they are interested.

In the municipal and district/neighbourhood sections we want to give priority to the young and active households.

The PTB will encourage young comrades to go and work in factories and in the trade unions. They can help us bring the reality of young workers closer to us. In general, we want to encourage young people to be more interested in the world of labour, by taking them along to strikes, open union meetings...

We ask our youth to take part in the activities of the trade union youth groups of the ACV (Christian trade union) and the ABVV (socialist trade union).

We want our 'elders', who have more experience in factories and trade unions, to coach their new and younger comrades.

3. A party of active members

3.1. An active party

Our party is still not very well known. More activism is needed in order to be visible in many more places, so that people hear about the PTB. It is possible now to achieve this if we succeed in giving a task to all our new members.

- The PTB must be *everywhere where workers undertake action*. Our spokespersons should show their solidarity and support to activists and strikers by concrete means (posters, stickers, photo reports, but also with soup, croissants, etc.)
- The *Solidaire* newspaper plays a role in this militancy. We present the newspaper at demonstrations, actions and in other places. We want to make greater efforts to get subscriptions. Moreover, we can - as a promotion - distribute *Solidaire* for free in railway stations, in libraries, at trade union activities or in other public places
- Three times a year, the PTB distributes a national folder very widely, in mailboxes and in factories and offices.
- Just like in the municipalities of Hoboken, Zelzate and Herstal where there are small municipal newspapers, our base party groups in workplaces can produce, with their members, a *small newspaper for the firm or sector*. For that purpose, workers of the firm can be brought together and new members can be attracted.
- Members must dispose of *good material for free* to present the party to new contacts.

We want to generalize the example of Zelzate in the party

- A party which mobilizes, fights and struggles, together with its members
- A party which feels the concerns of the people very well and can translate them into acts
- A party which organizes many members
- A party which registers small victories
- A party which appreciates its members for what they do
- A party which celebrates with the whole municipality, not just in a small circle
- A party which organizes education.

In 2009, the 30th anniversary of the party, the book of the left-wing journalist Thomas Blommaert, *The Secret of Zelzate* (in Dutch ‘Het geheim van Zelzate’) will be published.

We want to use this book as a means to generalize the active party model based on the rich experience at Zelzate.

3.2. A party with many members

In June 2007, the PTB had 2,885 members. In 2006 we only had 2,335 members, which means an increase of 550 members in one year.

This is encouraging. But we can certainly achieve more if all party members set their minds on it.

(a) Choose sides

We propose a membership card to anyone who has an interest in the PTB on any subject. A membership card gives a member the feeling of belonging to his/her party: ‘The PTB is my party’. To sell and propose the membership card is a permanent task. Both

during campaigns and in intense moments of struggle, the sale of membership cards should particularly be on the agenda; it is the moment when people may join. We miss many occasions if we ask them months later.

We want each member always to have 5 membership cards in his/her pocket. We want everyone to raise the question: 'Have I already presented the PTB membership card to my colleagues at my job, to my colleagues in the trade union, to my family, to people in my sports club or in any action taking place?'

(b) Our objective: 5000 members by June 2010

Each new member will receive a welcoming gift and some information at home.

We will link the renewal of the contributions for the year 2008 to a campaign for the payment of contributions by bank order, and ask new members to pay preferably by bank order. Militants and members of the base party groups pay their contributions at their party meetings.

4. Different levels in the party

In the past years we have enlarged the party with workers, trade unionists and many other people. We asked the party sections to experiment and acquire various creative experiences. The Congress wants to preserve and continue this broadening for the years to come.

But at the same time the Congress defines a number of rules, which describe the rights and commitments of the different levels. These are rules applicable in the party as a whole, from Herstal to Ostend, from Genk to Mons.

The party brings together everyone aspiring to a socialist society, a society without exploitation.

We organize in order to reach that historic objective. That's why the party needs the collective forces of all its members. You can break a finger, but not a fist. In order to obtain that force, the party needs rules, as defined in the *Party Rules*.

4.1. Three different levels of commitment

The party works with three levels and forms of membership: the advisory members, the group members and the militants. Each form of membership has its own rights and commitments.

(a) The militants

To carry out our wish to have a bigger party of members, we need many new militants. Militants who must help the many new members in their daily work. We want many workers, but also young people and students, to become militants. This will help us both to renovate the party and to give it a working class character. In the new Party Rules the articles 12, 19 and 20 define the rights and commitments of the militant.

(b) The party base groups

Group members are organized in base groups. Base groups can exist in workplaces, trade unions and municipalities, and in other lines of work.

The party is made up of base groups. The base groups are the driving force of the work of the PTB among the population. In order to allow many more people to be organized in base groups, we want to propose a much more open concept.

The participation in a base group must be simple. The members should also feel comfortable in the base group. At the same time the base groups are also specific forms of organization. They function according to certain criteria, defined in the articles 15 and 16 of the new Party Rules.

Who can adhere to a base group of the PTB?

Article 11 of the new Party Rules determines that each advisory member can join a base group, if he/she:

- has a membership card;
- has filled out a personal membership form;
- pays a party contribution of 5 euros per month;
- regularly attends the meetings of the base group;
- accepts that the party functions according to the Party Rules and the Congress decisions.

The acceptance of new members must be approved by the base group and the level above.

How does the base group work with its advisory members? The base group works actively with every advisory member and bases its action on the engagement of those members. It discusses thus with all advisory members how they can best contribute to party action.

The base group works towards a friendly group dynamics and acts according to the collective principle: one for all, all for one.

(c) The advisory members

How does someone become an advisory member?

Article 10 of the new Party Rules defines the conditions for becoming an advisory party member.

Every man or woman who has reached the age of 18, feels at home in the party and its actions, fills out a member form and pays an annual contribution, can become an advisory member.

The annual contribution is fixed at 20 euros. For a family it is 30 euros. Each member receives a copy of *Solidaire* each month.

What is the importance of the (general) assembly of members for the unit?

We want to emphasize and give more importance to the advisory members and the general assembly, their dynamics and force.

Article 14 of the new Party Rules defines the role of the general assembly of members.

The general assembly of members (GAM) brings together all members of a given firm, district or action field. Through the GAM the party involves the advisory members in party activities and campaigns. The GAM is open to all members (advisory members, group members and militants), but also to sympathizers considering becoming members.

In order to have the right to vote in the GAM, membership is required. The GAM takes place at least every sixth months.

4.2. Respect for the rights and commitments of each level

The Congress opposes the mixing of the different levels in the party. Advisory members cannot be permitted in base groups – or in the base group meeting – unless they have complied with the five conditions of group membership.

Why?

The five conditions for membership of a base group are the expression of a concrete engagement in an organized unit of the party.

They are the expression of a commitment as an active part of the party as a whole.

They are the expression of the commitment to work along certain democratic rules, on a collective and common base.

All of this is needed to guarantee the collective force of the party. This collective force is essential for our party model, as a communist party. It is necessary to lead the class struggle in unison.

Advisory members cooperate, but at another level. We respect that commitment. We ask them to act according to their role at the GAM and to cooperate in the activities of the basic group.

The Congress makes two exceptions to this rule

1. When founding new party groups (base groups in formation).

We appeal to advisory members and group leaders to build up new party groups in their field. Today these will be often meetings with advisory members, eventually with group members, together with sympathizers. We stimulate several forms in between, with the aim to form a real base group later on.

Article 18 of the new Party Rules provides expressly for this possibility: ‘Members who in their district, firm or field of work want to constitute a new party group, direct this question to the provincial leadership. If the request is accepted,

the provincial leadership defines the arrangements for possible base groups in formation.

2. Founding base groups during an important struggle. We want to open the base groups in periods of important struggle. During the struggle against the Generation Pact (2005) and the municipal elections (2006) several sections applied this successfully. This resulted in large base groups. It is at such a moment that many active people want to commit themselves further.

For this reason article 17 has been added to the new statutes: “In case of an important struggle the Provincial Council or the National Council may open the base group(s) for a predefined time to advisory members wanting to be more active.”

4.3. You’ll never walk alone: group dynamics

If we want the party to become a home for the working people, the members have to feel at home in the party. You’re not alone in the party. *You’ll never walk alone*. You are part of a strong unit. Where there is solidarity and help, mutual respect and group dynamics. That’s why we consider the following rules of thumb as important:

- To develop group dynamics as much as possible, while at the same time, each one has to feel comfortable
- To create a pleasant framework for the meetings, to pay attention to what the members propose. No problem to propose something to drink, or a snack. It is also a good idea

to go to a film together from time to time or to take part in another leisure activity.

- The individual work of the members must be at the centre of the meetings. Sufficient attention must be paid to problems related to the firm or the district/neighbourhood. The meeting has to be an instrument for action.
- The base group is a box of ideas, the members come up with proposals and solutions.
- Contact must be maintained with the members between meetings: through a phone call, an SMS, an e-mail - today's means of communication. People today are used to these means of communication.
- We will only be able to keep new members if they feel at home, if they feel that their contribution is useful. That is why it is important for each base group to have a joint project, discussed among and decided by all members, on the basis of the ideas and problems they put forward.

5. In the PTB, everyone has the right to education according to his/her needs

We want to offer 7 kinds of education courses.

5.1. An education course for the base groups

The first instrument for the education in the base groups is our weekly newspaper *Solidaire* and the portal site www.ptb.be. For more thorough education we use *Études Marxistes (Marxist Studies)*.

5.2. Basic education

Accessible to all and organized on a local or provincial level, basic education can treat topical issues or trade union-related topics.

A course can also be organized in the form of a visit to an exhibition, or by inviting an author.

A course can also be based on a visit to a fraternal party or on a trip to a socialist country.

We endeavour to publish a series of small books similar to the booklet published at the time of the Generation Pact, which talks about Marxism and current issues.

It is also important to have a booklet for new members on the program and working principles of the PTB (related to the *Party Rules*).

5.3. Training course on the setting up of a base group

This training course is an aid for all those who want to start a new base group or a group of members. It is mainly a ‘school’ to learn practically how to lead a group. We need to prepare a small handbook for this purpose.

5.4. School for militants

Education on the classical writings of Marxism, at the rate of 3 weekends per year. This training course is aimed at (young) intellectuals and workers.

5.5. School for worker-cadres

In order to reinforce the working class character of the party, it is necessary to include workers in positions of leadership. Thorough training is needed in order to carry out this task.

5.6. School of the 8th Congress - Cadres

Intended for the cadres who are asked to take up higher responsibilities in the party leadership.

5.7. Other courses

Other initiatives or training can be interesting too. The party recommends the courses of the summer and winter Marxist Universities.

6. What still needs to be changed to be able to achieve these goals?

6.1. The party

We ask our members to become established wherever they live. Because it is where their children go to school, it is where they are members of a club or a social organization. We ask them to take part in the activities of their district/neighbourhood. These are natural places to discuss with people about our party.

The PTB must become an open house. Our secretariats must have a human face in as many places as possible. Open doors,

with people always present. Clean and friendly. We can organize visiting hours on certain topics, meeting moments, etc. We want a maximum of contact addresses in small towns, municipalities and districts/neighbourhoods. According to possibilities, members can also organize events for their own acquaintances, for members in the district/neighbourhood. ..

The PTB must *offer more services* to help solve the problems of workers. Just like *Medicine for the People*, many of our intellectual comrades should be specialists. We need legal assistance for our sections in firms and for our municipal councilors. *Doctors for the People* can offer more services to the trade union committees for prevention and well-being at work. We can offer services on taxes, on energy invoices. If we take on these issues, we will be able to put new forces to work, including intellectuals. Voluntary work still attracts many young people.

6.2. The style of work of the cadres

The party leadership must centralize and tackle more of what 'lives' among our well-established members. To do so, it is necessary to develop more democracy, with a better follow-up of all activity reports.

Each campaign needs to have a national assessment, starting from the assessments made by the base units and provincial leadership.

We should organize seminars to assimilate the lessons of important assessments and exchange experiences and learn one from another.

Cadres must devote more time to listening, coaching and centralizing.

All members of the national Council must be practically associated with the work at the grassroots in the province where they live.

Cadres must take an active part in carrying out pilot experiments, and then generalize them.

Notes

1. The last crisis of this type was that of the thirties, which resulted in the Second World War. The structural crisis lasts for a substantial period of time. It is characterized by slow growth, a permanent surplus of production capacity in the companies and as a result permanent high unemployment and a growing financial fragility. It is crossed by many cyclical crises of growth followed by decline, which only last a few years.
2. Among other ways, by increasing the intensity of labour.
3. For instance, by forcing workers to produce more at the same wages.
4. This overproduction is thus relative: businesses produce too many goods in relation to purchasing power. Of course, in absolute terms, the needs of people are a long way from being satisfied.
5. The big means of production are large firms, big landlords, agribusiness, means of communication and transport.
6. Ronald Reagan, president of the United States until 1988, and the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, never hid their full support for anti-communist organizations and movements in the socialist countries. They welcomed the overthrow of socialist regimes as a direct victory for their own governments.
7. A trade deficit means: imports exceeding exports.
8. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the total value of goods and services produced in a given country in a given year.
9. Financial crises – of different strengths – have followed each other at an accelerated pace over the last few years. Such was the sudden fall in share prices during August 2007. The US government stimulated the massive purchase of houses by families through mortgages. But when incomes fell while prices rose, an increasing number of citizens could not repay their loans. Shareholders feared that banks would fail, involving other enterprises in their collapse. They resorted en masse to selling their shares, which caused prices to plummet. It will not always be possible to avoid a similar crisis leading to a major financial crisis.

10. Patrick Artus works as economic analyst for the French president Sarkozy. According to him: “The worst is yet to come” (*La Tribune*, 27 August 2007). Alan Greenspan, the once so optimistic ex-chairman of the Federal Reserve, the Central Bank of the USA, assesses the possibility of a recession in 2008 at 50%. (*International Herald Tribune*, 18 December 2007).
11. In the US the official retirement age is 70. A US employee works an average of 1,900 hours a year, compared to 1,700 in the EU. The employers only pay 26% in social costs, as compared to 40% in the EU.
12. NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, formed in 1949 by the US. The purpose of this political and military alliance of Western powers was to pressurize the camp of socialist countries in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and if possible to conquer them by force. It was only in 1955 that the socialist countries countered with the Warsaw Pact with a view to defend themselves. But when this Pact was dissolved in 1991, NATO on the other hand decided to reinforce itself with the aim of being able to intervene everywhere in the world.
13. Spain and Luxemburg also put this draft to a referendum. Great Britain cancelled its plans to do so after the referendums in France and the Netherlands.
14. This is the reason why various political forces are demanding measures to be taken against trade unions. See below.
15. Most attacks are against the armies of occupation. (According to a report by the Intelligence Services of US Defence (DIA) ‘70% were directed against foreign occupation troops and 20% against the new Iraqi security services. A mere 10% are blind attacks against civilians.’ (*New York Times*, 17 August 2006). But the media, censored by the US army, generally only publicize terrorist attacks by fundamentalist forces, usually paid either by the US or by rival clans within the Iraqi government, which only exist by the grace of Washington.
16. Under national revolution is understood: to chase away the occupier and acquire independence. China was first controlled by several Western powers until it fell, in the thirties, totally under the domination of Japanese fascism. Democratic revolution means the overthrowing of feudal power,

- the power of the landlords, and the replacement of these by the power of the people.
17. Immense as it is, China has never been completely colonized – but several Great Powers – Great Britain, Germany, France, Japan and even Belgium – owned ‘concessions’, colonial settlements in various big cities, especially along the coast.
 18. The *UN Human Development Report* for 2004 places China 94th of 179 countries. See : http://hdrundp.org/reports/global/2004/francais/pdf/press-kit/HDR04_PKFR_HDI.pdf.
 19. The WTO (World Trade Organization) is with 151 member states one of the most important international organizations. The WTO organizes trade around the world on the basis of agreements between the member states on the rules governing international trade. These agreements concern agriculture, trade in goods, services, intellectual property and patents. The WTO also controls the implementation of these rules. In case of litigation it arbitrates. It can sanction members who deviate from the defined norms.
 20. In 2006 China invested over a billion dollars in infrastructure projects. Roads in Nigeria, a telephone network in Ghana, an aluminium plant in Egypt.
 21. Let’s take the textile industry as example. Today this sector employs 36,000 workers in Belgium – in 1975 there were three times as many workers. Yet the sector now produces, with 75,000 less jobs, the same volume as 30 years ago. In the weekly paper *Trends* of 20 September 2007 Geert Noels, the chief economist of the exchange enterprise Petercam, stated: “Without China we would already be in a recession.” Without China, employment in Europe, the United States and the rest of the world would pay a high price.
 22. The Dutch Central Plan Bureau has calculated that the handling of imported Chinese goods has led to the creation of 8,000 jobs in the Netherlands. Besides this, China has created 15,000 jobs in the Netherlands by the import of Dutch products (Central Plan Bureau, *China and the Dutch economy*, The Hague, September 2006, p. 52). On 29 September 2007 *The Economist* wrote: “Let’s hope growth in China continues, or else prospects for the world economy will be gloomy.”

23. Russia was the largest republic of the Soviet Union. Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus and the present Baltic republics also belonged to the SU.
24. The Russian economy of the nineties suffered a strong decline compared to the years before. But since 1999 it has been recovering. The gross domestic product for instance has grown from 260 billion dollars in 2000 to 987 billion dollars in 2006. Other development indicators show the same tendency, as shown by the figures of the World Bank.
25. A world where several economic, political and military powers prevent a superpower from dominating the whole world.
26. The South has to provide the North with raw materials at low prices (e.g. copper from Chile), and to import manufactured goods at very high prices from the US as well as to allow safe investment to US multinationals, i.e. to ensure that wages, social provisions and trade unions laws are such that immense profits are guaranteed.
27. Bolivarian comes from the name of Simon Bolivar, a hero of the independence struggle of the Latin American people against Spain at the beginning of the 19th century.
28. This does not mean that the people automatically believe in its socialist future project, as shown by the negative result of the referendum for a new constitution on 2 December 2007.
29. In France, more than 7 million wage-earners earn less than 722 euros a month. More than 3 homeless people out of 10 have a full time, part-time or precarious job. Over ten years, the proportion of temporary work has increased by 130%, short-time contract work by 60%, while full-time contract jobs have only increased by 2% (*7 million working poor*, Jacques Cotta, Éditions Fayard).
30. The overall revenue is the total sum of labour revenues and capital revenues.
31. Jo Cottenier, "Le Parti du Travail de Belgique et la lutte contre le 'pacte des générations' du gouvernement libéral-socialiste (octobre - décembre 2005) in *Études marxistes*, n° 74, 2006. http://marx.be/fr/content/%C3%A9tudes-marxistes?action=get_doc&cid=71&doc_id=520.
32. Jo Cottenier, "Flexicrité, la stratégie de Lisbonne aujourd'hui. À propos du livre vert de la Commission européenne" in *Études marxistes*, n° 79,

2007. http://marx.be/fr/content/%C3%A9tudes-marxistes?action=get_doc&id=77&doc_id=559.
33. Henri Houben, "Le processus de Lisbonne : une révision douloureuse... pour les travailleurs" in *Études marxistes*, n° 73, 2006. http://marx.be/fr/content/%C3%A9tudes-marxistes?action=get_doc&id=70&doc_id=514.
 34. The data mainly come from the 2003 and 2006 issues of the *UN Human Development Reports*.
 35. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) includes 12 former republics of the Soviet Union before its breakup in 1991: Ukraine, the Russian Federation, Georgia, Belarus, Moldavia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
 36. Peter Mertens, "La classe ouvrière à l'ère des entreprises transnationales", in *Études marxistes*, n° 72, 2005. http://marx.be/fr/content/%C3%A9tudes-marxistes?action=get_doc&id=69&doc_id=505.
 37. In addition, there was the alienation from the social environment of the common people. According to the Party rules, cadres and elected members of the BWP could earn a maximum of five times the norm of an average worker's wage. The members of parliament raised this to ten times the average worker's wage.
 38. The aim of World War I (1914-1918) was the partition and repartition of colonies and influence spheres. Two blocks stood face to face. Britain and France wanted to keep their colonies against upcoming Germany. Belgium wanted to keep the Congo, which was threatened by Germany. Russia took the side of the first block with the aim of taking part of the Balkans away from Austria.
 39. The progress in physics, (quantum physics), in biology (molecule), in geology, in mathematics (chaos theory), etc.
 40. For instance: molecules, atoms and their sub particles change their place continuously and are always moving. Just as occurs with the earth, the sun, star clusters and maybe still larger structures (clusters of solar systems). The biologists Levin and Lewontin describe this in their book *The Dialectical Biologist*: "A constant becomes a variable, a cause becomes a result and systems develop while destroying the conditions which led to their origin."

41. The *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Recent genetic analyses (DNA) have revealed that our human species has its origin in Africa some 150,000 years ago. Afterwards, about 50,000 years ago, they began to spread all over the world (Asia, Australia, Europe, and America). People lived collectively in 'clans'. The (primitive) means of production were common property of the clan.
42. This period is called the *neolithic revolution* because of the revolution in the development of means of production. Societies had become sedentary, and they start to use irrigation canals and fertilising, they made use of animal force and the plough, of carriages on wheels and sailing boats, they learnt how to use copper, bronze, stone and glass, they came up with a sun calendar, with writing, numeric systems, etc.
43. Feudal: a social system in which most people had to work as serfs for the leading feudal class. In Europe this was the system existing during the Middle Ages.
44. In 1917, when the Soviet Union was formed, more than 75% of the population was illiterate. Twenty years later illiteracy had been reduced to 10% of the population and still twenty years later to 1.5%. In China, at the time of the revolution (1949) 80% of its inhabitants were illiterate. In 1964 their number was reduced to 54.8%, in 1990 to 15.9%. In Cuba 40% of the population was illiterate and still another 40% was semi-literate. In only a bit more than one year the majority of Cubans had been taught to read and write. At the end of 1961 Cuba was the first country in Latin-America without illiteracy. Only in 2005 a second country, Venezuela, wiped out illiteracy completely.
45. Thirty years after the October revolution the number of elected women representatives in the Soviets had risen to 456,000. At the highest levels of research and industry 141,000 women engineers worked for the construction of socialism. In today's Cuba 65% of all scientific and technical management staff are women.
46. Before the revolution Russia had the highest mortality rate of Europe. The Soviet power created a national health service and health care became free from 1930 on for the entire population. Attention was given primarily to preventive and curative medicine and healthy work situations. In Chi-

- na life expectancy between 1949 and 1976 doubled: from 32 years to 65 years. Now average Chinese life expectancy is 71 years. The Cuban health-care system is one of the most progressive of the world.
47. In *the battle against fascism* about 14.5 million soldiers of the Red Army lost their lives, together with 7 million Soviet citizens, totalizing more than a quarter of the entire working population. Of the 783 military divisions of Nazi Germany 607 were defeated on the Soviet-German front. And 80% of the Nazi losses were inflicted by the Red Army and the partisans of the Soviet Union.
 48. Between 1989 and 2003 production (gross domestic product) in the former socialist countries declined by 35% on average, e.g. Russia - 33%, Ukraine - 50%. In six years (male) life expectancy in Russia dropped to 48 years (in 1997). Unemployment, which was almost inexistent before 1989, reached spectacular heights. In some countries incomes dropped more than 60%. Almost everywhere farmers had to cope with a big crisis. In Central and Eastern Europe there are now more than twelve million poor people, who have to live with less than \$4.30 a day.
 49. The analysis of this was already a subject of the Fourth Party Congress. It was later transposed in the book of Jo Cottenier and Kris Hertogen, *Time is on our side, Trade Union militant in the nineties. Crisis, new technologies and internationalization*. EPO Berchem, 1991. More recently this analysis was developed further by Peter Mertens, *The working class in the era of transnational corporations*, in *Marxist Studies*, nr. 72, IMAST, Brussels, October-December 2005.
 50. In 1870 the living standard of the richest countries compared to the poorest ones was 3 to 1. In 1950 this was already 35 to 1, and today it is 72 to 1. The situation is getting worse.
 51. *Mapping People and their Needs*, State of World Population 2004, p. 26. http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2004/pdf/en_swp04.pdf.
 52. Ten Big Pharma corporations get more than half of the turnover of all pharmaceutical enterprises. Six motorcar constructors control 76.3% of the worldwide production. Ten food chains supply 57% of all food chains. Six agrochemical enterprises control 70% of the world market.

53. In socialist Cuba the Asamblea Nacional discusses every year the balance of the past year and the budget of the following year. But first the concept plans are discussed in workplaces, cooperatives and neighbourhood assemblies. For instance, the measures taken during the ‘special period’ were discussed in 70,000 people’s meetings, resulting in more than three million proposals. Important measures of the concept plan got turned down, leading to a drastic adaptation of the plan.
54. In socialist Cuba the *power of the people* (Poder Popular) is exerted by the National Assembly of People’s Power (Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular). There are 603 representatives, of whom half plus one are directly elected by the people. The other part is elected by the mass organizations (trade union, women, youth, farmers...) in order to obtain a balanced representation. About 80% of the representatives are working people. Participation in the National Assembly (the Parliament) is no full-time ‘job’. Every representative has to remain active at the place where he/she has been elected (workplaces, farms, neighbourhoods, provinces). And it is there that he/she is accountable.
55. At the end of 2001 the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund brought Argentina to the brink of bankruptcy. The middle class lost all its savings, retired people lost their pensions, factory and office workers lost their jobs. The majority of the people lost their illusions in bourgeois politicians: ‘*Que se vayan todos!*’ (let them all go away) was heard everywhere. Some days before Christmas the revolt started with the plundering of supermarkets by hungry people in Buenos Aires. Thereupon factory and office
56. It is interesting to keep to a number of rules of thumb for action. The rules we present here are borrowed from the Dutch SP, but they form a perfect match to our experience.
1. You take action together with people. You have to devote much time and energy to it.
 2. Action is a means of obtaining something. Adapt your means if the situation changes.
 3. Action requires knowledge of the matter and experience.

4. Action is struggle. Take into account the strong and weak sides of all parties involved.
5. Taking up action means attacking. Don't let yourself get pushed into a defensive role.
6. Action requires good organization. Good will is not sufficient.
7. You take action to get result(s).

