

**B R O A D E N I N G**

**U N I T I N G**

**D E E P E N I N G**

SOLIDARITY CONGRESS



**PTB**

Les gens d'abord, pas le profit



**BROADENING UNITING DEEPENING**  
SOLIDARITY CONGRESS 2015

Creation: [www.commsa.be](http://www.commsa.be)  
Layout: EPO  
Printed by EPO Printing Company  
Lange Pastoorstraat 25-27  
2600 Antwerp  
Belgium  
Tel. 32 (0) 3239 61 29

© PTB-PVDA-Publishers  
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1000 Brussels  
Belgium

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June 13, 2015



# **BROADENING UNITING DEEPENING**

SOLIDARITY CONGRESS 2015



# CONTENTS

## BROADENING - UNITING - DEEPENING 10

THREE KEY WORDS 11

OFTEN AGAINST THE TIDE, ALWAYS GENEROUSLY ON THE LEFT 12

## 1. TIMES ARE CHANGING 15

INTRODUCTION 17

1. **A SOCIAL RESPONSE TO A PROFOUND ECONOMIC CRISIS 19**
  - 1.1. Illusion bubbles are bursting 19
  - 1.2. Excess supply stumbles on a lack of demand 22
  - 1.3. Treating the disease with medieval bloodletting 23
  - 1.4. What lies ahead? 27
  - 1.5. The crisis and the European Union 29
  - 1.6. Social investment programmes and deep society change 33
2. **A PROACTIVE PEACE POLICY AGAINST GROWING WAR THREATS 35**
  - 2.1. A new balance of power 35
  - 2.2. The particular position of China as a rising power 37
  - 2.3. Emerging countries challenge the hegemony of the United States 40
  - 2.4. Facts and fiction about the US decline 42
  - 2.5. Increasing the risk of war 44
  - 2.6. A proactive peace policy 47
3. **THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS 49**
  - 3.1. Social and democratic rights as the achievements of collective struggle 49
  - 3.2. Union-busting 51
  - 3.3. Class justice 53
  - 3.4. Big Brother against the right to privacy 54
  - 3.5. A war against international law and against law itself 57
  - 3.6. Divide and conquer: discrimination, racism and the far right 59
  - 3.7. Democratic rights as a springboard 62
4. **CHANGE NOW, BEFORE THE CLIMATE CHANGES EVERYTHING 64**
  - 4.1. The facts are indisputable 65
  - 4.2. The task is clear 66
  - 4.3. Human society is facing important decisions 68
  - 4.4. The social and ecological struggles are joining together 71

## 2. POSITIVE AMBITIONS 75

1. **THE STRATEGY OF CHANGE 77**
  - 1.1. A Party of the Working Class 77
  - 1.2. Party of Youth 82
  - 1.3. A Party of Progressive Convergence 91
  - 1.4. A broadly defined cultural struggle 93
  - 1.5. The social struggle and people's representatives 99
2. **AMBITION VERSUS ROUTINE 105**
  - 2.1. Growing Pains 105
  - 2.2. Thinking strategically 108
  - 2.3. A strong backbone 111
  - 2.4. Women 113
  - 2.5. The Red Devils of politics: a bilingual and national team 119
  - 2.6. Educating to understand and act in an informed way 122
3. **A PARTY LIKE NO OTHER 127**
  - 3.1. A party of active members 127
  - 3.2. A communist party of our time 133
  - 3.3. A rich social history 136

## 3. SOCIALISM 2.0 157

1. **PARADIGM CHANGE: THE WORLD ON A HUMAN SCALE 159**
2. **A BETTER WORLD IS POSSIBLE AND NECESSARY 163**
  - 2.1. Living together cannot happen alone 163
  - 2.2. The production base of society 164
  - 2.3. Human action is the driving force of history 166
3. **SOCIALIZATION OF THE ECONOMIC LEVERS 168**
  - 3.1. Key sectors in the hands of the community 168
  - 3.2. Public sectors to ensure fundamental rights 170
  - 3.3. Common heritage, knowledge and development 171
4. **PLANNED DEVELOPMENT 174**
  - 4.1. Human needs as the driving force of the economy 174
  - 4.2. Planning a collective household 174
  - 4.3. Freeing planning from the yoke of private ownership and profit 176
  - 4.4. An efficient and participatory planning 177
  - 4.5. Innovation, creativity and diversity 178
  - 4.6. The technological basis for planning 181
5. **A SUSTAINABLE MODEL OF SOCIETY 183**
  - 5.1. Labour and nature: the two sources of wealth 183
  - 5.2. A different kind of growth 185
  - 5.3. A sustainable economy 188



6. **ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT 190**
  - 6.1. People Power **190**
  - 6.2. Reduction of working hours as a prerequisite for broader development **191**
  - 6.3. A rich democratic life **192**
  - 6.4. Direct and representative democracy **193**
  - 6.5. Separation of powers **195**
  - 6.6. A constitutional state **198**
7. **FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS 199**
  - 7.1. Three generations of human rights **199**
  - 7.2. Fundamental rights and freedoms **201**
8. **INTERNATIONALISM, SOLIDARITY AND PEACE 209**
  - 8.1. Internationalism **209**
  - 8.2. A policy of international solidarity and peace **210**
9. **A RICH CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT 212**
  - 9.1. Solidarity is a fundamental pillar of human development **212**
  - 9.2. A broad process of cultural struggle and new ideas **213**
  - 9.3. An innovative and progressive culture **215**
10. **SOCIALISM 2.0 IS JUST A START, ON A NEW BASIS 219**

## **ANNEX THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF BELGIAN SOCIETY 221**

1. **WHY ANALYSE THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY? 223**
2. **THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF OUR COUNTRY 224**
  - 2.1. General **224**
  - 2.2. Classes in society **225**
  - 2.3. The establishment **226**
  - 2.4. The working class **228**
3. **THE WORKING CLASS AND ITS ALLIES 234**
  - 3.1. A global vision of the working class **234**
  - 3.2. The working class and its allies in the independent middle class **235**
  - 3.3. Special allies: young people, students, intellectuals and artists **237**



**BROADENING  
UNITING  
DEEPENING**

# BROADENING - UNITING - DEEPENING\*

Today, as part of our *Solidarity Congress*, you have elected a new National Council. It includes many young comrades who want to continue advancing the party's fortunes in our country's political environment. A new team will be putting in practice the orientations chosen during this Solidarity Congress. This process is a hallmark of our party. We first discussed content. Where do we wish to go? What are our weaknesses? What are our strengths? Then, we made use of this Congress to set, together, an action course. Finally, we elected a team that will implement these orientations.

This substantive work was quite intense: a very rich democratic process, which took considerable time, lasting nearly a year. First, the departments and grassroots groups of the party elected 556 delegates to this Congress, 63 percent of them Dutch-speaking and 37 percent French-speaking. Each delegate received drafts of our three basic Congress texts, drawn up a year ago and, together, they suggested no less than 921 pages of amendments. It was quite a feat to process these thoroughly and to narrow down the key points to debate. Those key issues were submitted a first time to 37 commissions meeting throughout Belgium. 415 delegates took part in these discussions and voted in the commission hearings. The results of this process came back to the Congress Bureau, so that the drafts could be enriched and thoroughly revised, based on these amendments, debates and votes. All delegates received a second draft of the papers, which were finally presented to the two plenary sessions of the Congress. These sessions included ultimate debates and then votes on the texts presented here today. This intense democratic process marks our congress papers as a collective work that reflects the richness of our activity at the grassroots level and the quality of our membership.

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\* Closing speech by Peter Mertens at the second plenary session of the Solidarity Congress.

## Three key words

Broadening - uniting – deepening are the three key words of this Congress. They run through the different chapters of this document.

In the first part, we examine our current era and the political juncture. Under the heading *Times are changing*, we explore five specific themes: social progress, democracy, culture, ecology and peace. Our party is best known today for its interventions on socioeconomic issues. In impoverished neighbourhoods, in workplaces, in social struggles and within our study department, we have built a strong reputation in this field. Naturally, we want to preserve these assets. Yet, *broadening* means that in the coming years, we also wish to affirm a stronger profile on other issues. At this congress, we paid considerable attention to the environment because in our view, the environment is a crucial social issue that is too important to be left to market forces. We want to send out a clear signal that our social and ecological struggles must go hand in hand, based on a same social vision of emancipation. We have symbolized this focus in our new logo, by combining a green arrow with our basic red design. We also seek to be more proactive in defending democratic rights, in fields such as trade union rights or the protection of privacy or the struggle against racism. A dynamic peace policy is also an axis that we intend to develop in the coming years. Broadening means tackling more issues than we do today. Uniting means our wish to link these different themes, making them a joint struggle against the profit system. Deepening means looking further, opening windows to the world, and bringing social progress, democracy, culture, ecology and peace into the public debate.

In the second part of our Solidarity Congress, we define guidelines for the coming years. Being optimistic, we advocate, with the title *Positive ambitions*, heady projects, out-of-the-box thinking and a lot more creativity. We want to expand and become a party for a broadly defined working class, with all its diversity, nuances, and different layers. Yes, there remains much to do on that front. In the various commissions of this Congress, we reflected at length on how to become a party of youth, the motor of this rapidly evolving 21<sup>st</sup> century. We have set this crucial task

for ourselves. Broadening also means lending an ear to particular social groups: intellectuals, artists, students, but also women and people with immigrant roots. Our discussions paid considerable attention to the place of women in the party and how we can enhance it. These debates facilitated the election of many talented young women to the new National Council. Finally, broadening also means extending our politics to large sectors of the self-employed middle class. This goal is new for us, but no less strategic. In this context, uniting also means pursuing a progressive alliance, a progressive merging of all these groups and social components. As for deepening, we are primarily talking about our identity, our backbone, our education. Yet we also need to develop cultural awareness and broadly debate ideas and social issues. The second part of this text addresses all those issues.

In the last section, we are seeking a paradigm shift, a different vision of the world, of people and nature. We call this vision of ours *Socialism 2.0*. Broadening in this context means having a broad view of socialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, paying attention to the human condition, and to economy, ecology, democracy, internationalism and cultural development. We revisit the themes of our first section, no longer in upheaval but firmly grounded. Uniting here means that our social vision is a whole. It is neither a strictly economic approach, nor one limited to culture or ecology. Deepening means that we want to start a debate about a society no longer based on the profit motive, but redefined on a human scale, with respect for nature. Those are the issues broached in our third part.

## Often against the tide, always generously on the Left

Today, you have elected a new National Council. So it is also time to thank the outgoing Council for the path we have travelled together, between the Renewal Congress (2008) and today's Solidarity Congress (2015). It was an honour to be able to work with you. Together we have come a long way.

The team elected during the Renewal Congress immediately had to face, in late 2008, the international banking crisis. The following year produced the longest political and institutional crisis ever in our country. It was at the time especially important for us to put the PTB on the map as a mature political party in our country. The party grew from 2 885 members in 2008 to nearly 10 000 members today, a threefold increase. The party now has many more departments and grassroots groups, including in the world of labour. The provincial and county leaderships have been renewed and younger comrades brought in, and our study department has expanded. This is an asset to our renewal, with substantial discussion papers on issues such as taxation, energy, healthcare, pensions, and the European crisis.

The last Council also lived through a socially turbulent period. Trade unions and civil society organizations experienced pressure. The PTB put all its might into the service of the social struggle. It did so in 2010 and 2011, but also recently in the great struggles that occurred at the end of 2014 against the shock policy of a right-wing government.

In the municipal elections of 2012, the first electoral breakthrough of the PTB came in Liège and Antwerp, with 7.5 and 8 percent of the vote respectively. In total, the party managed to elect 52 local representatives. Pursuing our momentum one and a half years later, we managed to elect in June 2014, for the first time in our existence, two federal representatives and won two seats in the Walloon Parliament and even four in the Brussels Parliament. Ever since the Renewal Congress, the party has kept on growing, obtaining 50 000 votes in 2007 and 250 000 votes in 2014, a fivefold increase. This dynamism is also evident at our annual ManiFiesta, a Solidarity festival that we have been holding since 2010 with our magazine *Solidaire* and Medicine for the People. ManiFiesta symbolizes the enthusiasm, the solidarity and the optimism that our party exudes.

We have felt this *spirit* and momentum throughout the present congress. Our national football team exists as a single team, with a single name: *Rode Duivels* in the Dutch language, *Diabes Rouges* in the French language. Similarly, the PTB is a single party, equally active in all regions, be

it Flanders, Wallonia or Brussels. The 556 delegates present in this hall come from across the country, and will not be divided. We are the Red Devils of politics, often against the current, but unashamedly, positively and generously on the Left.

**Peter Mertens**



1.

# **TIMES ARE CHANGING**

## **Introduction**

1. **A social answer to a profound economic crisis**
2. **An active peace policy against growing war threats**
3. **The struggle for democratic rights**
4. **Change now, before the climate changes everything**

# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION 17

1. **A SOCIAL RESPONSE TO A PROFOUND ECONOMIC CRISIS 19**
  - 1.1. Illusion bubbles are bursting 19
  - 1.2. Excess supply stumbles on a lack of demand 22
  - 1.3. Treating the disease with medieval bloodletting 23
  - 1.4. What lies ahead? 27
  - 1.5. The crisis and the European Union 29
  - 1.6. Social investment programmes and deep society change 33
2. **A PROACTIVE PEACE POLICY AGAINST GROWING WAR THREATS 35**
  - 2.1. A new balance of power 35
  - 2.2. The particular position of China as a rising power 37
  - 2.3. Emerging countries challenge the hegemony of the United States 40
  - 2.4. Facts and fiction about the US decline 42
  - 2.5. Increasing the risk of war 44
  - 2.6. A proactive peace policy 47
3. **THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS 49**
  - 3.1. Social and democratic rights as the achievements of collective struggle 49
  - 3.2. Union-busting 51
  - 3.3. Class justice 53
  - 3.4. Big Brother against the right to privacy 54
  - 3.5. A war against international law and against law itself 57
  - 3.6. Divide and conquer: discrimination, racism and the far right 59
  - 3.7. Democratic rights as a springboard 62
4. **CHANGE NOW, BEFORE THE CLIMATE CHANGES EVERYTHING 64**
  - 4.1. The facts are indisputable 65
  - 4.2. The task is clear 66
  - 4.3. Human society is facing important decisions 68
  - 4.4. The social and ecological struggles are joining together 71

# INTRODUCTION

Did we talk about “accountability” when banks took a dive, did we demand that they pull through on their own? Did we force the bankers to undertake training at job agencies to certify their competence? Did we consider sentencing them to community service? Yet, those were the very people who had brought society to the brink of destruction.

Everyone knows the answer. We did not demand anything of them. Instead, we gave them money. Huge amounts of money. European bankers received an injection of 1 600 billion Euros to get by. They became the largest welfare recipients on the continent. In our country, Belgium, welfare recipients live under constant scrutiny. One has to remain available for work, attend trainings and never be fussy. Anyone who fails to abide by these requirements is sanctioned.

So one social class experiences little support, many preconditions and severe sanctions. For another class, there is huge support without conditions or sanctions. Yes, we live in a country with dual democracies. They are not different democracies in the North and the South of the country; they are one democracy for the haves, and another for the have-nots. In addition, the wall between the two groups is growing higher and higher.

Capitalism has turned the world upside down. Temporary jobs have replaced permanent ones, with precariousness instead of security, dividends instead of investments, maximum profit instead of a sustainable environmental policy, war instead of peace, and a small privileged oligarchy instead of democratic rights for the majority. It is really a topsy-turvy world. The only thing to do is to put it right side up again. Moreover, we will have to do it ourselves, by raising awareness among people, organizing and mobilizing them.

With incredible arrogance, the establishment<sup>1</sup> takes advantage of this crisis to strengthen its power further and dismantle the rights acquired

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1 Establishment: this expression designates a social minority that exerts a strong control on society through established powers. They are the political, economic, and cultural decision-makers that steer the main public and private institutions of a country, in their own interest and according to their world-views.

through years of struggle and international pressure at a faster pace. Everything is threatened, whether it is individual rights (the right to life, the right of association, freedom of expression, freedom of religion), social rights (the right to work, housing, and social security), peoples' rights (independence, national sovereignty<sup>2</sup> and sustainable development), the right to a common heritage (atmosphere, seas and oceans, biodiversity, which we consider collective goods of humanity).

It is therefore not only an economic crisis but also a systemic crisis, with catastrophic social, democratic and ecological repercussions. The global balance of power is drastically askew and the new configuration brings new risks of war at regional and world levels. The problem is not limited to local trifles; it threatens the planet and the future of humankind. To meet this challenge, we need a true paradigm shift,<sup>3</sup> and a different society. Not some utopia or romantic dream, but a much-needed answer to today's challenges.

Abolishing slavery was deemed “impossible”. That was until the French implemented it, after the French Revolution. Banning child labour was called “impossible” until the labour movement in this country said “enough” and pulled children out of mines and textile mills. Overcoming Apartheid seemed also “impossible”, until the ANC abolished racial segregation in South Africa. Nothing is impossible. It is up to us to design our project, our plan, our own narrative.

In this first part, we will study current changes in four fields:

- A social answer to a deep economic crisis.
- An active peace policy against growing war threats.
- The struggle for democratic rights.
- Change now, before the climate changes everything.

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2 Sovereignty: a state is deemed sovereign when it exercises political power in full autonomy, without foreign meddling. When popular will forms the basis of political power, one speaks of popular sovereignty.

3 Paradigm change: a change in the world's representation model and the mental framework used to analyze reality.

# 1. A SOCIAL RESPONSE TO A PROFOUND ECONOMIC CRISIS

## 1.1. Illusion bubbles are bursting

After World War II, Europe and North America experienced a relatively stable period of growth. In Europe, reconstruction was the priority. The United States offered assistance with the *Marshall Plan*.<sup>4</sup> The plan also boosted US exports. At the same time, the plan aimed at strengthening capitalism in Europe against “the Communist threat”. Communism had indeed allowed the labour world to go on the offensive and pry new rights and some social progress from the ruling class. The arms industry also powered the economy in a world marked by the conflict between the Eastern and Western blocs. Workers’ living conditions got better, as wages increased with productivity. This created the illusion that capitalism could be managed without crisis from now on.

But when oil prices increased fourfold in 1973, the global economy entered a crisis. The system got bogged down because of the overcapacity phenomenon: one cannot produce more than what people can buy. It was quickly realized that this was not a temporary incidental weakness, but a structural imbalance between the firms’ production capacity and the people’s purchasing power. Factories closed down, workers were laid off, and unemployment rose sharply.

When the crisis of overproduction came knocking in 1973, reaction to it was rather muted. It was thought that this condition would pass, as a temporary downturn due to oil prices. However, things worsened and by 1978, severe restructurings came into force. In Belgium, major shut-

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4 On June 5, 1947, the US Secretary of State, General G. Marshall, presented at Harvard University a plan for the reconstruction of Europe. Its official title was the European Recovery Programme, but history has preserved it in memory as the Marshall Plan. This plan had four strategic objectives: (a) To make European economies dependent on the US economy; (b) To sow discord within the WFTU, the French CGT and the Italian CGIL; (c) To fight against communism; (d) To spearhead the defence of the free market.

downs and layoffs happened in the five “national industries”: the mining, steel, shipbuilding, glass and textile industries. In ten years, the number of unemployed workers in Belgium shot up from 100 000 to 600 000, Wallonia being the most affected.

The second oil shock of 1979 was the kick-off of a radical turn. The shock therapy imagined by Milton Friedman’s Chicago School became known as “neoliberalism”. The dictator Pinochet had tested it in Chile, but it was the Reagan-Thatcher offensive that imposed it on the world. In the face of falling profits, the ruling class responded with aggressive neoliberal policies. The U.S. wave of liberalization<sup>5</sup> became the world model of competitiveness. European governments responded by European unification at the request of Europe’s biggest monopolies. This led to the creation of the European Union, the Maastricht Treaty and the adoption of the Euro.

A tsunami of privatizations<sup>6</sup> then swept over the public sector: the private sector seized state monopolies (telecommunications, railways, postal services...), and flexibility became the magic formula on the labour market. Salaries were squeezed and corporate and wealth taxes cut down. The 2010 “Lisbon Strategy” became the benchmark of Europe’s competition with the United States. The goal was maximum flexibility, pension reform and a profound liberalization of the financial sector. Europe thus took new shape by adopting the US model of competitiveness.

This policy led to a gigantic redistribution: revenues from capital rose at the expense of those from labour. The wealthy became spectacularly wealthier and embarked on risky investments in tax havens and hedge funds. The world of finance had been granted unfettered power. Advanced financial technology flooded markets with new products and new players. Globalization and liberalization broke down all barriers, unleashing

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5 Liberalization: legislation whereby a specific economic sector is opened to competition between companies. In Belgium, the energy and telecommunications sectors were liberalized during the nineties.

6 Privatization: the measures by which public companies are transformed into entirely or partly private companies. Both measures place under the control of private capital increasingly large and vital parts of society.

speculators and risk managers. Capital that could not be invested in industry with sufficient profitability found its way into new high-risk financial instruments, in a fully deregulated market. For speculators, predators and the shareholders of banks and financial corporations, the sky was the limit. The time had also come for new financial vampires, known as hedge funds<sup>7</sup> and private equity funds,<sup>8</sup> whose specialty was to pump money out of every industry.

Reagan and Thatcher's tax reforms provided the fuel for these new investment circuits. The wealthy received enormous gifts. In the United States, between 1980 and 2000, with Reagan and Clinton in charge, the tax rate on the highest incomes dropped from 70 to 28%. These incentives for the wealthiest tremendously increased the societal gap between the haves and have-nots. Finally, a way was found to keep sucking money from workers and welfare recipients whose purchasing power was declining: credit purchasing. The richest segment of the population picked up the profits, and a major part of the poorest layer of the population found itself deeper in debt.

Yes, the miracle doctors of neoliberalism claimed they had found remedies to cure the crisis. But the Chicago boys did not solve the crisis, they only "postponed" it. They won some time by creating an artificial demand, based on granting excessive credit and inflating financial bubbles, such as the US real estate market (subprimes<sup>9</sup>). In other words, the crisis had not been solved, but merely hidden.

When the US housing bubble burst in 2008, it became clear that all that was thin air. The entire banking system was stuffed with toxic products, IOUs without any collateral. States had to muster trillions of dollars and Euros to save the big banks. And all that because the wealthy of this world

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7 Hedge funds, unlike their name which implies protection, are speculation-oriented investment funds. They rely on leverage, that is to say the ability to invest a greater volume of capital than the value of their equity. The goal is to obtain the highest possible return.

8 Private equity funds: private funds that gather capital from private fortunes, off stock market circuits, to finance companies.

9 Subprime: a mortgage provided by banks to customers whose income is insufficient to be able to repay the loan.

had filled their pockets through financial looting and speculative activities. When that bubble burst, the world went full circle back to the seventies and the crisis of overproduction, but with a huge additional debt for States and individuals alike.

## 1.2. Excess supply stumbles on a lack of demand

It is often said that the fire of the financial crisis spread to the real economy, but this assessment is inaccurate. The opposite is true. Everything started in the real economy, in the production of goods and services. The crisis of overproduction was temporarily masked through financial bubbles. When they burst, the system rocked on its foundations.

Real wealth is created through production by the working population, not by banks or by the bubble blowers of the finance world. One can get rich by speculating on the price fluctuation of a load of raw materials or on the value of the financial package of a mortgage. Investment banks can build their business on this process. But it does not create new wealth. It only generates a kind of advance on wealth that is yet to be created. One can thus temporarily create the illusion that wealth falls from the sky, but when the gap becomes too wide between the virtual world and the real world, this house of cards collapses.

The 2008 crisis was also the year of Karl Marx's comeback, as wrote several newspapers. But this insight was soon forgotten. Still, to understand the world of real production and the reasons behind the crisis, one has to go back to Marx's fundamental analysis.

In the capitalist economy, every company seeks to make as much profit as possible in order to reinvest, improve production and thus make even more profit. A company's capacity for continuous increases of its capital determines whether it survives or is wiped off the map. Whoever accumulates the most capital can invest more, innovate and adapt more quickly to economic fluctuations. It then becomes a market leader and imposes its rule on the whole sector. Other businesses have to follow suit, seeking



fresh capital to invest. They find that money in the financial world: credit, capital increases, issuing public shares (IPO), etc. This is an essential part of the competition mechanism.

Each manufacturer tries to capture market shares from his competitors, through aiming for the lowest production cost. By investing in new technologies, in modern machinery that require less labour, and by increasing its working pace and hours or by lowering wages. From the point of view of the individual employer, this is a good move, improving his competitive position. However, globally, when all manufacturers do the same, production increases but purchasing power declines because people earn less or become unemployed. More production but less purchasing power: the collision is unavoidable. This contradiction is inherent to capitalism. The tendency of the supply side to accumulate capital in order to produce more stumbles on the decline in purchasing power of the demand side. This is how capitalists saw off the branch they are sitting on. The lack of planning in the industrial and social fields leads to chaos. And the resulting overcapacity crisis is only acknowledged afterwards.

### 1.3. Treating the disease with medieval bloodletting

The best way to measure the health of the current Euro zone is to use the “employment thermometer”. About 7.5 million young people in the EU have a degree, but no job. That is almost as many as the entire population of Switzerland. The European Union has had an 11 to 12% unemployment rate for the last five years, but even this figure is an underestimate. When new jobs are created, they are often part-time, temporary, or mini-jobs (part-time, low wage). In Germany, more than half of young workers aged 15 to 24 only have a temporary job; this ratio climbs to 54% in Italy and as much as 59% in France.

A major labour market reform is happening right before our eyes. Employers divide existing positions into four or five part-time jobs, which are hyper-flexible and underpaid. A growing phenomenon is that of the “working poor”, who are employed but do not manage to get by. Some

8.7% of employed Europeans are unable to make ends meet. In Germany, this percentage reaches 22.2%, more than one in five workers.

This revolution of the labour market puts pressure on the right to work as defined in Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

“Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.”

Mini-jobs as in Germany, zero-hour contracts such as in the UK, on-demand flexible jobs as in the Netherlands and hyper-flexible jobs as in Belgium are undermining the social right to “equitable remuneration”, “ensuring [workers] and their families of an existence worthy of human dignity”. Instead of a substantive employment policy to create and foster the creation of new productive jobs, we see a labour market policy that enshrines competition as its ultimate goal, pitting working conditions and current wages against each other continent-wide.

Unemployment, the increase of temporary and agency work, contract flexibility and pushing back the retirement age maintain pressure and eventually extend that pressure to the wages and working conditions of stable jobs. Authorities are increasingly adopting measures that constantly attack wages directly. The goal is to reduce production costs and to promote exports in the belief that this is the way out of this new recession for Europe.<sup>10</sup>

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10 Recession and depression. One speaks of a recession when the growth of the GDP (gross domestic product, all of the wealth produced in a country) is negative for at least two successive quarters. When there is a sharp decrease in the long term, one speaks of a depression.

Capitalism knows no other way out of the crisis but the restoration of competitiveness and profit rates. European diktats therefore obey a single law: all countries must become more competitive, to increase their export opportunities. Companies are allowed to freeze or even cut wages and to exert more flexibility from workers. They pay lower taxes and contribute less to social security systems. But this race necessarily has losers as well as winners, because not all countries can be winners in the field of exports. This exacerbates competition to the point where it destroys the productive systems of the weaker countries. This raises the question: how can we get out of the crisis if, throughout Europe, we attack the purchasing power of workers and benefit recipients?

We see the opposite happening: the population suffers from restrictions and spends less. As a result, the economy winds down and tax revenues decrease. The public debt of the countries with the most severe restriction programmes has increased sharply rather than decreasing. European remedies are as stupid as those of 17<sup>th</sup> century “miracle doctors” who knew of only one remedy: bloodletting.

Job cuts in the public sector, cuts in social systems and public infrastructure, sales of whole public sectors to the private sector, new consumption taxes, increased VAT, cuts in social and cultural programmes, wage pressure: we still see authorities constantly reiterating with unshakable conviction that these austerity measures will revive the economy.

Yet throughout Europe, the crisis extracts a heavy toll. Between July 2008 and July 2013, no less than ten million people lost their jobs – and those are merely the official figures. Five years ago, there were 16 million job-seekers in Europe; today they number over 26 million. The situation is dramatic, especially for youth: one in four is unemployed. In March 2013, there were no less than 5.6 million young people without work in Europe. In Spain, 55% of young people do not have jobs. In Greece, 60% of the young are unemployed. This system is jeopardizing their future. The 2011 report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) of the United Nations stated, “Global youth unemployment has reached its highest level

on record, and is expected to increase”. The report speaks of “the scars of a generation facing a combination of high unemployment, low wages, increased inactivity and unstable employment”.

Women are also affected and so are residents of foreign origin. The restrictions in education, health care and social security shut down the prospect of a better future for ever larger groups of people. There are more and more disenfranchised people: those who are crushed by the activation circuit, those who cannot pay their bills or their rent or those who are not completely entitled to social security. They find themselves in permanent and helpless poverty. Within the European Union, 120 million people, a quarter of the population, are living at or below the poverty line.

Meanwhile, businesses are raking in fabulous profits. Capital has thrived on the crisis. Restructuring, mergers and shutdowns have restored the profits of the big monopolies, and corporations are accumulating financial reserves. Yet multinational corporations and international investors are merely sitting on this money pile. They think there is too much uncertainty. In Europe, they only utilize 78% of the production capacity available. With the austerity policy, consumption continues to decline and global trade is in a stall. Investments are primarily rationalization investments: takeovers, mergers... none of which create jobs. Corporations do not invest, because solvent demand is low and the future remains uncertain. As a result, shareholders and the super-rich keep on piling up money, tax havens continue to flourish and banks are pampered. The double standard is the alpha and the omega<sup>11</sup> of a society that operates at the service of capital owners.

Oxfam recently announced that in 2016, the richest 1% would own more wealth than the other 99% of the world combined. In the history of Homo sapiens, now with over 100 000 years on the clock, this is unheard of.

The top stratum of the richest consists of individuals whose personal wealth exceeds 25 million Euros, the ultra-rich. This elite club comprises

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11 Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the ancient Greek alphabet. This expression designates the beginning and the end, the be-all and end-all of a phenomenon.

200 000 people, barely 0.004% of the world adult population. Their fortune has increased by over 10% annually in recent years. In our country, too, this group goes on growing year by year. About 900 ultra-rich have an estimated fortune of 84 billion Euros combined, or an average of 96 million Euros per “ultra” in Belgium.

Finally, there is even a core of “mega-ultras”: the 80 richest people in the world now own as much as the poorest 3.5 billion, or half of the world population. The gap has become so wide that it is difficult to visualize it on a chart.

## 1.4. What lies ahead?

We are undergoing the worst economic crisis since the thirties. At the time too, the crash followed a period of financial euphoria: production and world trade fell sharply, and there was a long period of recession. What did the crisis of the thirties teach us? There are similarities but also important differences. Let us detail four of them.

(1) As in the thirties, the remedies applied further aggravate the crisis. During the thirties, wages were cut and the world sank into protectionism.<sup>12</sup> The market contracted and the recession became a depression, a long period of negative growth. Today in addition, the unfettered expansion of misery jobs (among other phenomena) exerts strong pressure on wages and labour income. Purchasing power thus slips into a downward spiral. That is why, after treading water for six years, European countries are facing a risk of deflation<sup>13</sup> for the first time since the thirties. The economy is slowing down so much that prices will fall. This may seem positive at first, but it may further aggravate the crisis. Purchases are deferred in the hope that prices continue to fall; the economy collapses like a soufflé, while unemployment and poverty are increasing.

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12 Protectionism: a policy of the authorities focused on protecting or promoting domestic businesses versus their foreign competitors. National markets are organized according to a series of rules aimed at protecting the country's trade interests.

13 Deflation means a widespread decline in consumer prices, the contrary of inflation.

(2) During the thirties, after four years of depression and deflation, the state came to the rescue, using the Keynesian<sup>14</sup> recipe. The US launched the New Deal, with huge investments in infrastructure and public works. Today, however, that money is not available: state coffers are empty because public authorities have borrowed massively to save the banks. National banks (the US Fed, the ECB, the Bank of England ...) pour cheap money into banks in the hope that it will trickle down to businesses, to facilitate their investment. However, the banks say “thank you!” and merely use this money to balance their budget. In early 2015, following the Fed’s example, the European Central Bank (ECB) decided to inject a large amount of fresh money into the economy by buying government bonds. For lack of real growth prospects, however, there is a strong risk that this money will end up mostly in hedge funds, and give birth to new financial bubbles that will further deepen the huge current income gap.

(3) In the thirties, the collapse of the banking sector was much more important, but ensuing measures were more drastic than those of today. The much-hyped reform of the banking sector is really a joke. The split between savings banks and (speculative) investment banks was carried out radically enough during the thirties, but this solution is carefully avoided today. No action was taken against financial parasites such as hedge funds, which ensure usurious profits to wealthy investors by speculating, among other things, against countries in difficulty.

(4) As during the thirties, the financial collapse began in the United States, then dragged in Europe. Today’s production is much more globalized, and the crisis has repercussions all the way to the most remote corners of the world. During the first years of the crisis, emerging countries, especially China, absorbed much of the global shock and provided an alternative economic driving force. However, their export dependence renders their growth vulnerable. Only in China has the production driving force continued to turn at full speed, increasing the purchasing power

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14 Keynes was a British economist. To combat the crisis of the thirties, he proposed another recipe than the classical liberal method of cutting down wages. He proposed that, if need be, the State borrow to invest in public works, resolve unemployment and increase purchasing power. This was intended to revive the economy. Policies inspired by Keynes are called Keynesian.

within the country. None of the three major traditional economic powers, the United States, the European Union and Japan, seems able to pull the global economy out of the rut.

These four points show that the crisis could drag on and worsen. Describing the situation as if it was all about regaining “confidence” is useless. We are facing serious overproduction. The more we cut into people’s purchasing power, the more companies will destroy their excess capacity by shutdowns, restructuring, takeovers and bankruptcies. Fresh investments will only surface with the coming of a new solvent demand or when new markets arise, which is far from being currently the case. Under capitalism, it is not the needs of society that rule investments, but the prospect of maximum profit.

## 1.5. The crisis and the European Union

The European Union – and not the United States – has been the region most affected by the financial crash of 2008 and the subsequent economic crisis. This had a profound impact on European unification. It brought the EU close to a breaking point. This possibility still exists. The European establishment has taken advantage of the situation to carry out a covert institutional coup and to expand greatly the power of the European Council and the European Commission towards the creation of a supranational federal state apparatus.

The formation of a supranational state, overseeing various national states, is a new phenomenon in recent history. Once a mere Economic Union (EEC), European unification has evolved toward somewhat of a confederation of States (European Union), with also a monetary union (the Euro zone) at its core. This confederation was born because the big property-owners overflowed state borders and voluntarily gave up some of their power to a European state apparatus in the making. The European establishment represents major European monopolies, organized in the European Round Table of industrialists, in Business Europe and in the Transatlantic Business Council. European capitalists fear this construction could fall in the com-

petitive struggle with the United States, Japan and especially with China and the new emerging countries, if they fail to turn themselves into a European super-state. To stand stronger before this competition, they struggle for a greater unity that would allow harmonizing the exploitation of labour, free movement of goods, people and capital and a European set of regulations with a common currency. This is not to say that there are no longer national or regional interests, for each national government continues to defend its specific interests, which are sometimes at odds with European decisions. There are contradictions between strong and weak countries, between countries that wish to go fast and others that slow down, between countries of the historical core and the new countries of Eastern Europe. However, the common European interests clearly outweigh these national interests.

In response to the crisis, the two decision-making bodies of the European Union, its Commission and its Council, have appropriated more and more powers to intervene in the 28 Member States of the Union, in agreement with the national governments. In 2013, all types of authority to intervene and impose sanctions were assembled in the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (TSCG). The treaty was approved by all national parliaments, almost unanimously. Amongst other things, it forces all member States to cap their budget deficit at 0.5% and to reduce public debt to 60% of GDP<sup>15</sup>. Fines of up to 0.2% of GDP may be imposed when these goals are not achieved quickly enough. The new treaty also allows intervention in cases of “macroeconomic imbalances”. Salaries, indexation, the retirement age and working conditions henceforth fall under the de facto control of the European Union.

Another threat comes from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiated between the European Union and the United States. The United States deems the TTIP a new model for other bilateral agreements in the world, but it is likely to have negative consequences for the EU population. It will install mutual recognition of standards so that a product approved in the United States must also be granted access to the

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15 GDP: Gross Domestic Product. All of the wealth produced in a country.



European Union. For US and European capitalists, this is a unique opportunity to impose a major reduction of food safety regulations, genetically modified organisms, and pollutants or products harmful to the environment. In addition, US monopolies would obtain the right to challenge any new EU laws or limitations if they affect their competitive position, even if these are meant to protect people or the environment. This would happen before an arbitration court made up of three so-called trade experts or private arbitrators, which would lead our countries into a downward spiral in terms of health and environmental standards.

The European Union floods us on a near daily basis with unpalatable laws, regulations and measures. From its inception, the European Union was a pet project of the continent's great fortunes and major captains of industry to face down competition from the United States and Japan. EU legislation reflects the interests of this class, and it shows at the social, democratic, ecological, cultural and international levels. There is, in terms of class character, no qualitative difference between the European supranational State being built and individual Member States.

As for ourselves, we struggle for social progress, democratic rights, social ecology, a culture of openness, international solidarity and for an anti-imperialist policy, first in the framework of current national States, in order to change the balance of forces within each country and to create in these countries "driving forces of the struggle" for the whole continent. However, there is also a need for continent-wide analysis, as governments and Capital-identified parties have been doing for a long time. The crisis and EU restrictive measures give rise throughout the continent to social movements for a different policy, for a better future. But all too often these movements remain isolated in their resistance, while their opponents speak with a single, European and neoliberal voice. Our contribution aims to bring us in phase with many European parties and organizations collectively putting forward demands and socio-democratic campaigns. The climate change issue; the attacks against the EU governments which want to go their own way such as Greece; the struggle for public services and refugee policy – we must intervene in these European policy debates.

We will not leave action on these issues in the hands of those who would have people believe that the EU can be reformed and become a social and progressive force, nor of those who propose to withdraw to their own nation-state as alternative to cooperation and European solidarity.

We are already addressing radical democratic demands to the European Union on several issues, in order to improve the situation of workers in Europe. Through those struggles, we want to contribute to people's understanding of our need for a different Europe, one devoid of exploitation. Competition and the race for profits on the open market are the roots of this system and of the EU. These principles appear in the founding texts of the Union. They stifle all progress. Democratic radical measures such as a tax on millionaires would bring much-needed oxygen to the process and allow us to regain the initiative. This is not to give a new look to the competitive structure or to slightly mitigate imbalances. We need a different basis, new foundations. Cooperation and solidarity must replace competition and imbalances. This requires a different Europe: a continent that will first cancel public debts and distribute wealth quite differently. A continent where key sectors are effectively in the hands of society, and where public services and businesses operate according to the needs of the population, a continent structurally opposed to all parasitic and usurious charges and to speculation.

We do our utmost to take part in various struggles for radical social, ecological and democratic reforms as much at the national as at the European level. These social movements build power relations that can also lead to European breakthroughs. Similarities are evident with the recent evolution of Latin America. In the seventies and the eighties, right-wing dictatorships imposed anti-popular measures to implement the dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the "structural adjustment programmes". In contemporary Europe, the Troika, the European Commission and soon a sort of European Monetary Fund also impose adjustment programmes. In Latin America, popular movements shook the continent and led to a turnaround. Anti-imperialist governments came to power. The people of Venezuela had the courage and determination to change

course, and other countries followed suit, such as Bolivia and Ecuador. The general political climate has changed throughout Latin America. There will be no change of course in all European countries simultaneously. However, some countries may serve as the vanguard of a renewal.

## 1.6. Social investment programmes and deep society change

Societies with greater equality do more than create better life expectancy and lower infant mortality, they also ensure a better quality of life and significantly less anxiety, depression, stress, alcohol or drug addiction. They also show less trans-generational poverty, obesity, teenage pregnancy, personal indebtedness, murder and incarceration. This is only logical. Such problems worsen as social inequality increases. Moreover, seven years after the 2008 crisis, our society is more unequal than ever.

If we wish to offer a future to the people, we need to develop a policy along two axes: on the one hand, ambitious social, democratic and ecological investment programmes to satisfy human and environmental needs. On the other, a profound societal change.

We need to create our own proactive project. One that will create thousands of new jobs. Real jobs with decent pay. Our project calls for social investments. Quality health care and education. A strong social security net and a broad cultural sector. Our project is that of an ecological renewal. Public energy utilities placed under democratic control, scientific research on environment-friendly technologies and sustainable energy sources. Healthy cities in which to live, with green spaces and social services. Our project also needs to invest in railways, instead of dismantling public transport infrastructures. Our project is to strengthen democracy, that is to say, listen to the people, and allow genuine grassroots participation. We also want to reinforce the associative sector, to protect trade union rights and also expand and strengthen social, economic and cultural rights. The only short-term alternative is to invest heavily in the public sector, in social services, in conversion to a sustainable economy. This is

how we shall generate new jobs and more income. For this, we need to activate the dormant capital of those who are too wealthy, organizing a transfer of wealth from the richest 1% toward public authorities and the community. Such a project can happen only with a broad mobilization and a determined struggle.

The struggle for deep social, democratic and ecological reforms relates to the struggle for a society without exploitation of man by man and without destruction of nature. By taking action for social, ecological and democratic renewal, we also struggle to strengthen the position, organizational strength and striking power of the working class. No major reform can occur without a broad and lengthy struggle. Everything that the labour movement achieved, it got by developing its own forces. This means organizing, taking action and building power relationships.

Every struggle for social and democratic improvements can take two different routes: either it reinforces the system and the dictatorship of the monopolies, or it manages to raise up large groups of people and give them a new vision and energy. They then reject the idea that the contemporary world is the only one possible. They become able to create a better world. We are moving towards a time when more and more people will turn their anger into action and organize new resistance movements. The needs of people and of their planet will be the starting points of these resistance movements, of their renewal and creativity. There will be a growing sentiment that such an approach is in conflict in a thousand and one ways with current capitalist society and that another society needs to emerge. We need to nourish this sentiment, provide arguments in its favour, support, develop, and organize it.

For the goal of social action cannot be to try to stabilize the existing system and thus save capitalism. In this sense, as contemporary Marxists, we have a different starting point from Keynes. We want to move toward a socialist society, to offer a systemic response to the various crises and to finally end the exploitation of people and the plundering of our planet. This is possible only if the economy is planned according to a logic that centres in society the needs of humans and of the planet, rather than profit.

## 2. A PROACTIVE PEACE POLICY AGAINST GROWING WAR THREATS

### 2.1. A new balance of power

“Capitalism brings war as the cloud brings the storm,” said Socialist Jean Jaurès<sup>16</sup> on the eve of the First World War. That was a hundred years ago. There are great differences but also significant similarities between the current world situation and the early years of the 20th century. A century ago, the world was in the grip of the British Empire and of some second-magnitude colonial States, including France and Belgium. Germany had come on the scene late and was demanding its share of the loot. The First World War was ultimately a struggle for the redistribution of spheres of influence and colonies. Tensions had risen because the world balance of power had changed.

This is not unlike today where rising powers are challenging the world order. The United States is currently the dominant superpower. With its economic, cultural and military supremacy, it manages to steer the world in support of its own interests. Wars, coups, subversion and corruption through ideology<sup>17</sup>, always in the name of “freedom” and “democracy,” are inseparable from U.S. dominance. However, the balance of power is changing, causing new tensions and threats of war, because Washington does not intend to renounce its global hegemony<sup>18</sup>.

For the first time in two hundred years, major economic growth is not occurring in Western industrialized countries, but in rapidly developing “emerging countries”. While in 2000, the Chinese gross domestic

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16 Jean Jaurès (1859-1914): historian, founder and editor of *L'Humanité* in 1904. A major figure of the French and international socialist movement. Because of his constant struggle against the threat of imperialist world war, he was assassinated in 1914.

17 Ideology: a representation of society, a coherent set of notions (ideas, principles) that indicate how society is structured and how it can change.

18 Hegemony: preponderance, supremacy.

product (GDP) only amounted to one tenth of that of the United States, in the coming decade China will surpass the United States as the world's largest economy<sup>19</sup>. Beside China, there are four other major emerging countries: Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa, the five constituting the so-called "BRICS". A broader group of ten second-order emerging countries follows them. In contrast to the "old industrialized countries", these countries managed to show strong growth figures for some time despite the crisis.

This rapid growth has changed the balance of power in the world. Four out of ten people in the world live in the BRICS bloc. In just ten years, between 2001 and 2011, BRICS' share of global wealth increased from 16 to 27%. During the same period, the share of the United States has fallen below 20%. China has achieved a particularly stunning leap over the past thirty years. While the other four BRICS countries have lost some ground since 2012, the Chinese economy continues to grow at an exceptionally high rate of over 7% per year.

There certainly are, therefore, two indisputable trends:

- (1) New entrants are catching up on the international scene. Today, the BRICS and eleven other developing countries (including Turkey, Nigeria, Mexico...) are producing 50% of global wealth. In 1993, this figure was only 35%. South-South trade and investments are rapidly rising, breaking down traditional imperialist transfer patterns between North and South.
- (2) The centre of the world economy is shifting towards Asia. For a millennium, China was the largest economy in the world. With the industrial revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the world's centre of gravity shifted to both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Today it is moving back towards Asia, with China and India in the lead roles.

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19 Expressed in dollars. Calculated in terms of "purchasing power parity" (PPP), i.e. according to local purchasing power, China has already surpassed the US in late 2014.

## 2.2. The particular position of China as a rising power

China has been laying claim since 1978 to a specifically Chinese form of Socialism. The country has gradually introduced market mechanisms that took over traditional planning functions: price formation, distribution of investment and labour, regulation of the economy. Private ownership of the means of production has grown freely to an increasing extent. State corporations have seen their holdings reduced to about half the national product, and they have had to compete with private capital that has reappeared.

These conditions made it possible for China to enter the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, making investment in China particularly attractive for western multinationals. They were able to flood both the Chinese market and world markets with cheap consumer goods. China became simultaneously the world's factory and its largest consumer market. The country has made unprecedented achievements in terms of the fight against poverty. With increasing prosperity for a billion Chinese, however, came growing inequality. Because investors and Chinese private entrepreneurs had a field day, a new class of large property-owners developed and the first millionaires and billionaires emerged. The more elements of capitalism were incorporated, the more principles of a socialist society were buried. Market and competition philosophy inevitably promotes individual interest, resulting in rampant corruption.

This is not a positive development. But the situation is complex. Thanks to the 1949 Revolution, China still controls its own fate. Unlike other emerging countries of the South, this huge country does not have to dance to the tune of foreign corporations. The Chinese Communist Party has now launched a campaign against corruption. History will show if it will be possible to avoid a full restoration of capitalism.

The People's Republic of China also holds a special place on the international scene, one that will only become more important in the future.

Since joining the World Trade Organization, China has fully integrated the global market and become the largest trading nation in the world. It has moved from the stage of trade agreements to that of exporting capital, investing and making acquisitions abroad. In 2013, these capital exports passed for the first time the \$100 billion mark, almost as much as multinational corporations' investments in China. This places China among the top third of world foreign investors. These investments are strongly encouraged and often actively supported by the Chinese authorities.

In order to maintain its rapid growth, China has a great need for energy and raw materials. Hence, the impressive amount of business contracts and Chinese investments in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. These are mainly contracts signed with States and investments by Chinese state-owned enterprises.

This policy is not to be considered on the same footing as the Western policy of colonization and domination. Chinese authorities are sticking to the win-win principle, that of mutual benefit, as opposed to that of inequality or zero-sum game characterizing most of Western arrangements. The agreements reached by China to stock up on energy, raw materials and agricultural products help countries to develop. In return for stakes in oil exploration, mining or agriculture, there are investments in the construction of infrastructure, roads and railways, power plants, schools and hospitals. This policy often includes cheap loans and debt remission. It is therefore important to keep one's eyes on the bigger picture. Chinese companies transfer their expertise to local authorities and workers. The export of natural resources to China is often paired with the import of Chinese cheap consumer goods. For the rest, the Chinese authorities do not interfere in client countries' internal affairs. This is in sharp contrast to the practices of European and American imperialism that imposes adjustment programmes designed to open doors to the greed of the multinational corporations. The countries of Africa and Latin America usually welcome the Chinese presence as a unique opportunity and as a useful counterweight to escape the stranglehold of European and US-based multinationals. This helps them fight poverty and fosters a clear path to a more independent development.



One can question the increasingly frequent presence of Chinese multinationals in the West. Since the 2008 crisis, Chinese businesses, encouraged by the authorities, are looking for good acquisition opportunities in Europe and the United States. They invest in infrastructure (ports and airports), energy and manufacturing, information and communication technologies, luxury goods, finance and real estate. Thus a growing number of Chinese multinational corporations, public or private, dive into the competitive struggle on the international markets like all capitalist enterprises. For Chinese public authorities, this also is a win-win situation: Chinese companies are gaining technology and market access; the West is gaining oxygen and employment for its faltering economy. On the other hand, it is clear that this deep integration into the global capitalist economy reinforces the move towards a “capitalism with Chinese characteristics”. All obstacles to the free play of market mechanisms are abolished one after the other, both within China and abroad. Large Chinese companies go public in New York and Chinese stock exchanges open up to foreign investors. The deregulation of the financial sector is one of the last major reforms tested in the free market zone of Shanghai before being generalized.

Regarding international relations, China has developed a coherent vision. It relies on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence,<sup>20</sup> which prioritize the territorial sovereignty and inviolability of states. China recognizes states and not political regimes, it does not interfere in domestic affairs and shows respect towards other systems. China expects the same attitude from other powers and opposes U.S. and European meddling in other countries. China has no military bases abroad. The Chinese presence abroad shows neither territorial ambitions nor attempts to dominate other countries. China always advocates peaceful and negotiated solutions to conflicts and has indeed been voting at the UN Security Council following that principle. Time will tell if these principles hold when Chinese interests abroad are threatened by uprisings, regime changes, or confrontation with other interests or those of the population.

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20 The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were written by Chou En Lai in 1954 to become the basis for relations between countries with different regimes. They are: 1) respect for territorial sovereignty and integrity; 2) non-aggression; 3) non-interference in home affairs; 4) exchange on a basis of equality and collective interest (win-win); 5) peaceful coexistence.

China believes that the imperialist world order can give way to a multipolar world. Thus, the Chinese want to promote, through reliance on a renewed South-South collaboration, the formation of an anti-hegemonic growth pole (like that of the BRICS), the promotion of cooperation with European countries and the widespread implementation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. However, this idyllic picture painted by Chinese authorities loses sight of the struggle against capitalism. The thirst for conquest is part of the logic of capitalism, and competition will not disappear in the name of “common sense” or “goodwill”. The uneven development of capitalism and an evolving balance of power are the driving force of conflicts and wars, and it is an illusion to believe that this could disappear through consultation and collaboration of the win-win kind.

## 2.3. Emerging countries challenge the hegemony of the United States

What unites BRICS countries is not only their spectacular growth, but also above all their political attitude opposing the global hegemony of the United States. Their alliance demands a greater economic but also political role in the world order, at the United Nations, in the G20, in international institutions and in climate change negotiations.

Unlike other emerging powers in history, modern players managed to grow without plundering other countries, without invasions, colonization, brutal expansion, or war or external aggression. The basis for claiming their place is their weight as an economic power, built within the context of the capitalist world order. For four of the five BRICS countries, there is no doubt that this happened on a capitalist basis, with every class contradiction that implied. It is on a capitalist basis that emerging countries challenge the hegemony of the United States. This catching up, however offers Southern countries the opportunity to look for alternatives to submission to the US and EU monopolies. For many countries, cooperation with the BRICS is an opportunity to break the monopoly of

the North regarding investment, trade, credit and development aid ... The same goes for the New Development Bank, founded by the BRICS as an alternative to the World Bank.

Yet this development is in no way comparable to the Non-Aligned Movement<sup>21</sup> of the fifties and sixties which, at the time, followed a clearly anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist course. At the Bandung Conference of 1955, a number of Asian, Middle East and African countries launched a movement against Western domination, which took shape in the pan-Arabism of Nasser (Egypt) and the Pan-Africanism of Nkrumah (Ghana) and Lumumba (Congo).

A movement of the same kind can be observed developing in Latin America over the last twenty years. From the late nineties, powerful popular movements have ousted presidents in Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Uruguay. Under the leadership of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez, a Bolivarian partnership treaty (ALBA) was installed between nine Latin American and Caribbean countries with the stated goal of breaking free from the grip of the United States, which had been trying to impose its own neo-colonial free trade zone (ALCA<sup>22</sup>). The ALBA is more than a free trade agreement; it relies on mutual relationships of solidarity and cooperation, rather than the pursuit of profit. The broader alliance of 33 Latin American and Caribbean states (CELAC) exists also in this context of a multi-polar world without the hegemony of the US and opposed to it. Nevertheless, with the exception of Cuba – and, up to a point, of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador – capitalist relations remain in force without change in CELAC states, often under close control by international or national monopolies.

Uneven development is a fundamental feature of capitalism. The most powerful of imperialist countries, the United States, wants to maintain its hegemony over the world. To make any headway, Southern emerging

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21 The Non-Aligned Movement still exists, but has lost its strength as an anti-imperialist movement. It has become more diverse and hybrid in its composition and objectives.

22 Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas or Free Trade Area of the Americas – FTAA) or Free Trade Area.

countries have to form a bloc. While this is no proof by itself of an anti-imperialist identity, there is a difference between countries seeking to buttress their hegemony and those that are just beginning to find a place in the capitalist world order. However, this can also evolve. Some emerging countries, such as Russia, clearly display the ambition to regain their lost grandeur and sometimes their actions show the characteristics of a regional hegemony. This danger also threatens Brazil and India.

## 2.4. Facts and fiction about the US decline

The United States, which has been exerting unquestionable hegemony in the capitalist world since World War II, considers this development with suspicion. The American establishment does not intend to cede its hegemony to any enemy. The current US president took over the ambition of George Bush Jr.: the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be and remain American, as he put it in his *Project for a New American Century*.

The superpower status of the United States does not rely only on military superiority. The American superpower also rides on the strength of its big monopolies, their technological advance, their financial cutting edge and the hegemony of the dollar as the international currency. In leading fields and major service sectors such as information and communications technology, American monopolies still dominate. They rely on technological superiority and attract brains from around the world to American universities. In this manner, the US has been able to build a new kind of empire that no longer relies on territorial occupation as in colonial times, but on the global tentacles of the US monopolies network. The imperialism of the United States ideally relies on liberalization and deregulation to impose the law of the strongest. With the help of the World Bank, the IMF and the World Trade Organization, the United States has gradually managed to “pry open” the Third World to Western monopolies. These are therefore producing abroad three times more goods than they are exporting from the United States. This is one of the causes of the US balance of trade deficit, but at the same time, it is equally part of their supremacy. Washington’s political and military interventions protect this network by installing friendly regimes that destroy any opposition and open borders to US interests.

The United States alone accounts for no less than 43% of all military spending in the world.<sup>23</sup> Washington also heads the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the military alliance defending Western interests.<sup>24</sup> That is how the United States remains the sole military superpower, unchallenged in the short and even in the medium term. However, an evolving balance of power requires the United States to review its political and military strategy. For the US, the only possible competitor for long-term global hegemony is the People's Republic of China. As a result, President Obama has moved the centre of gravity of his military strategy from the Middle East to Southeast Asia, affecting the whole of US diplomatic, geostrategic and military policy.

The United States is intensively preparing for a military confrontation with China, with an encirclement strategy. It is installing military bases in neighbouring countries and deploying its navy on every sea. Washington strives to make alliances in the region and cleverly takes advantage of local tensions between China and its neighbours: Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines. Moreover, Taiwan remains the most faithful ally of the United States and a solid beachhead, within a stone's throw of the Chinese mainland.

China stresses that it wishes a peaceful environment above all, but at the same time, it is preparing for war. It invests in high technology military equipment to repel any inroad on its territorial integrity. This arsenal is essentially defensive, designed to prevent a possible military blockade. China sets up alliances in the region, the main one being the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a military and economic alliance with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

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23 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

24 The alliance claimed to be a counterweight to the Warsaw Pact... which was actually founded only six years later, in 1955. NATO was founded in 1949 as a military group of 12 countries defending their interests, the interests of their multinational cooperation against the rest of the world. Today, NATO is the largest and most powerful military alliance in the world. Strongly dominated by US imperialism, NATO currently has 28 Member States. Twenty-two other countries are engaged in what is called the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). In addition, 19 countries are involved in more or less institutionalized dialogue programmes such as the NATO-Mediterranean Dialogue Initiative, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and other venues such as the Partnership for Peace or Partners Across the Globe.

## 2.5. Increasing the risk of war

A 2014 survey of 162 countries shows that only 11 countries are not involved in one conflict or another. The world is becoming less and less peaceful. International institutions and international law are increasingly being trampled on. Major Powers are placing themselves more and more above the UN Charter. Sovereignty, proclaimed by the United Nations, is increasingly becoming the exception and foreign interference the rule. The United States, other Western powers and NATO are actively involved in most of these conflicts. France, for example, intervened in Chad (2008), Afghanistan (2009), Ivory Coast (2010), Libya (2011), Mali and the Central African Republic (2012 and 2013) and again in the Middle East (2014). The list of US interventions is even longer. In addition, whatever the situation before these Western interventions, social, democratic and human rights conditions usually deteriorate subsequently.

Analysing US long-term strategy is the best way to understand current conflicts in the world. With NATO, European countries have chosen to enter this long-term strategy. Their actions are generally complementary to those of the United States, active in the main conflict centres at the borders of Russia, in the Middle East and in Eurasia. The United States and Russia face off in these regions. As tensions rise, Russia is seeking a closer relationship with China. Thus a new Cold War climate is developing in which the old imperialist powers (the US, the EU and Japan) constitute a new front against the growing new superpowers (Russia and China). In Africa, the United States, along with some former European colonial powers, choose to counter the growing Chinese presence by embarking on military adventures and causing chaos. In all these conflict zones, the control of underground ores and of oil and raw materials supply routes is of paramount importance. Here is a brief overview of the three main conflict centres: (a) Russia, (b) the Middle East, and (c) Africa.

(1) *Containing Russia.* After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia experienced an unbridled capitalist dismantling, but over the past ten years, Putin has been claiming a place back among the great powers. Contem-

porary Russia has a large military potential and leverages its wealth in oil, gas and raw materials to rally the former Soviet republics. The United States attempts to impede this process with a new containment strategy.<sup>25</sup> Washington benefits from the active support of the European Union to this purpose. When the Berlin Wall fell, US Secretary of State James Baker formally promised Gorbachev “NATO would not expand one inch to the east”. Nothing was less true. Since 1999, NATO has incorporated no fewer than twelve countries that previously were members of the Warsaw Pact. Of course, Russia perceives this as a direct threat.

The European Union offers attractive association agreements to Russia’s neighbouring countries, like the one signed in June 2014 with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The United States and the European Union took advantage of the popular movement against corruption in Ukraine to achieve their goal and they have used neo-Nazi parties to install a regime sympathetic to the West. Russian support for the secession of Crimea fuelled this conflict further, and the country is on the brink of all-out civil war. In 2014, the Ukrainian conflict led to a third indirect confrontation between NATO and Russia, after the wars in former Yugoslavia (1992) and in Georgia (2008).

(2) *The strategy of chaos in the Middle East.* A second contest of wills is being openly played out in the Middle East. The United States can count on Israel for unconditional support. Other supporters of the Western camp are Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. These were deemed sufficient by the United States to advance the project of a Greater Middle East under Western control. To achieve this objective, it is necessary to break the resistance of Iran, Iraq and Syria. This is the main reason for the United States war in this region for over twenty years.

However, the plan did not play out quite as planned. The United States and some of its friends went to war against Iraq based on fabricated evidence. They never managed to destroy the Iraqi resistance. When the

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25 The containment strategy was coined by President Truman in 1947 to encircle and isolate the Soviet Union, which ultimately led to its fall.

Arab Spring ousted the US puppets, Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt, the United States had to manoeuvre seriously in order to engineer regime changes in line with their wishes. The alliance between Iran, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon proved stronger than expected and it sought support from Russia. In Palestine, the Oslo Accords<sup>26</sup> led to a complete failure: Palestinian resistance against the Israeli policy of apartheid and occupation took off again at full strength.

In this context, the United States had to resort to a strategy of chaos. By fuelling ethnic and religious tensions in Iraq and Syria, exploiting a justified popular discontent, and financing and arming Salafist and jihadist rebel groups, the US tried to bring about the downfall of Assad in Syria, to divide and weaken the adversary and eventually shatter Iraq and Syria. Instead of a Greater Middle East favourable to the United States, the region has become a field of ruins, a nest of terrorists and a permanent war zone with hundreds of thousands of victims and a population trapped in hopeless misery and violence.

(3) *Keeping the African continent in check.* After the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the United States saw an opportunity to conquer territory on the African continent. It came into competition with the still strong presence of former colonial powers such as France and Belgium. The United States grabbed the limelight with the United Nations “Operation Restore Hope” in Somalia (1992-1993) and conquered an important foothold in Central Africa after the Rwanda genocide in 1994. They also support de facto the murderous aggression that has been conducted by Rwanda and Uganda against neighbouring Congo since 1998.

However, with the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some rivals have surfaced. Western interests suffer increasingly from the growing economic investments and economic cooperation between China and other BRICS countries, and most African countries. In response, the US has chosen

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26 The Oslo agreements were passed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993.



to strengthen decisively its military presence and the militarization of its relations with Africa. So has France. The illegal NATO war against Libya, the richest country in Africa and the one that had also invested the most in African unity, produced only chaos and an endless civil war. The shadow of Washington or Paris looms over almost all African civil wars. Fuelling the fire of ethnic, regional and religious contradictions in Africa has proved an ideal formula to then justify military interventions “for humanitarian reasons”, often against rebel militias which the West had originally helped create. A first war in Mali had already been the pretext for a large-scale Western intervention. A second similar intervention occurred the following year in the Central African Republic.

Each time the presence of Western troops in Africa has increased. US military leaders conducted a major reorganization in 2008 by founding AFRI-COM, a centralized military command for Africa. Since then, we have observed the rapid development of a network of support points and military bases in Africa. If left to Washington and Paris, the African battlefield will not come to an end soon. However, more and more African governments are explicitly claiming sovereignty over their countries.

## 2.6. A proactive peace policy

Immediately after World War II, which claimed over 60 million lives, calls for a proactive peace policy grew louder, even more so when the Western capitalist countries founded NATO in 1949, as an aggressive military pact against socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In 1950, the World Peace Council requested a complete prohibition of nuclear weapons, at the behest of the French Communist physicist Frédéric Joliot-Curie. This call became known as the Stockholm Appeal and collected 300 million signatures in just a few years. At the initiative of Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein, 52 Nobel laureates launched a similar statement against atomic weapons in 1955, responding to the aggressiveness of Cold War policy. In the sixties and seventies, part of the peace movement linked up with the movement for civil rights in the United States, the anti-colonial struggle and resistance against the war on Vietnam.

In the first half of the eighties, Belgium witnessed the largest demonstration ever against the installation of additional nuclear missiles in Europe. This was the result of a strong mobilization by hundreds of local committees, trade unions, NGOs and in fact the entire associative sphere. After the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, these people hoped for a “peace dividend”, but they were soon disillusioned. In the next decade, the peace movement had to take to the streets again, albeit not as massively, to oppose wars against Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq again, Libya, etc. One should point out that these imperialist wars were often presented as “war against terrorism” or “humanitarian intervention”.

Today, the peace movement is significantly weaker than it was in the eighties. However, this can change quickly, and indeed, it must. We urgently need a proactive policy and a wide and powerful peace movement. We defend national sovereignty, international law and human rights against the interventionist policies of the United States, NATO, the European Union and other major powers. We support global actions for active nuclear disarmament, starting with that of the major nuclear power: the United States. But we also do so in our own country, advocating the evacuation of the nuclear weapons stockpiled in the Kleine Brogel air base. We oppose NATO, its wars and its growing pressure for increased military budgets. The fight against NATO is an important democratic task, not just against the war abroad, but also against militarization within our country.

The struggle for peace is part of the larger movement for democratic rights, social justice, sustainable development and international solidarity. We can only achieve sustainable peace by addressing poverty and injustice and by righting historical injustices against all oppressed peoples, so that they can define their own future. A lasting peace can only occur in a society that is not based on competition and profit, but rather on cooperation and solidarity, on political and economic democracy, and on the satisfaction of social and ecological needs – in short, a socialist society.

## 3. THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

### 3.1. Social and democratic rights as the achievements of collective struggle

It took two general strikes (in 1886 and 1887) to prohibit child labour and to force employers to pay wages in cash. It took three general strikes (in 1893, 1902 and 1913) to replace census suffrage by universal suffrage (for men). In 1921, following World War I and after half a century of bitter struggle, article 310 of the Criminal Code, prohibiting strikes, was repealed. Picket lines became legal. The great general strike of 1936 was instrumental in winning the minimum wage and paid holidays. After four years of struggle against fascism, social security was introduced in late 1944 with pension insurance, health and disability coverage, unemployment benefits, family allowances and holiday pay.

Social and democratic rights were acquired primarily through the collective action of wage earners. They were pried from the ruling class by the organized labour movement. As early as 1954, a study by Professor Jan Dhondt showed that our country's greatest social advances were obtained "under the pressure of the population's impetuous voice and not by the effect of elections or of Parliament". The struggle for the defence of democratic rights is fundamental. The rights to strike and to demonstrate, along with freedom of opinion and of association are essential to the defence of social gains and of democracy itself.

At the same time, every democratic and social advance has two sides. On the one hand, it is the result of working class struggles; on the other, it is a concession by a ruling class anxious to "avoid the worst". No gains have ever been conceded spontaneously, without struggle. In the words of historian Gita Deneckere: "The restoration of public order could never be imposed merely by weaponry, concessions were also made to reign in the problems that had arisen and to ensure pacification." Under capitalism,

gains are never “safe” nor “final”. They always remain under threat from Capital, in its pursuit of profit and additional profit, and depend ultimately on the balance of power between labour and capital.

Over the past thirty years, this balance of power has profoundly changed. After the 1973 crisis, we saw the aggressive reaction of the “Chicago boys” who, along with Reagan and Thatcher, applied to capitalism a sort of shock therapy, known today as neoliberalism. This therapy thrived when the Soviet Union and socialism in Eastern Europe were overthrown and authorities proclaimed the final victory of the free market. Finally, neoliberalism found itself further strengthened by the fact that social democracy<sup>27</sup> has gladly adopted this narrative. After Reagan, came Clinton; after Thatcher, came Blair; in Germany, Schröder came after Kohl, and we barely noticed the difference. Social democracy adopted the market philosophy and took over the torch of shameless neoliberal dismantling. In Belgium too, for 25 years, the social democratic parties have unashamedly had a hand in the privatization of public companies, cutting social security and unravelling social rights. All the above have changed the balance of power in favour of capital over the past three decades, resulting in a new open season on key social and democratic gains.

As for democratic rights, a fourth factor needs to be taken into account: the September 11 attacks against the Twin Towers in New York. The “War on Terror” that ensued provided the US establishment with the perfect justification to make anyone into a suspect, organize a large-scale monitoring of the population and strengthen its repression apparatus.

In Europe too, “internal security” is a dominant theme used to get the population to support restrictions on fundamental freedoms. This theme has also served to create a climate of anxiety and develop a new strategy of “divide and rule”. All Muslims and people of Arab descent suddenly became suspects. An entire religion, Islam, is increasingly identified with a potential terrorist threat: this is termed “islamophobia”. Racism has

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27 Social democracy is a political approach that seeks to achieve a more equitable social organization via reforms and changes, within the framework of liberal democracy and in full respect of the free market. Socialist parties belong to this current.

regained considerable ground. Discrimination based on origin, religion or sexual preferences has again become commonplace. Recent attacks by European citizens with fundamentalist sympathies – with or without foreign indoctrination – threaten to accentuate further the security syndrome, with harmful consequences for democratic rights. In early 2015, the army was once more deployed in the streets of our major cities.

### 3.2. Union-busting

For many years, Belgium was under a ban to come out into the streets bearing a red flag, a prohibition to celebrate May Day, a law against “coalitions” (unions). Between 1830 and 1867, no fewer than 1 500 workers were thrown into prison for going on strike. They could lose everything: wages, food, health, and even their lives. Nevertheless, there existed a collective resistance. It started with hunger riots, collective occupations of expropriated land, the destruction of machines, employers’ mansions set ablaze and looted. Soon followed petitions, marches with demands, rallies, demonstrations, and general strikes.

In Belgium, article 310 of the Belgian Criminal Code provided for correctional penalties for “anyone who, through rallies near work facilities... will have infringed the freedom of masters or workers’. This article primarily targeted strike pickets. It took more than half a century of tireless struggle to get it repealed. This much-hated article 310 was repealed only after World War I, when the revolutionary movement developed in Europe with Republics of Councils in Hungary, Austria, Germany and Italy, and with the October Revolution in Russia. From then on, workers became entitled to stop work together and collectively defend their interests. After World War II, this right was confirmed in a series of international, European and national laws. The right to strike also implies the right to take steps for collective action to succeed: picket lines, even on company ground, occupations and sympathy strikes. In addition, judges cannot interfere in these conflicts.

From the very beginning, the Chicago Boys’ offensive aimed at breaking this union counter power. Reagan and Thatcher knew very well that

breaking the unions would also mean breaking the backbone of the working class. Successfully muzzling the strongest resistance force in society would mean giving a free rein to transform the balance of power between labour and capital completely. Thatcher introduced a complete ban on solidarity action, even in the case of factory shutdowns. Actions in support of other strikes were prohibited, even among companies of the same group. Lists of strike participants had to be handed in. Family members of strikers were hit with social allowance cutbacks. The family members of “illegal strikers” could no longer receive any allowance. With union power broken, inequality in the distribution of wealth produced grew unfettered. Both the income gap and the wealth gap widened.

The attack against the unions occurred alongside an organized ideological offensive. Challenging the “taboo” of social and democratic gains and achievements is now described as “progressive”, while defending the organizational strength and collective power of the working class is dismissed as “conservatism”. This kind of linguistic offensive is strategically developed in all kinds of neoliberal “think tanks”.<sup>28</sup> Political agitation against inter-professional and sector agreements (in which the most combative sectors or firms pull the others upwards), against the co-management of institutions regulating the social contributions of workers (such as Belgium’s National Employment Office, ONEM), against the social services rendered by unions (such as paying unemployment benefits) and against what are alleged to be “political” strikes (those against government measures), are all part of the same attack. Their goal is to prepare public opinion for the establishment of a legal liability of trade unions, which will make it possible to drag them to court and break them legally.

The New Right wants to exploit formal democracy – the result of the electoral process – against the vibrant democracy that builds on the balance of power created by social upheaval. Their model targets all associations: environmental organizations, cultural associations, local action groups,

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28 The term *think tank* (or ideas laboratory) designates a private institution, in principle independent and non-profit, which brings together experts or professionals who reflect on issues of political, economic, technological or social import.

women's committees, youth organizations, social workers, anti-poverty groups, etc. The ruling class wants to break the fighting spirit and the autonomy of progressive organizations, to incorporate them fully into the system or render them harmless as purely charitable institutions.

Nowadays we see a similar offensive all across Europe. There are projects afoot to guarantee essential services in the public sector, financial penalties imposed on strikers who refuse the dismantling of picket lines. There is talk of banning the picketing of industrial estates and ports. The European Union is trying to give the freedom of movement of services (one of the causes of social dumping) precedence over the right to strike. In Spain, hard hit by the Euro crisis, the number of protests has increased tenfold in ten years. In response, the right-wing PP (Partido Popular) passed a law in late 2014 that limits the right to demonstrate and threatens any participant in an unauthorized demonstration with fines of up to 600 000 Euros. This shows how much the new resistance developing across Europe is feared.

### 3.3. Class justice

Alongside trade unions, the young also find themselves increasingly in the crosshairs of this repression. In the Westkust police zone (on the Belgian coast), the State has introduced what it calls the *Very Irritating Police* approach: police officers must badger allegedly “idle” youth with irritating controls. “Public nuisance” is the reason increasingly being invoked to discipline young people by imposing municipal administrative sanctions (MAS). Nuisance is a very broad concept. Throwing snowballs or confetti, putting out one's trash bag on the wrong day or eating a sandwich in a public space can result in a fine. Most affected by this system are precisely the young who make the most use of public space, for instance because they have less room in their family environment. This rage of administrative sanctions hides a normative conservative ideology. The idea is to discipline the excluded and those most affected by the crisis. Peacekeepers are no longer hired to help the elderly board a tramway or bus, but to slap fines on youth. Where prevention<sup>29</sup> used to justify mentoring, school

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29 Prevention: measures adopted beforehand in order to head off problems.

coaching, or access to sport and culture, the ruling class is now increasingly using more repression, to push everything it calls “antisocial behaviour” into a criminal realm.

However, when it comes to the wealthy, clemency towards antisocial behaviour is immense. Major fiscal and financial fraudsters can buy off justice. No trial, no conviction and no criminal record. They escape punishment by paying a fraction of the taxes they took away from society. He who steals an apple from a store shelf is locked up. He who steals billions from society receives an invitation to have tea with the Attorney General, in order to discuss “between civilized people” the amount he will need to pay to avoid a criminal record.

Defence rights are also increasingly under threat. For ordinary citizens, thresholds to access justice are increasingly high. Fast-track procedures undermine the right to a fair trial as they carry the risk that no serious investigation has been carried out and that the defence cannot be carefully prepared. Throughout Europe a dual justice system is appearing: expensive, unable to protect the interests of ordinary citizens, but always ready to defend those of the ruling class. Justice in general is also an ivory tower, a world set off from ordinary citizens. Many people are increasingly aware of this strong class character of justice. The judicial process is also very inefficient.

### 3.4. Big Brother against the right to privacy

It is striking that not one of the traditional political parties is ready to fight effectively in defence of personal freedom and privacy. Yet this personal freedom is the basis of all other political freedoms. We are entitled to hold social, trade union and political opinions without being constantly monitored. We now see the ruling class sacrificing the right to privacy, one of the achievements of the French Revolution against feudal absolutism<sup>30</sup>, in order to put in place an unprecedented control apparatus.

30 Feudalism, a word derived from the Latin *feudum*, describes the fief system that prevailed in Europe from the fall of the Roman Empire and the end of slavery (circa 500 A.D.) to the French Revolution. The feudal lord gave the land in tenure to his vassals in exchange for mili-



State Security forces conduct hundreds of far-reaching secret operations: they place cameras in homes, create fictitious companies, spy on computers and trace telephone calls, actions that up to now could only be authorized by the judiciary. These new methods of intelligence gathering are not used only to fight crime. Vague political concepts such as “radicalization” and “extremism” justify the political use of these new intelligence methods. This is how authorities use the Internet to gather data on criminals or terrorists, but also on mere citizens, and first and foremost on socially active citizens. With the minimal control left to Parliament on everything State Security forces undertake, very few safeguards remain to protect privacy. Capitalism in crisis is implementing a Big Brother society on a grand scale. In addition, removing people’s privacy suppresses freedom of thought, democratic dissent and creativity. This has not only political consequences, but also a profound impact on individuals themselves.

The National Security Agency (NSA), the central US spy agency, makes a large-scale use of Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Apple to monitor all data exchanged. Snooping on the American communication system was previously only possible when mandated by the justice system. However, following the 2008 US law on espionage, this is no longer the case. US intelligence services are not only spying on their “enemies”, but also on allies like Germany and France. To top it all, they are perusing the emails of millions of citizens. In our country, NSA spies on all Belgacom customers with the full knowledge of this corporation.

The National Security Agency (NSA) and its most loyal partner, the British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), do not need any particular reason to collect all possible communications. The fact that people communicate is reason enough for them. Not long ago the Internet was an anonymous medium where everyone could be anyone. Today, it is monitored 24 hours a day by giant monopolies like Google,

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tary service and tax. The peasants who lived on this land and worked it had been reduced to the condition of serfs. They were to some extent the property of the landowner. The surplus peasant labour disappeared in the pockets of feudal lords. The Church also was a landowner. Peasants had no political rights. The feudal state (kings or emperors, the nobility and the Church) exercised power and oppressed the peasants.

Apple and Facebook and by the authorities to extract all sorts of personal data. These so-called “big data” make it possible to keep an eye on alleged “radical content” and to politically control our behaviour. The real reasons for this massive espionage endeavour are economic and political. Information gives power and control over the entire population...

The Member States of the European Union gave their police forces the opportunity to make use of Special Investigative Means and Special Intelligence Means for data collection. These laws destroy any respect for privacy and transform the basic justice principle of justice that all are “innocent until proven guilty” into its opposite: “everyone is potentially guilty until it is proven otherwise.” In August 2013, Di Rupo’s Belgian government introduced a law requiring telecommunication companies to retain the communication data (telephone and internet) of all citizens for one year. In April 2014, the European Court of Justice annulled the EU Directive on which the Belgian law was based. However, the law still applies.

As the United States has its National Security Council, so Belgium now has its own Conseil National de Sécurité, centralizing all services and aspects of security and intelligence. Henceforth, it will no longer be OCAM (Coordinating Body for Threat Analysis) deciding on the threat level, but this national security council, the ministers of the “Kern”<sup>31</sup>, and the Ministers of Justice and Defence. Politically motivated objectives risk replacing objective analysis.

In the name of the fight against terrorism, the army can henceforth be given the task temporarily of effecting surveillance missions when threats are deemed to reach a “severe” level. The army involvement especially affects the social mood, increasing subjective feelings of insecurity. The entire population will have to become accustomed to the military presence. In the event of combative social actions, it is not excluded that the government will give the army law and order functions. Moreover, as the power

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31 The Inner Cabinet *kern* (in Dutch: *kernkabinet*) consists of the Prime Minister and all vice-PMs of the government.

of the police and security apparatus increases, there is a corresponding decrease of citizens' ability to oppose possible policing abuses.

### **3.5. A war against international law and against law itself**

In the years following 9/11, the United States arrested hundreds of people at dawn, detained them without charge and deported them without any trial toward special CIA jails that escape US jurisdiction. Between December 2001 and 2006 no less than 1 080 secret CIA flights entered European airspace, carrying alleged suspects to often secret destinations, deemed "black sites". A presidential directive had given official permission to seize certain categories of suspects and detain them without public accountability or having to disclose the circumstances of their detention. In our country, six CIA flights of this kind transited through Deurne Airport (Antwerp) among others. These deportees were entirely stripped of their rights, were not formally charged, were held for an indefinite time and deprived of legal assistance.

Gone are the rights to a fair trial, to an adversarial procedure, to the assistance of a lawyer, to access the file and to challenge evidence. The charges are based on the unverifiable information of the security services. The fundamental principle of law that no one can be deprived of liberty without a court order and without the right of recourse to a judge has been simply abolished.

In the US, the immigration service has the authority to detain any foreigner reasonably suspected of terrorist activities for 48 hours or indefinitely. Confidentiality of the lawyer-client privilege is no longer guaranteed. Their conversations may be monitored. The list of crimes punishable by the death penalty has been expanded. United States citizenship can be revoked and such citizens can be deported if the authorities "think" either they are members of a "terrorist" group or they have provided material support for such a group. The Military Commissions Act of 2006 authorizes extracting confessions from terrorist suspects by "enhanced inter-

rogation techniques” such as keeping detainees awake, forcing them to stand in uncomfortable positions, exposing them to heat, water or cold. This amounts to legalizing torture. This Act establishes military tribunals composed exclusively of military judges; detainees’ defence is ensured by handpicked military or civilian lawyers who must obtain special authorization. The process includes information and secret evidence that lawyers may not communicate to their clients; a large number of offences held against the accused are punishable by the death penalty.

The shocking photos of Abu Ghraib (the US prison camp in Iraq) circulated around the world: a smiling female soldier posing behind a pile of naked and handcuffed Iraqi prisoners, prisoners with their head covered with a bag, prisoners tortured with electricity, attacked by a dog, or beaten. What those pictures do not show are the scientifically designed tortures such as “water-boarding”, or sensory deprivation, methods designed to cut off hearing (though constant noise exposition), seeing (with a bag over the head or a mask over the eyes), feeling (by wrapping up every body part, even hands) or sleeping. Use is made of so-called “enhanced interrogation”, officially described as “borderline torture” – when in fact it is torture. These are serious violations of the Geneva Convention, signed to prevent any future repetition of the barbarism and tyranny of Nazism.

The invasion of Iraq was sold to public opinion by spreading fear of weapons of mass destruction, which turned out to be non-existent. This illegal invasion consciously trampled on international law, where “pre-emptive strikes” are nothing but a war of aggression, recognized since Nuremberg<sup>32</sup> as the ultimate crime: a crime against peace. With the invasion of Iraq, everything was experimented: war crimes, torture, illegal camps, use of depleted uranium, white phosphorous. This was open and brutal domination by the United States.

The campaign of the great capitalist powers for geopolitical objectives and for the control of raw materials creates a shocking depletion of law. Capitalism dehumanizes humanity. Under international law, it is unlaw-

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32 Twenty-four Nazi war criminals were tried in 1945-46 in the German town of Nuremberg.

ful to assassinate people using drones and outside an “armed conflict” situation. Yet unmanned aircraft hit schools, wedding parties and civilian targets. In Pakistan alone, US drones have killed hundreds of citizens who had nothing to do with the “war on terror” and were not on any “kill list”. Massive bombing of cities like Fallujah or Sirte, destruction of civilian infrastructure (roads, railways, bridges, universities and hospitals), triggering sectarian and fanatical civil wars, removal of prisoners to ghost jails, torture: capitalism’s contempt for humanity gangrenes the whole planet and inspires terrorist organizations such as Daesh (organization also known as “the Islamic State”) to act in similar fashion.

### **3.6. Divide and conquer: discrimination, racism and the far right**

For the first time in history, more than half of the world population is living in cities. Major cities have always been hotbeds of renewal, they change, grow and are always a melting pot of various international influences. This aspect is further reinforced by the internationalization of the capitalist economy. Today, most major cities show enormous diversity, with people of all backgrounds. Diversity is real, and also an asset. Change and this super-diversity also imply the challenge of establishing an intercultural common life that can give birth to a new progressive common culture incorporating every advanced aspect of this new diversity.

The vast majority of the immigrant population consists of wage-earners in the labour workforce. They are thus doubly facing discrimination based on origin, skin colour or religion, particularly for access to employment, education or housing on the one hand and social injustice on the other. The New Right increasingly wants to make basic rights subject to all kinds of conditions. Indeed, the very concept of unconditional basic rights is thus called into question. These conditions affect more and more people who, for various reasons, must get by on a social allowance. Additional conditions are often imposed on people of foreign origin, such as language tests or so-called integration courses. Social injustice affects people of every origin. However, injustice is also highly coloured. In our

country one in three children of immigrant workers lives under the poverty line, Belgium achieving the third worst result of all industrialized countries (OECD), just below Spain and the United States. Our employment rate for non-European nationals has decreased by 42.7%, the worst result among the 28 Member States of the European Union.

Discrimination and racism are of concern for the entire labour world. If a group of workers does not have the same rights others, they have to accept worse working conditions and lower wages. Everyone's wages and working conditions are thus threatened. Europe uses immigration as a weapon in the competitive economy, based on purely economic interests and as a spearhead against any demand for better working conditions and wages. The free circulation of workers within the European Union and the possibility for nationals of a Member State to work in another country under the social rules of their country of origin (posted workers) lead to social dumping. This is especially the case for construction, transportation and cleaning jobs. New antisocial measures are often tried out by applying them first to foreign workers since they are more vulnerable.

Extreme poverty, climate disasters and wars drive people to leave their country and seek refuge in a safer part of the world. These immigrants are often used as test subjects for rights restrictions, such as generalized fingerprinting or long months of detention without having committed any illegal action; they are subject to raids, identity controls and mass arrests. The European Union has been made into a fortress, with military measures buttressing its external borders. Each year, thousands of migrants die attempting to cross these borders.

The federal government has significantly tightened the rules for obtaining Belgian citizenship. The first victims of those measures are mostly persons with low income or little or no qualifications, the temporarily employed and the unemployed. Applicants for citizenship must now demonstrate knowledge (level A2) of one of the three national languages, as well as social integration and an economic contribution to society (through a degree, language skills, employment, etc.) The right to family reunification (between spouses, or parents and children) is made increasingly difficult.

It has also become more difficult for undocumented persons to regularize their situation, even in case of serious illness, exceptional humanitarian situations or strong ties with Belgium. They are increasingly hunted down and deported. This policy maintains thousands of undocumented workers in illegality and insecurity. They are therefore willing to work for next to nothing in a whole variety of sectors. Acquiring Belgian citizenship should depend on objective criteria, but the new law acts as a barrier for people facing the most difficult living conditions.

Racism is also a political instrument in support of the “divide and rule” strategy. It pits those afraid of losing everything against those who have nothing. In 1993, Samuel Huntington, ex-assistant to President Johnson during the American occupation in Vietnam, published *The Clash of Civilizations*, which was received with enthusiasm by the American establishment and the far right around the world. In Belgium, Filip De Winter (Vlaams Belang) has been a fan of this book from the beginning. Eager to sweep the contradiction between labour and capital, between national liberation and imperialism, and between socialist and imperialist countries under the rug, Huntington initiated the contradiction between “the West” on one side and “Islam” and “Confucianism”<sup>33</sup> on the other.

This *cultural revolution* of the New Right<sup>34</sup> was designed and promoted with strategic motivations. In order to prepare Western minds for new wars and occupations in the Middle East, it highlights so-called large “identity” differences between “the West” and “Islam”. To prepare the world for a strategic attack against China, the way is paved by featuring supposed “cultural” differences between the “West” and “Chinese Confucianism”. With this analysis, there is no longer any question of fundamental

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33 Chinese philosophical and ethical system developed by Confucius (551-479 BC). Developing domestic pleasures such as courtesy, justice, trust, and altruism are for Confucianism the basis of order in the family and society.

34 Racist and ethnicist theories are now replaced by culturalist and identity theories from the far-right, developed in the laboratories of Harvard University's Institute of Strategic Studies during the nineties. A European version was developed by the New Right movement in France: it called for a “conservative revolution” against what it called the “egalitarian dogma” and the “toxic notion of multiculturalism”. The New Right advocated a deeper “entrenchment” of “European peoples” in their own traditions and culture to prepare an “European cultural renaissance”.

economic interests, social classes, control of raw materials, new markets or strategic expansion. This concept of a “clash of civilizations” has also led to new episodes of racist violence, such as the murder of Luna and Oulematou by Hans Van Themsche in Antwerp (2006) and the massacre of 77 young socialists by Anders Breivik on the Norwegian island of Utøya (2011). New right-wing extremist movements in Germany, such as Pegida, bring back to the forefront old far-right slogans on “antagonistic cultures”.

These worrying developments regarding democratic rights in Europe render particularly dangerous the rise of far-right parties. In Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Austria and the Netherlands, nationalist, xenophobic, authoritarian parties have been or remain involved in the administration of public affairs. Others are actively working their way toward public office, as in France. The traditional political parties often consider old and new far-right parties as respectable entities with which one can have normal relations. If these right-wing parties come to power, they will find a trove of laws, police structures and instruments of population control ready for application. Should these laws and structures be used to their fullest extent, they will become instruments for the exercise of an open dictatorship against the labour and democratic movements. *No pasarán!*

### 3.7. Democratic rights as a springboard

The democratic and social rights that we know today were all obtained through struggle. They are constantly in the crosshairs of established powers and the more the crisis deepens, the more the establishment will want to curtail them.

We want to build up democratic and social rights for the working class to have more space and opportunities to change the balance of power and lead the struggle for social progress, a rich culture, international solidarity, peace and a sustainable environment. However, as long as a small group of people, the industrial, financial and political elite, is in control of the direction taken by society, democratic rights are never definitively



acquired and democracy will never be complete. It remains subject to limitations imposed by the power of the wealthiest. In addition, each crisis offers the powerful new opportunities to do everything they can to limit or abolish hard-won rights. For economic reasons – added profits –, but also for political reasons – to weaken social resistance.

This is why any struggle for basic democratic rights must be fought from the start with a broad and long-term vision: towards a different society that is no longer focused on the 1% of the super-wealthy. A society by and for the other 99%. A society where for the first time millions of workers really have a say on all key political and social issues of their collective lives: employment, salaries, pensions, education, health care, housing, the environment... Our ambition is to achieve a democracy that guarantees real equality and active participation, which does not plunder nature, and installs new cultural values in society.

## 4. CHANGE NOW, BEFORE THE CLIMATE CHANGES EVERYTHING

Humanity is destroying its own survival conditions at full speed. So say recent scientific studies on soil and water pollution, the release of large quantities of agricultural chemicals into the environment, the release of greenhouse gases<sup>35</sup> into the atmosphere and damages to biodiversity so extensive that it could be reduced by half in a few decades.

But if we speak of “humanity”, one could think that there is no reason for this destruction of the planet, that there is no one responsible for pollution, deforestation and desertification. But there is; there are really people responsible and there are also victims.

This also applies to the threats bearing down on the world’s freshwater resources. This is a huge problem for many countries of the South. Simultaneously, it is a source of enrichment for the monopolies that have made water their personal property. The soil and the seas are poisoned by phosphates and nitrates because the giants of food and chemical industries have linked their fate to industrial agriculture. And there is also an unusually rapid warming of the climate, because of the industrial revolution. We are gradually coming to realize the existence of “a war between climate and capitalism”, as author Naomi Klein puts it. Each of these ongoing patterns of deterioration has consequences on biodiversity and on the extinction of animal species, coral reefs and plants.

There are other environmental problems such as depletion of natural resources, pollution of the atmosphere with fine particles, ocean acidification, etc. We will focus on global warming, because this problem is likely

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35 Gaseous components of the atmosphere which absorb and then re-emit infrared rays, thus contributing to the greenhouse effect. The best known of these is CO<sub>2</sub>. Using fossil fuels - oil, gas and coal - to produce energy sends CO<sub>2</sub> (carbon dioxide) into the atmosphere.

to be the most crucial for life conditions on Earth and because of its impact in many other fields.

## 4.1. The facts are indisputable

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) continually centralizes and updates available data on climate change from thousands of scientists working around the world. And as serious scientists, the IPCC is very cautious in its conclusions. Its fifth report (published in 2004) found that the unprecedented acceleration of global warming was caused by human activity on earth. It also noted that efforts to curb this warming pattern were insufficient. Air temperatures have risen by 0.85°C since the beginning of the industrial era (1880), and we are witnessing an unprecedented acceleration especially since 1950. This is caused by the release of greenhouse gases, themselves caused primarily by fossil fuels used for electricity production, manufacturing, transport and heating. Another cause is the large-scale deforestation and loss of vegetation and biomass on the planet, which means that less CO<sub>2</sub> is captured. The unsustainable model that underpins industrial agriculture also reduces absorption of CO<sub>2</sub> and increases methane emissions. The oceans are nearing saturation levels, so that CO<sub>2</sub> remains suspended in the atmosphere. The IPCC report states that the period 1983-2012 has been the warmest thirty years of the past 1 400 years in the Northern Hemisphere.

At this rate, the atmosphere will warm by 3.7 to 4.8 °C by the end of this century. This scenario is absolutely to be avoided as it would significantly change our living conditions and even make parts of the Earth uninhabitable. Therefore, a consensus<sup>36</sup> has been achieved: the temperature on Earth must not rise by more than two degrees Celsius. This is already a compromise between governments, subject to strong pressure from large multinational corporations. For many countries set at sea level and for sub-Saharan Africa, this would already be a disaster. In fact, a warming of 1.5°C is likely to be already excessive, since irreversible mechanisms may engage in which, for example, sea levels will rise

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36 Consensus = agreement and consent of the greatest number of parties.

faster. The precautionary principle commands this threshold to be set even lower. Especially as we can already clearly see the consequences of the rise in temperatures. The Earth's ice caps are already rapidly shrinking. But we can also observe large weather swings and the increasing violence of natural disasters (storms and floods). The consequences are particularly tangible for the indigenous people of small islands and desert countries, and for farmers and fishermen in poor countries: increasingly shorter agricultural production seasons, decrease or disappearance of agricultural land, less crops and less food, fresh water scarcity. Malnutrition, hunger and famine are already forcing millions of people to emigrate.

## 4.2. The task is clear

To keep climate change within reasonable limits, it is essential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions significantly. So far, humanity has already released 2 100 gigatons<sup>37</sup> of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. To hold the temperature rise below two degrees Celsius, we cannot allow ourselves to emit more than 800 extra gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> in the future. This is humanity's "budget". If current emissions continue unabated, this budget will be exhausted in 16 years. If we want to maintain the temperature rise at one and a half degree, this budget is *already* spent. This signifies the need for negative emissions or for a freeze on greenhouse gas emissions.

The severity of the problem has been recognized since 1988. It was officially proclaimed a global emergency by the United Nations during the Rio de Janeiro Summit in 1992. This led to the Kyoto Protocol (signed in 1997, implemented in 2005) which established a first standard for emissions for older industrialized countries (minus the US, which rejected this Protocol). Between 2008 and 2012, emissions of greenhouse gases were to diminish by an average of 5.2% compared to 1990.<sup>38</sup> This modest objective was achieved in Europe, with the help of the economic crisis and through extensive use of a perverted and falsified means of reducing

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37 One gigaton = one billion metric tons.

38 8% for the European Union, 7.5% for Belgium.

these emissions.<sup>39</sup> However, on the global level, there occurred the opposite result: global emissions have increased by another 40% since 1990.

Meanwhile, the Kyoto Protocol has been extended until 2020, aiming at an 18% reduction compared to 1990. But in practice only the EU (and Australia) is committed to the protocol, since Canada and Japan have joined the US in opting out. The US and Japan are investing heavily in the exploitation of bitumen and shale gas. And Japan has fallen back on fossil fuels after the nuclear disaster in Fukushima. In 2020, a new global climate protocol will come into force, but its content has yet to be decided during a climate summit meeting in Paris in late 2015.

With each new IPCC report, the alarm sounds louder. To limit the temperature rise to two degrees Celsius, global emissions of greenhouse gases must decrease by 40 to 70% by 2050.<sup>40</sup> The crucial question is how those efforts should be allocated. Developing countries do not want to be hindered in their efforts to catch up with the industrialized world. Most gas emissions have occurred since Western industrialization and, at each World Conference, emerging and developing countries legitimately claim that the West should put in the largest effort and transfer its environmental technologies. For the old industrialized world, this would mean a reduction in emissions of 40% by 2020 and even 90 to 98% by 2050. In other words, the emissions of rich industrialized countries must drop each year by at least 8 to 10%. And the faster the better.

This clarifies what is at stake with climate issues. Only a large-scale, planned and coordinated effort can provide convincing results. Three investment axes are essential to approach the climate issue:

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39 A reference to the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) that allows rich countries to purchase “clean air certificates” from developing countries, which costs them much less than having to invest in limiting emissions.

40 This uses 1990 as the reference year. But according to the 5<sup>th</sup> IPCC report, the delay incurred is already so important that from 2050 on, greenhouse gases will have to be removed from the atmosphere and oceans to reach by 2100 an emission reduction of 120% compared to 1990 figures.

(1) It is necessary to reduce the use of fossil fuels (oil, coal, gas) significantly and eventually replace them completely by renewable energy from the sun, wind, water and biomass waste.

(2) At the same time, the amount of energy consumed can be substantially reduced by improving efficiency in the use of energy itself, but also by developing more energy-efficient production, transport and heating. The insulation of buildings and houses and the development of public transport are two key elements here. The aim should be to create carbon-neutral cities and production zones. This can be done by combining renewable energy and energy efficiency features, to which cogeneration, smart grids heating and urban cooling can add an important contribution.

(3) Finally, we must invest in increasing the CO<sub>2</sub> absorption capacity in vegetation, underground life and aquatic organisms. This implies an active reforestation policy, agro-ecological agriculture, development of green areas in the urban environment and protection of natural ecosystems.

### 4.3. Human society is facing important decisions

Can we make a complete transition to renewable energy sources using existing technologies? Numerous studies by international and national energy experts prove that this is possible. It can even be achieved by 2050.

Why isn't it done then? The main obstacle is not technical, but political. It is the stubbornness with which politicians continue to cling to present market mechanisms to achieve this energy transition. And the even greater stubbornness of their continuing reliance on the good will of private capital. It means that, ultimately, short-term profitability is left to determine long-term investments and policy.

Deferring to market forces has three adverse consequences: (a) the transition to a sustainable and carbon-neutral economy is hindered, instead

of being firmly grasped; (b) major international climate conferences produce few binding outcomes; and (c) given the absence of a structural approach, the consumer is left to pick up the tab, for instance in the form of environmental taxes.

(1) The logic of competitiveness means that investments are made only when they appear to be profitable. For the overwhelming majority of companies, it means that expensive environment-friendly investments must be resisted as much as possible, unless they allow for quick savings. Very few capitalists consider that there is money to be made in the sustainability industry. They rush forward to be the first to grab those future markets. But as long as renewable energies cost more than fossil fuels, the invisible hand of the market will act so that we will not see considerable progress in the transition to a sustainable economy. And this despite all the warnings about climate change.

Let us look at the 200 biggest monopolies of oil, gas and coal. These giants have a total market value of 4 000 billion dollars. That is roughly the equivalent of all of Latin America's GDP. Under no circumstances do these 200 energy giants tolerate interference with their economic or financial empires. They completely resist environmental considerations, even if the future of the planet is at stake. Their decisions are based on maximum profit for shareholders and not on the interests of the world's population. If we want the Earth to remain liveable – meaning if we want to keep temperature rises under two degrees Celsius, a change of course is urgent. To achieve this, a third of oil reserves, half of the gas reserves and four fifths of coal reserves must remain below the Earth's surface. We are talking about a radical change. The exploitation of bituminous sands in Canada must also stop, and no oil drilling should be carried out inside the Arctic Circle.

Today, we see the exact opposite happening. The top 200 energy companies are spending huge amounts to locate new oil and gas reserves, often through dangerous underwater drilling. They invest no less than \$670 billion per year in the quest for energy sources we should actually be giving

up. This money is therefore not invested in the search for new renewable energy sources and even less in scientific research. The 200 multinationals are not doing any of that because it would compromise their position. They want to continue giving their shareholders annual dividends of \$125 billion. If the two degrees standard were taken seriously, these energy giants would lose two thirds of their reserves. This means they commit all their economic, financial and political means to combat any radical change in energy policy. In other words, if we want to make the vital choices required for the survival of humanity and the planet, we cannot go on entrusting our future to such monopolistic companies and their private interests.

(2) The Kyoto Protocol planned on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions standards being achieved by the creation of a carbon market. The traditional political class is once again relying on “the market” to solve problems. In this scheme, each country receives emission rights that are distributed among the most polluting companies, and these rights are to decline year after year. Companies emitting less gas than their quota can then “sell” their rights on “a market”. Or they can buy additional rights, if this is cheaper for them than investing in limiting their emissions. There are even more profitable opportunities to avoid such investments by funding projects to reduce emissions in developing countries – or in other countries of the European Union, where savings are less costly and can be negotiated. This is how climate policy is turned into a stock market game. When the economic crisis hit, the market price of emission rights collapsed and emissions rights for the future were bought cheap. This demonstrates that big industry can be as duplicitous about gas emission rights as it was for toxic financial products, with consequences that may be even more catastrophic.

(3) When the market is called upon to provide the solution, we know this always ends up in the same direction: raising fuel and waste management prices through environmental taxes. And the responsibility for failures is passed on to the consuming public. Ultimately, it is the workers and the poorest families who end up funding the struggle against climate change, instead of the large-scale polluters or those who impede the transition to a sustainable economy.



The choice we are facing is either controlling the climate crisis as much as possible (this process is called mitigation) or suffering its consequences and trying to cope. Unless a change happens very quickly, we will inevitably have to take that second road, however disastrous it may be. This policy of negligence (*Après nous, le deluge*) is equivalent to keeping our heads in the sand, and waiting to see what happens.

There is a natural reason why changes need to be made very fast. The carbon ending up in the atmosphere accumulates there for millions of years and it takes a very long time for a reduction of emissions to have any effect on the climate. There is also a financial reason. The choice to adapt to climate change will cost several times the investment currently required to make the transition to 100% renewable energy. The *Stern Review* calculated it would require an annual investment of 3% of global GDP, but the energy monopolies absolutely reject the costs necessary to achieve this change.

Will humanity leave those choices in the hands of a few private interests and of the market? Or will we choose as a community for a low-carbon production and a policy that will not destroy the planet, but keep it viable for future generations? This choice will never be realized in a society where the market paradigm rules the day. A social revolution is needed to plan for the long term, the large scale and to engage optimally all available scientific and technological knowledge. This is our commitment to socialism 2.0.

#### 4.4. The social and ecological struggles are joining together

For all sections of the population, the climate is the same. Nevertheless, not all levels of society suffer equally from climatic disasters. The richest people of the world have a lot more resources to protect themselves from storms and floods, and especially from famine. Those who are not so rich and especially the millions and millions of poor people are those who suffer most acutely from global warming. The struggle for a viable and sustainable planet goes hand in hand with social justice.

In the countries of the South, a catastrophe is in the offing. Fishermen, farmers and livestock breeders complain about seasons that have gone mad, heavy rainstorms and cyclones, searing droughts and a shortage of fresh water. Already, millions of people are looking for easier places to live in. A flat and very vulnerable country like Bangladesh spends a billion dollars a year on measures to fight the effects of climate change. That is 5 percent of the budget. Nevertheless, it is an illusion that this will only affect the South.

It is above all in the richest countries that positive change can be enforced, for the benefit of the whole world. The directors and major shareholders of the oil giants, energy corporations, car manufacturers and agricultural conglomerates do not want to make the changeover. They continue pumping up fossil fuels and emit massive amounts of greenhouse gasses. After all, capitalism knows no precautionary principle, it knows only the profit principle. That is why the climate problem is also becoming a conflict with opposing social interests, a class conflict.

The market will not solve the climate crisis, nor the multinationals. We have to be in control of the direction taken by society. Environmental renewal means investing in public utilities under democratic control, at local and national levels. We change the chaos of the free market for the planned development of a sustainable energy system. Environmental renewal means focussing on scientific research in environment-friendly technologies and renewable energy sources, free from private business interests and market mechanisms. Environmental renewal means promoting a modern, dense, reliable and affordable public transport system. Investing in insulation and energy-saving. Daring to think about ecological mobility, container trains, and bicycle super highways. These urgent measures are needed today.

The social and ecological struggle should naturally join together. The environment movement, social movements, and the trade unions face the same opponents. The people who for years were calling for liberalization, privatization and deregulation are even now averse to rigorous standards

and preach confidence in the market to address the climate crisis. It is of great significance that since 2009 the International Trade Union Confederation has been advocating making climate change a terrain for trade union action. On the other hand, the climate movement will only acquire the trust of working people when it makes an effort to link environment issues to the cause of social justice. The fight for a sustainable economy is of essential importance for the struggle for more jobs, better housing and urban development, healthy food and a healthier environment for everyone. Once this link is created, the battle for a sustainable society will become a lever to build a different society, freed from the absolute power of monopolies, and based on social and environmental justice.



2.

## **POSITIVE AMBITIONS**

1. **The Strategy of Change**
2. **Ambition versus routine**
3. **A party like no other**

# CONTENTS

1. **THE STRATEGY OF CHANGE 77**
  - 1.1. A Party of the Working Class **77**
    - (1) Reaching out to all workers **77**
    - (2) Strong Grassroots Branches **79**
    - (3) Gradual progress **79**
    - (4) Great Challenges **81**
  - 1.2. A Party of Youth **82**
    - (1) Youth as agents of change **83**
    - (2) Making room for youth **84**
    - (3) Three youth organizations **84**
  - 1.3. A Party of Progressive Convergence **91**
  - 1.4. A broadly defined cultural struggle **93**
    - (1) Building our own culture **95**
    - (2) An extensive process of cultural awakening **96**
    - (3) Our own language, as opposed to dogmas and jargon **98**
  - 1.5. The social struggle and people's representatives **99**
2. **AMBITION VERSUS ROUTINE 105**
  - 2.1. Growing Pains **105**
  - 2.2. Thinking strategically **108**
  - 2.3. A strong backbone **111**
  - 2.4. Women **113**
  - 2.5. The Red Devils of politics: a bilingual and national team **119**
  - 2.6. Educating to understand and act in an informed way **122**
3. **A PARTY LIKE NO OTHER 127**
  - 3.1. A party of active members **127**
    - (1) From 1 000 to 10 000 members **127**
    - (2) The grassroots branches are the eyes, ears and arms of the party **130**
    - (3) The importance of cadres and why there are still too few of them **132**
  - 3.2. A communist party of our time **133**
  - 3.3. A rich social history **136**
    - (1) 1966-1979: The beginnings **136**
    - (2) 1979-1989: The neoliberal years **143**
    - (3) 1989-1999: A changing world **148**
    - (4) 1999-2008: From Party Crisis to Renewal **152**

# 1. THE STRATEGY OF CHANGE

- 1.1. A Party of the Working Class
- 1.2. A Party of Youth
- 1.3. A Party of Progressive Convergence
- 1.4. A Cultural Struggle in the Broad Sense
- 1.5. The Social Struggle and the People's Representatives

## 1.1. A Party of the Working Class

### (1) **Reaching out to all workers**

The PTB is in the first place the party of the working class, which is the only fundamental force in the struggle for social reforms and for change in society. The class of workers (or working class), consists of all the people who work for wages. It includes different layers (see Annex *The Social Structure of Belgian Society*).

For strategic reasons, we will *focus first* on large industrial production lines and key sectors of the economy. Production is the basis of society. Manufacturing industry<sup>1</sup> employees form the heart of the broadly defined working class. Not only are these large productive sectors bastions of experience and struggle, but they are also of great economic importance. It is there, at the heart of the economy, that we want to be active. History teaches us that it is often in large industrial production facilities and in key economic sectors that the labour movement is the most advanced in terms of organization and struggle. This is where most people work. It is where the workers are the most educated, organized and disciplined by production. It is where workers have extensive knowledge of modern production and planning techniques. It is also where there is

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1 The manufacturing industry includes economic sectors that industrially fashion new products out of various materials.

often a tradition of struggle. These are all reasons why a labour movement based on large production lines and key sectors is often best able to draw the other strata of the working class into the struggle for liberation, and for a society without exploitation. We saw this confirmed by the general strike movements at the end of 2014.

By *industry production lines*, we mean both the parent company, the suppliers and subcontractors, as well as the temporary and precarious work depending on them. Around large firms dozens of subcontractors, temporary work agencies and small pseudo-independent businesses have sprung up. The work done in large firms with a chain of suppliers and subcontractors offers very different pay and working conditions within a given production chain. We have seen this for example at Ford Genk and its subcontractors. There is a very diverse range of statuses and contracts, and there is a growing proportion of new types of workers (temporary workers, home workers and phony self-employed). They often work in very small enterprises where no trade union is present, which makes their situation more difficult. At the same time, this development makes the parent companies more vulnerable because parts are not delivered in times of social unrest or strikes among subcontractors. By *key economic sectors*, we refer to energy production, water management, transport and warehousing.

*First*, in order to enable the working class to play its vanguard role in the struggle for liberation, it is necessary for the party to continue to grow among the dozens of large industrial production chains and in these key sectors.

*Second*, we want to develop political work in all layers of the working population, including the half-million service workers (often related to industry), the half-million people active in the sectors of health and home care, the 400 000 employees of the education system, the million civil servants, the wage-earners in trade and the half-million unemployed. This is a very diverse group. We therefore need to diversify our action and our message. We also want to pay special attention to youth, to women



and to immigrant workers. These are the three groups most affected by the crisis and who often find themselves in situations of dual oppression.

## (2) **Strong Grassroots Branches**

The most important place for organizing is the workplace. Organizing workers in a branch at their workplace is not an easy task. The pace of work is increasing: always doing more with fewer people. Job security is decreasing, with precarious work, greater turnover, more repression from bosses. Nevertheless, there are still a lot of social bonds, cooperation, camaraderie and solidarity there. Our priority remains to build strong branches in the workplace.

The workplace is not the only place of organization. The social history of Belgium comprises a wide range of workers' organizations, local and neighbourhood associations, a place of socialization for tens of thousands of workers and young people. Other examples include gymnastics clubs, theatre groups, street bands, cultural organizations, cooperatives, sports clubs, youth movements, women's organizations and other organizations founded by the labour movement.

These diverse cultural organizations of the working class are a key stake for the liberation struggle. We need many new and original initiatives to develop the party among the working class as a whole. Each branch should draft creative proposals to develop very accessible activities such as city tours, exhibition visits or movie evenings.

## (3) **Gradual progress**

In recent years, we have made progress in creating strong grassroots branches. The number of our workplace branches has increased by 150% over the past five years. The total number of party members working in companies has grown by 75%.

This progress has been achieved in all provinces. We have progressed most where we have invested more in better leadership of our activities

within the working class. In other provinces, progress is less apparent, sometimes because of the disappearance of major firms, like Ford in Limburg and ArcelorMittal in Liege.

Our branches have not only grown in numbers but also in the quality of their efforts in their workplaces. During the election campaign of 2014, we collected more than 5 000 surveys in workplaces. In almost all branches, party members worked with the electoral survey and voting cards. They led political discussions with co-workers. All this influenced the election results. During the social struggle against the right-wing government, our workplace branches educated colleagues on anti-worker measures.

The progress of our workplace branches rests on three pillars: (1) a greater number of analyses and studies adapted to a working-class readership (2) better collaboration with the trade unions and (3) more attention, support and investment from the leadership.

*First*, we now have more and better analyses and studies adapted to workers than five years ago. We won some fame with the media visibility of our spokespersons and with the publication of the best-seller *Comment osent-ils? (How Dare They?)*, which was widely read in trade-union circles. Our studies have now made us authorities on taxes, energy price increases, health care and pensions. Our support for workers' resistance has led us to develop scientific analyses on wages, indexation, VAT, and the closures of ArcelorMittal and Ford Genk. Our studies counter the notion that liberal policies are a necessity, without any alternative. They act as an echo chamber for the discontent and resistance of the people at the grassroots level.

*Secondly*, the Renewal Congress (2008) has facilitated a different relationship with the trade unions. We are now perceived much more as a political party, one that defends its principled vision, but that is also flexible and tactical and knows how to intervene with respect for trade unions. This attitude has gradually earned us more acceptance: the unions take many of our proposals seriously, and specialists in our research

department often give lectures and courses. In the 2014 elections, there was a record number of shop stewards on our lists, and many trade unionists presented the PTB as a credible political force.

*Thirdly*, there was also more attention, support and commitment on the part of our leadership. We gave the follow-up work of our grassroots branches and members a more central place in the party. Provincial leaderships provided more support, more material was circulated to branches and there was more bottom-up feedback. We drafted guidelines for organizing within the working class, and wrote a handbook for branch leaders – we organized seminars to exchange experiences, we appointed provincial leaders and summarized positive experiences. We also established a new Labour department, tasking it with following up this work.

#### **(4) Great Challenges**

The results are positive, in contrast to the notion that it would no longer be possible for the party to grow stronger in the labour world. Nevertheless, we must remain realistic: right wing forces still have great influence on the shop-floor. We are still far from being able to make significant and decisive contributions to the development of the social struggle in the most important businesses and sectors. Compared to the needs and the overall growth of the party in recent years, the growth of our members and party branches in workplaces remains inadequate. Growth is faster and more spontaneous at the neighbourhood and local level. The first challenge therefore remains, how can we transform dozens of large production lines in the manufacturing industry and key sectors into real bastions of social struggle? How can we strengthen the party there?

We must devote more attention and forces to building strong branches in large industrial production lines and in key sectors. We must produce more material adapted to a working-class readership. We must show creativity launching new initiatives in our workplace branches. We must insert more (young) party members in workplaces. More working men and women need to chair our branches and take leadership functions. These are our main challenges for the coming years.

We support the trade unionists and their organizations whose ideas and actions go beyond the narrow framework of market dynamics and who take the offensive in their demands. We support the participatory<sup>2</sup> and societal approach in trade union work. We find the principle that struggle is beneficial essential. The strong pressures exerted in many firms arouse much anger, as do total flexibility, skills management and job insecurity. This anger turns into frustration if it fails to be transformed into collective struggle. The accumulation of frustrations leads to division, snitching, harassment and racism.

If we want to educate fellow workers, we must first talk to them. Today, this is less obvious than it appears. Very few trade union representatives can leave their workplace at any time for union work. Bosses have many ways to restrict this right or make it impractical, such as blackmail and threats, or “punishing” colleagues by demanding they do the work of absent shop stewards. Any social action requires building countervailing trade union power in the workplace. That is why our party contributes on principle to the strengthening of unions.

## 1.2. A Party of Youth

Today’s youth is the crisis generation, the first since World War II to risk experiencing lower living standards. Young people grow up in a world where the Cold War and anti-communism of the last century seems very distant. This new generation is looking for an alternative to the TINA doctrine (“there is no alternative”). Young people today are growing up with new technologies, Internet, social networks and smartphones. This changes their relationship to information and communication. They are the Facebook generation, that of the interactive Web 2.0, and they share a new digital culture.

This is a generation that feels it is “living on borrowed time” because of the environmental crisis. Young people know that their generation will soon be the one experiencing the consequences of the climate crisis.

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2 Participatory: actively involving the population in decisions taken.

This generation is much more European and multinational than the preceding one. They have never known anything other than the Euro. National borders no longer have the same meaning, and what happens elsewhere in Europe has much more direct impact on the situation in Belgium. The new generation is also very diverse. In cities like Brussels and Antwerp, more than half of the young are of foreign origin.

Youth is the future of society.

### (1) **Youth as agents of change**

When we look at the objective situation, we understand why many young people today are pessimistic about the future. Many are angry, feel that the world is on the wrong track and want to change society radically. This discontent has a very strong energy and creativity potential, which explains the existence in society of a major social effort to win over the young. The issue is understanding how to mobilize this energy and creativity.

How can we harness this potential in favour of social change and a different social project, focused on solidarity and democracy? We cannot abandon the young to all kinds of far right, religious or conspiracy theory<sup>3</sup> movements.

Youth is a natural bearer of change. Youth experiences have decisive impacts on shaping the adults we become. Most young people have the particularity of not having yet chosen their path. They form a specific layer which is characterized by where they come from and where they are going to, and many factors can still influence the choices they will make for their future. This is an age when one wonders, when one becomes aware of the world, when one challenges many things. Young people face injustice and inequality in our country and throughout the world.

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3 Conspiracy theories see history as produced by the actions of some occult group acting under cover with the aim of holding or retaining an absolute form of power (political, economic or religious).

## **(2) Making room for youth**

If young people are a special section of the population, they deserve special attention from us. Since the founding of the party, we have created our own youth movement to create a space where youth can meet, make sense of the world and develop their own experiences in order to transform the world and learn collective values and solidarity.

The texts of the Renewal Congress (2008) mentioned the importance of young people, but we did not implement this priority practically. We paid too little attention to our youth organizations and invested too little time and personnel in supporting their development. Our youth movement is, most often, not even visible in the important activities of the party. If our party has grown rapidly in recent years, this has not been the case with our youth organizations. Many party members do not even know our youth organizations and are not aware of their activities. We want and need to change that.

We really want to grasp the potential of youth. Our youth movement must become much larger than it is today. The PTB has entered a new phase, trebling its membership in the last seven years. It is now much better known than its youth organizations and we should leverage that awareness toward a much more ambitious development. Our primary challenge is to capture this tremendous potential in and around the party effectively and be able to pass it on among youth.

## **(3) Three youth organizations**

“Young people” do not form a homogeneous layer. A 9-year old child, a 16-year old, a student aged 22 and a 25-year old worker do not do the same things, nor do they have the same interests, live in the same environment, etc. Our party and our youth movements want to adapt to these different audiences. During the last twelve years, Comac has centralized its activity among university students, high school students and in popular neighbourhoods. In fact, the student organization model proved dominant and the other youth layers did not find their full place in Comac. We want to remedy this by offering movements adapted to each layer of our target audience.

That is why we want to develop three PTB youth organizations:

- an organization for children,
- an organization for teenagers and young adults aged 14 to 25,
- an organization for students.

While having their autonomy, these three movements need to be able to rely on the support of the PTB. On the other hand, we also want to give young people a greater role within the party.

### **The Pioneers: An emancipation space for children aged 6 to 16**

From their earliest moments, children are immersed in a society which, through the media, video games and all sorts of ways, tends to foster the development of an individualist world-view and the spirit of competition, including intolerance and violence. This age is a crucial moment in the development of future adults. We want to build a broad and open movement where the youngest feel good, play, learn to know each other, can have fun and relax while learning early on the values of solidarity, listening, respect for others and the importance of the collective. Our movement is a place where children of all backgrounds can find their place. They experience encounters with children of different origins and those who speak the other language of our country. They acquire a positive experience of diversity very early in their development. We thus offer them keys to their future lives, we sow the seeds of a more open, more tolerant and egalitarian society. This is the role currently envisioned by the Pioneers, including their summer and Carnival camps. Teenagers will learn to be guides for younger children, through creative fulfilling games and activities. These activities provide children with a healthy and balanced living environment, without neglecting proper food and sport, which unfortunately are not always accessible in our society.

This organization is also important because of the PTB's intention of being an increasingly broad and ambitious workers' party. The development of activities for their children is very often an objective condition for workers to become involved in the party. The PioFiesta village at the ManiFiesta festival is the best example of this project.

This is especially important since the existence of an organization accessible to working class children is an objective need that is not always met in our society. That is why, alongside the youth movements that already exist, there is room in Belgium for a bilingual popular youth movement.

We want the Pioneers to be able to bring together hundreds of children and dozens of organizers around their activities. The potential for expanding and developing the Pioneers remains great. Too few members and supporters of the PTB know of this group's existence. We must build bridges with the PTB and the medical centres and better publicize the Pioneers' activities.

### **An organization for teens and young adults**

An organization for young people (14-25) that has several priorities:

- *Developing a broad education and action movement for teens and young adults.* Young people are not given the tools and the knowledge to understand the world and to change it. We want a youth organization that enables them to do so. In the face of individualism, defeatism, ignorance and prejudice, we want to offer our alternatives and develop progressive values and an alternative culture together. We want to build a youth organization able to give them self-confidence, teach solidarity, camaraderie, mutual support and opposition to all forms of discrimination, racism, sexism, etc.

- *Being a movement that undertakes concrete actions.* Offering a space where young people can tackle their issues collectively and develop means of action to change the status quo. We want to help young people begin to seize action opportunities: for a democratic education, against racism and discrimination, against war and for peace, in support of the environment, to build a fairer society.

- *Approaching politics in innovative ways.* The party's youth organizations have too often tended in recent years to function as mini-parties. Our youth movement needs to innovate, to break with routine and look for



forms of appropriate, creative activities where young people can also have fun. We must trust them to develop their initiatives, seize opportunities that arise, generate them and act boldly. The young have cultural, sporting and emotional needs and we must consider them and enrich them. Politics can be expressed through culture, music, theatre, video, sport...

Everyone has potential and often unknown talents. The young are diverse and attuned to various social problems. Our youth movement must reflect this diversity with multiple discussion themes and forms of activity. We have had very good experiences in the past with camps that brought together several hundred young people, after-school mentoring to review course material collectively and organizing large street art festivals.

Our youth movement can play a decisive role in developing the whole party, in approaching young workers, and in feminizing and diversifying the PTB. The youth movement speaks to young people from all backgrounds and all lifestyles, especially those from the working class and those who will later join it (for example, by involving technical school students). Our teenagers' organization wants to reflect the diversity among young people, with particular attention given to the problems of discrimination experienced by young Belgians from migrant backgrounds.

These young people are the future of the party and the future of social change. Today, our youth movement is especially active in Brussels, somewhat so in Liege and has recently taken root in Antwerp. There are also embryos of groups elsewhere. In the coming years, we want to build our youth movement in all cities.

### **A combative student organization**

The student section is currently the most developed element of the PTB's youth organizations. It is active in eight Belgian university cities (Brussels, Ghent, Leuven, Louvain-la-Neuve, Liege, Antwerp, Hasselt and Mons) and had approximately 650 members in 2014. Students are a specific layer of the young and they live in a special environment.

The student movement is a cornerstone of the social movement. With privatization, more rigid selection, rationalization measures, reduction in social spending and the increase in university fees, students suffer directly from austerity policies. The problems of racism, climate change and international issues also affect students. They represent an enormous resistance potential, which calls for organization, campus by campus.

Among students are also to be found future intellectuals, who will soon lead the political, ideological and cultural debate in society. They discuss and form their worldview about the social, economic, political and even philosophical parameters of social organization. They ponder alternative approaches, such as a universal basic income, negative growth, Keynesianism or Marxism, and broach international issues. Later, some of them will become society's pundits. We are facing a big challenge, especially in Flanders, for it is also on the campuses of Flemish universities and colleges that the party is battling the nationalist and conservative ideology of the N-VA party and of Flemish bosses.

This underlines the importance of a student movement. First, to engage and influence these debates, imbue them with a Marxist perspective and disseminate a real alternative left vision. Second, to educate, within this movement itself, even more new intellectuals and activists, people who will, during their studies but also later, become the true driving force of this progressive counter-movement. Intellectuals who choose to side with the working class and are able to develop a Marxist vision. Our party itself was founded by students and many of its new cadres come from the student movement.

Finally, there are still very few working class children in higher education because of rigid selection and social inequalities in education. The university system has always tended to be an ivory tower, with students cut off from the world. Here too a PTB student movement can play a paramount role. First, this should lead us to pay attention to high schools where young people from the working class are more numerous. Second, we can strive to build bridges between students and the workplace and to

create opportunities for young people to encounter Belgian workers' reality. This will give them opportunities to invest their abilities in support of the labour movement and to join these struggles.

### **A constant concern of the party for its youth organizations**

The party's youth organizations should develop as autonomous organizations, but that does not mean that the party cannot support their development. On the contrary, we want to do so more effectively. For this to become reality, we must achieve a real "mental shift" at all levels and in all sections of the organization. This is one of the challenges of this youth priority.

In practice, this means for the party:

1. *Making room for young people in party leadership bodies*, starting with the National Council.
2. Each province must help new youth movement branches get started, beginning with the large cities. For example, by *strengthening adult teams* that can accompany and supervise branches. Experience shows that there exists a need, parallel to young people assuming responsibilities, for a stable team of adults who can pass on their experience and ensure a relative stability.
3. The party can *encourage all members keen to work with young people to give a hand*, either periodically or on an occasional basis.
4. There should be *periodic contacts* in the provinces between the party and its three youth organizations to consider what can be done together, how to reinforce one another mutually.
5. *Youth movement activities should be widely publicized through all party channels* (secretariats, medical centres, grassroots branches, and party media). We aim for 17 000 young members by 2020 and we already have a much wider circle of supporters; so there is a huge potential of young people who might be interested in the party's youth movements.
6. *Supporting existing initiatives such as school tutoring or collective study sessions*. These are indeed practical means of fighting against

inequalities in education, all the while developing a spirit of solidarity and mutual assistance. A great way to promote the youth and student movements.

7. There should be *in all party activities* a systematic reflection on the place and visibility of young people.
8. Providing *logistical assistance* when necessary and possible (facilities, communications, etc.)

#### **(4) Youth at the heart of the party**

Besides the youth organizations of the party, there is also the issue of youth within the party. Recruiting more young people into the party is essential to ensure its survival and future development. Youth organizations will obviously be prime contributors, but there needs to be more. We want to make a special effort throughout the party, from the National Council to the branch level.

Experience shows that the presence of young people is a factor of enthusiasm and dynamism. Youth attracts more youth. Conversely, we have branches or entire sections where the average age is increasing and we are unable to bring in or retain younger people. This is especially apparent as more and more comrades are now retired and therefore have more time for party activities. This is very positive for the party itself, but it highlights the acute importance of recruiting young people. We currently have situations where branches in some of the youngest municipalities in the country are composed mainly of older people. This is not normal and not good for party dynamics. Changing this calls for a true “mental turn-around” within the party. We must absolutely prioritize the recruitment of new young members to strengthen the branches and build new ones. During PTB introduction meetings and commitment courses, we must pay special attention to young people, perhaps by assembling groups on an age basis. Moreover, we must also envision splitting some branches and creating new ones where age differences are too great. To support youth involvement, we can sometimes organize certain activities or meetings especially aimed at reaching young people.

Finally, it is essential to pay particular attention to young workers and other young people in trade unions. The early years are in fact a crucial phase for young trade unionists, when they have their first experiences and must often learn to coordinate work and activism with their family life. It is important to help them achieve this balance.

### 1.3. A Party of Progressive Convergence

We are primarily the party of the labour world, in all its strata and its diversity. At the same time, our party is working to build a progressive alliance against monopoly capital. This means two things: (a) reaching out to broad layers of the independent middle class and to farmers, and (b) reaching out in particular to specific social categories: young people, students, intellectuals and artists.

A progressive convergence is not in this sense a form of organization or an electoral platform: it primarily means having a converging global approach with a message, spokespersons and demands addressing the needs of all components of this progressive alliance, and not just those of the working class. A progressive convergence fosters meetings and exchanges of views and experiences about resistance and the public debate in general. This progressive convergence is vital for our future, because it builds the only strategy that can break the suffocating influence of the minute social layer of monopolies, large shareholders and annuitants<sup>4</sup>.

At the heart of this progressive convergence is the working class, but if the latter is to involve other segments of society successfully in its liberation struggle, it needs to be able to move beyond its own discourse and its own direct demands. Only then can it draw forward young people, intellectuals and artists, and liberate the various layers of the independent middle class from the political and cultural influence of the monopolies. We must focus our proposals, our actions, our message and our cultural struggle in this direction. In our actions and mass communication, we must go

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4 Annuitants are people who do not work, but live on their pension or investment income. This income can come from various sources (life insurance policy, term deposits, shares in various companies, real estate income, the stock market, financial investments, etc.).

beyond “trade-unionist”<sup>5</sup> actions and messaging that only address the working class.

History teaches us how vital this is. Fascism was born as an anti-socialist revolution and was from its beginning financially supported by big business and large landowners in Italy and Germany. An open dictatorship of capital thus took power and managed to suppress the insurgent<sup>6</sup> workers’ movement. What is specific to fascism is that the “black shirts” (Italian militias of fascist leader Mussolini) managed for the first time to organize the middle class in a mass party. This was a completely new phenomenon because until then, the working class was the only one to organize in mass parties. The Communist parties of Germany and Italy were very developed in the working class, but small business owners ruined by the economic crisis joined the fascists in droves. Subsequently, the German Marxists said they had lost the battle against fascism because of the ruined middle class, among other causes. Our situation is not that of the 1930s. But this should not blind us to contemporary developments. Today, in addition, reactionary forces<sup>7</sup> are developing a strategy aimed at small business owners and at the middle class, to align them completely with the interests of large industrial and financial monopolies. The N-VA in particular is rapidly gaining in influence and membership in the various layers of the middle class. Subjectively, this is understandable, since many middle class small business owners tend to wish to become large business owners. Nevertheless, significant layers of the self-employed class objectively suffer from the competition of large monopolies. We need to figure out ways to take advantage of this objective situation to attract various segments of the independent middle class to a progressive movement and thereby isolate the reaction.

Spokespersons play a crucial role in bringing the *spirit* of this progressive convergence up to date. Almost every layer of society has its own

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5 Trade-unionist: oriented primarily or exclusively in terms of direct benefits for a group of workers. Loses sight of the overall struggle to change society.

6 Insurgent: in revolt.

7 Reactionary forces: political and ideological forces that oppose the fight for social democracy and socialism. They want to maintain the status quo and try to limit or abolish the rights obtained through workers’ struggles.

spokespersons, who articulate its ideological and cultural worldview. For example, Karel Van Eetveldt, the boss of the organization of Flemish SMEs (UNIZO), systematically and aggressively spreads the worldview and culture of monopolies among small business owners. This is why it is important that small business owners and all other social strata find their own spokespersons and intellectuals to develop an alternative message. The same goes for organizations of the middle class and farmers. The farming leader José Bové, for example, played a progressive role in the French farmers' resistance early in his career. This is just as true for young people, students, intellectuals, artists, women and people of immigrant background.

## 1.4. A broadly defined cultural struggle

Globally, monopoly, industrial and finance capital defines the country's political orientation. This happens in many different ways. There is the implication of some of the politicians: in a system of communicating vessels, politicians get highly paid positions on company boards and business executives are entrusted with mandates in government or functions in the administration. There is the influence of thousands of lobbyists<sup>8</sup> on legislative work in Brussels. But there is especially the worldview of the establishment, the dominant class, which creates an oppressive single ideology, parroted by virtually all political forces.

Here we are not talking about the specific demands of bosses' organizations or business lobbies, but rather about the cultural ideas or meta-ideas<sup>9</sup> disseminated in the population year after year. All kinds of think tanks have been developing these ideas for years: liberal ones like the Chicago School, or conservative, nationalist and racist institutions such as those of the New Right. They impose a vision of society that legitimizes capitalism. Today, neoliberal, conservative and nationalist visions are the

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8 A lobbyist is a person who influences political decisions (laws, regulations, standards) of a government on behalf of the interests of a person or of a professional, economic or financial organization.

9 A meta-idea is one that includes a whole set of ideas, a very general idea.

dominant ones. These think tanks have put a lot of work into how to communicate their worldview.

Everyone knows them, the jokes, the little sayings, the witticisms, the preconceived ideas that are dished out day after day: “if people have no work, it’s their own fault”; “bosses are creators of wealth”; “nothing can be done against the rich in case they flee abroad with their capital”; “the real contradiction is not between labour and capital, but between those who are productive and those who are not”; “government takes up too much space, we must decrease the number of bureaucrats”; “we will have to work longer because we live longer”; “trade union initiatives have never changed anything fundamental in society”; “strikes are useless”; “man is a wolf to man, selfishness is part of human nature”; “inequality makes for a dynamic society”; “the world is changing, Social Security must change too – not to see that is conservatism”; “we need to stimulate the upper layers of the economy; they play a leading role for all other levels”; and so on.

The business world, the class of investors and the financial elite thus wage a permanent cultural struggle. They do it with great creativity, with campaigns developed in expensive advertising agencies, with subtle messages disseminated in films and culture, TV series and games, magazines and books, but mostly through a continuous presence of their representatives in the mainstream press, spreading the same message day after day. Commercial media, belonging as they do to the economic elite, readily propagate this message, creating a kind of groupthink. The ruling class tries to persuade the people that its worldview is the only one, or at least the only one that works. Other ideas or visions rarely see the light of day or are marginalised.

The ruling class first tries to win over the various layers of the independent middle class to its worldview, so that all small business owners also become their spokespersons. Ultimately, it wants this worldview to penetrate the working class too and thus transform resistance into passivity and submission. The ruling class would like to popularize its philosophy and commercialize it until people no longer consider this worldview as an ideological



discourse of power, but simply see it as “normal thinking”. If that becomes the case, we can speak of a cultural hegemony of the ruling class.

### (1) **Building our own culture**

The 2008 global financial crisis gave birth to a slogan, “there will not be any societal debate about the crisis”, that resounded everywhere, including among European social democrats. This was what was left of the worldview of ultraconservative US professor Francis Fukuyama, who proclaimed “the end of history” in 1990, meaning the end of the ideological struggle between a capitalist ideology and a socialist liberation ideology. This is of course an exquisite conjuring trick. For when the culture of emancipation and liberation disappears, the field is clear for hegemonic capitalist culture. The alleged “absence of ideology” only promotes the ideology of the ruling class. Indifference to the cultural and ideological struggle weakens the progressive movement, relegating it to a defensive position. Instead of heading towards a profound change in society, we merely focus on what is achievable immediately, on small adjustments to the established order.

It is therefore vitally important to promote our own culture. The working class is the main creator of wealth and is best able to bring forward a new culture of liberation, based on solidarity. It develops its own rich culture, one that goes beyond its own interests and may also inspire the independent middle class, farmers, intellectuals, young people, students and artists. For our ambition must be to disseminate a new culture of liberation in the working class, but also among the other layers of the population. We must wrest these various classes from the influence of monopoly culture, the banker mentality, the selfish neo-liberal logic and the corporatist<sup>10</sup> worldviews of nationalists. In other words, the workers’ movement will need to oppose a “counter-hegemony” to the cultural hegemony of the ruling class.

Creating a new culture of liberation and a progressive worldview based on solidarity is a struggle in itself. We cannot underestimate it. It is a mistake

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10 Corporatism: social order of class collaboration within a nation.

to deal only with the cost of living, wages and pensions and the immediate needs of the population. Of course, these demands are of paramount importance because they determine the working conditions and lives of millions of workers and their families. However, it is a mistake to think that the cultural struggle over worldviews is not as important. There is the material and concrete situation of exploitation, but also the ideas that often keep people trapped in their oppression. We therefore combine the two: our fight for progressive politics relates to our struggle for a progressive and liberated worldview. We should abandon the deeply rooted tendency to limit ourselves to direct economic and social problems, without opening windows on the world.

## (2) An extensive process of cultural awakening

To break the consensus surrounding the dominant model of society, we need a new worldview. A social, democratic, ecological and internationalist vanguard conception of life, built from society's grassroots. The French Revolution was prepared for by decades of cultural struggle and battles of ideas, led by radical Enlightenment<sup>11</sup> thinkers in a process of awareness raising. Today, we also need this process of broadly defined cultural struggle.

Our *counter-hegemony* consists of the model of society we want to achieve. We call it Socialism 2.0. Each chapter of our section on Socialism 2.0 constitutes an element of our worldview. They are our vision of Man (as self-realizing), Culture (people's entitlement to share in the management of society), Economics (collectivization of the main economic levers), Ecology (respect for nature as a source of wealth) or Ethics<sup>12</sup> (solidarity). It is a mistake to believe that the struggle over these concepts becomes important only later, in a new socialist society. In a deeply politicized society like ours, it is crucial to lead this cultural struggle now and try and build

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- 11 The Enlightenment: Enlightenment thinkers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century favoured the development of science and of a scientific worldview by their intellectual exchanges. They opposed superstition, the abuse of rights in the Church and the State, and intolerance. They championed the principle of equality, the rights of human beings and of citizens. This school of thought was the ideological and political basis of the 1789 French Revolution that ushered in bourgeois democracy and ended the feudal system.
  - 12 Ethics has as goal providing answers as to how humans must behave, act and be with each other and with those around them.

our own cultural vision, from the labour movement towards all other sections of society. We do this in order to marginalize in the end the cultural hegemony of the ruling class, that of a worldview that only benefits the richest 1%. With Socialism 2.0, we offer a modern, inclusive<sup>13</sup>, forward-looking response to the groupthink of the Right. To achieve this project, we must dare to engage in this debate today, rather than tomorrow, by publishing opinion pieces based on well-grounded analysis, but also biting reactions, shock phrases and progressive images, Facebook statuses and tweets that reflect the optimism of our worldview.

This also means that we must create our own culture. The ManiFiesta festival is a positive example: it is a reflection of the society we want, in its balance between content and culture, in the diversity, the solidarity that prevails in common activism uniting supporters, members and cadres. Just as the medical centres of Doctors for the People are fine examples of our culture.

“There will be no new culture if we do not apply the values of the new society we want in our struggle today,” said Angela Davis. Today, the workers’ party must also value, in practice, the working class in all it does, in its culture, in images and in words. This also applies to equality between women and men, which must imbue our culture, against any male chauvinism. The same goes for diversity. Ultimately, this is true for all the Socialism 2.0 values that we stand for as a party: mutual aid, solidarity, cooperation, collectivism, mutual respect, conformity between word and deed, respect for work, rationalism, no racism or sexism, self-confidence and self-control, sense of initiative and internationalism. All this should be presented and discussed in the PTB introduction and commitment cycles, in cadre schools, but also in the daily lives of sections, grassroots branches and youth organizations. This is our worldview, this is our vision of the world and that is what we ourselves want to apply in the first place and actively disseminate. Our spokespersons, leaders, activists and members together influence tens of thousands of people daily. They are

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13 Inclusive: welcoming and bringing together all progressive social forces.

the most important ambassadors of a new culture of liberation, in word and deed.

### (3) **Our own language, as opposed to dogmas<sup>14</sup> and jargon**

Ideas are very important. Ideas are expressed using language, whose importance we often underestimate. This is a serious, long-standing disease in the communist movement, a real obstacle in addressing large groups of people. We discussed this very explicitly during the Renewal Congress (2008): “We need to speak a simple and direct language, understandable by all people, to simplify our messages, our literature, our activities, in order to put the people we work with at ease. We must pay special attention to avoiding party jargon, and simplifying our message. Both in documents and in imagery. By addressing both the mind and the heart. With humour and seriousness. [...] We base ourselves on analyses and well-built cases. These lead to coherent proposals. That is the work which addresses the mind. Then, we still have to win over the heart, by addressing it in our work. A picture says more than ten long sentences. A good title is more effective than a slogan. In a mass leaflet, images, illustrations, titles and subtitles are as important as the text itself.”

Yet we can still find among some in the party a language full of exclamation marks and simplifications. It uses binary<sup>15</sup> logic: a language that is either academic and incomprehensible, or full of platitudes, simplistic arguments and facile dogma. Direct, simple, clear language is confused with bar talk; indignation is confused with the use of exclamation marks and bold characters, political education with the removal of all nuances and all dialectics.<sup>16</sup> We underestimate people’s thirst for culture.

We plead for a new kind of language, understandable, clear and rich in content. We believe in convincing people with arguments and not by enumerating a series of dogmas. We must bring a rich culture to the

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14 Dogma: statement presented uncritically as a fundamental truth, unquestionable and inviolable.

15 Binary: offering only two possibilities.

16 Dialectics: worldview and method of thought that tries to understand the world in its complexity, its cohesion and its development.

table, not a simplistic commodity. We must highlight real-life people, focusing on their beliefs, expectations, hopes, strengths, but also their weaknesses. No heroes or abstract<sup>17</sup> voluntarism, but people of flesh and blood. We should not confuse fighting talk with inside jargon. Language too calls for creative work, and it is an essential element of an innovative culture. We need new words, metaphors,<sup>18</sup> strong images and great creativity at all levels of our communication. We really need a much greater media diversification of our own culture. Not just in writing but also in speech, audio-visual media and activities that are more accessible.

## 1.5. The social struggle and people's representatives

The great achievements of the social struggle, such as social security, paid holidays and the eight-hour day, are all the result of the organizational strength, education campaigns and mobilization of the labour movement. Democratic rights such as trade union rights, the right to vote, the right of association and freedom of speech were also the result of over a century of workers' struggle. The most essential improvements to the lives of workers issued from years of social struggle.

Our message is not “we will fix it for you”. We are not a clientelist<sup>19</sup> organization, quick to promise jobs, social housing or other benefits in exchange for a vote or a membership card. The PTB is different. Our message is “take your fate into your own hands, organize, study and educate yourself, mobilize”. The essential changes we need will only be achieved by a major social struggle and we invite everyone to take part in it consciously. This does not mean either that we cannot take practical action in response to questions that people put to us. We can provide them with information, direct them to a party branch that deals with this topic or to the competent administrative authorities or, in some more general cases, we can take political initiatives on the relevant issue.

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17 Abstract: theoretical, as opposed to concrete.

18 Metaphor: image-based language, using comparison.

19 Clientelism: a system designed to win political clients.

To reinforce the social struggle, we also appeal to our MPs and other elected representatives. They are party members who did not run to gain a position, material benefit or easy money. They live and work with an average worker's salary. This distinguishes us from all other parties and is crucial in the fight against careerism: none of our elected members draws a financial benefit from his or her mandate. Indeed, this is our fundamental vision of elected representatives: they live and work in people's interests, in support of awareness-raising, mobilization and organization. Our representatives are assets to the party: they act as a sounding-board to the social struggle and to progressive convergence, giving a greater media presence to the party's positions and worldview. They are also acknowledged spokespersons of the party.

Our MPs and other elected representatives work in transparency, independently of party politics and backstage arrangements, lobbyists, liberal think tanks and the jockeying for position that characterize our parliaments and provincial and municipal councils. Too often, our elected officials find that a game of political theatre is being played between representatives of the Majority (deemed "the good guys") and of the Opposition (presented as "the villains who can only say no"). These roles are often interchangeable and do change after each election, without changing anything fundamentally. There are many resounding declarations, but often everything is already decided in advance and elsewhere. In government (or in municipal executives), powerful lobbies from the financial or business world predetermine the agenda. This also happens at the EU level, where the interests of the ruling class weigh even more – think of the TTIP for example (see *Times are changing* section). Our MPs and other elected representatives refuse to play this game and firmly respect the principle of popular representation: they received a mandate from the people and work on behalf of social liberation. This annoys certain forces who exert pressure on all sides to attract our representatives into the sty of politicking and backstage arrangements.

Our representatives feel it is important to open the doors and windows of parliaments, provincial and municipal councils to the outside world. In

order to do politics differently. For instance, they divulge the secret deals and agreements made in the backrooms of power. Transparency in politics means politics made fully public. People have the right to know how decisions are made and which lobbyists are working behind the scenes. And our elected officials have a duty to reveal all of that.

Our goal is for our elected officials to give correct, well-argued and energetic speeches, which need to be understandable and clear as opposed to the jargon of Parliament that is comprehensible only by insiders. When an elected representative speaks like a notary, it is obvious that he or she never comes down to street level. “Tell me how you talk, and I’ll tell you who you are,” goes the saying. The way our representatives communicate is therefore very important. The language and metaphors we use are a crucial weapon in the political struggle.

Our elected representatives and officers are not looking for “a pat on the back from the mayor” or “a compliment from the Opposition”. They have received a popular mandate: to put our programme on the agenda, to give voice to the social struggle and to involve social movements in solutions. These politics often clash with the stifling groupthink prevailing in the various parliaments. Our speeches are well-argued, we avoid cheap slogans and flights of facile rhetoric, and we always seek to strengthen social movements and the social struggle.

The working principle of our representatives is “from the street to the Council to the street”. Their position is not an end goal, but a link in the PTB’s emancipation work. Our elected representatives start from the living dynamic of the neighbourhood, the workplace and popular associations, and they relate these aspirations to solid analysis and demands. Popular dynamics are our lifeline and our strength. This ranges from small things to major projects for which people organize and mobilize. Very often, our elected representatives are the ones putting the most practical issues on the agenda, based on the experiences of party members and the contribution of social movements. Our representatives enrich the liberation movement with all the information their mandate allows them to

access. They then share the results of their speeches and proposals, even if these have failed in Parliament. Our representatives bring the results of their work to the field and to the streets. This is the meaning of the *Street-Council-Street* principle. The speeches of our elected representatives serve the social struggle and not the opposite.

The essence of the Party's work is to deploy a political activity in the field. If a branch does a good job, it can score many points locally, even in the absence of elected representatives. For it is fundamentally education, organizational strength and mobilization that bring results, whether the issue is maintaining a playground, or advancing an ambitious project to fight a new expressway in order to have breathing room in the city. Moreover, even in the cities and towns where we have elected representatives, the axes of our work are not conditioned by their presence. Of course, we bring many items to the agenda of municipal councils and provincial or social aid administration councils – and we often do not use these opportunities enough. But not everything has to go through the elected representatives. The workplace branches and local sections have their own dynamics and their own action plan to bring about change. The political heart of our party is in its grassroots branches and the social struggle, and we want to keep it there.

The same goes for our parliamentary work. It is not a goal in itself but a link in a broad liberation movement. Our elected representatives also live by the *Street-Council-Street* principle. They relay the voice of the broadly-defined social, ecological, democratic and cultural struggle. The work of our deputies aims at strengthening both the capacity of the party to mobilize, organize and raise awareness and the striking force of labour. Through grassroots branches, they are listening to what drives people, they involve trade unions and community associations as front-line actors. With the help of our research department, they translate all these aspirations into resolutions and legislative proposals. But here too, the rule is that not all aspects of the liberation struggle can or should go through Parliament. Our MPs focus on the main issues experienced in the field and on a number of key cases. Of course, the larger our parlia-



mentary group, the more issues and subjects we can handle. However, we must always ensure that our elected representatives have enough time to be available in the field, so they do not let themselves fall into the rut of habit and language characteristic of Parliament. We want our MPs to feel like fish in the water in the neighbourhood, the workplace, the action group, association, trade union or neighbourhood committee. Our MPs must account for their mandate and this is where they have to do so, not with respect to elected representatives from other parties. This is important, so we have to make sure it happens. What did the PTB do with your vote? We can organize neighbourhood discussions, collect new ideas and proposals and gather criticisms that allow us to improve our work.

The history of the Parti ouvrier belge (Belgian Workers Party)<sup>20</sup> teaches us that there is a real danger of witnessing a power shift to party MPs at the expense of the democratically elected structures of the party. When MPs begin to define the political orientation themselves, power increasingly resides in their hands. Party activity is thus increasingly limited to parliamentary work, instead of playing a liberating role in popular neighbourhoods and in workplaces. This leads more and more to an electoral logic where a position that goes against dominant ideas is never adopted because that would cost votes. Politics thus becomes increasingly trapped in the logic of parliamentary forces, instead of social power relations. When child labour was banned in 1887, not one MP supported this measure. If we had then reasoned only from the perspective of a parliamentary majority, children would still be slaving in mines and textile factories. The social struggle is the force that changed the social power dynamic and won the prohibition of child labour.

The PTB's policy is decided in the various democratically elected structures of the party, first and foremost the National Council. The activities of our parliamentary groups reflect the interests of the whole labour movement. All our elected representatives work within National Council guidelines. The party has high political, organizational and financial demands for its parliamentary groups. The parliamentary groups do not

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20 The Parti ouvrier belge (Belgian Workers Party) was the ancestor of the Socialist Party.

therefore operate independently, but under the aegis of the National Council and the Party Bureau. Indeed, the history of workers' parties shows that the parliamentary tribune was for many elected representatives a vector of opportunism, individualism and personal enrichment. People are fed up with those practices, and rightly so. It is therefore our special duty to uphold these principles firmly.

## 2. AMBITION VERSUS ROUTINE

2.1. Growing Pains

2.2. Thinking strategically

2.3. A Strong Backbone

2.4. Women

2.5. The Red Devils of Politics: a Bilingual and National Team

2.6. Educating to understand and act in an Informed Way

### 2.1. Growing Pains

The approach adopted by the 2008 Renewal Congress)resulted in the Party we know today. Compared with the preceding thirty years, the party experienced a very rapid and even spectacular development.

Provinces were reorganized and new young blood was brought into their leadership, as was the case with a large number of departments and the student organization. We invested heavily in the development of new digital media and continued to reinforce our research department, of whose scientific importance we are well aware. There are also many more grass-roots branches, particularly in the labour sector.

The party is now familiar to two thirds of the Belgian population. Six or seven years ago, two thirds of the population were not aware of our existence. Before the Renewal Congress, we received 56 000 votes in the Federal election (2007). Seven years later, in the 2014 election, this score soared almost fivefold to more than 250 000 votes. We now have more than 50 representatives and, for the first time in our history, we also have MPs in the Federal parliament (and in regional parliaments).

All this happened during a very turbulent period: the economic crash (2008), the long institutional political crisis (2009), early elections and the continuing breakthrough of the nationalists (2010), the movements struggling against the crisis (2010 and 2011-2012), local elections

(2012), federal elections (2014) and the social struggle against the new right-wing government (2014).

In a relatively short time, we have continued building the party rapidly, which was necessary. However, it would be wrong to rest on our laurels, for social challenges remain huge. The more we grow, the more complex tasks become. We are also facing, in a way, difficulties linked to this growth. This is not abnormal, but we do have to be aware of it. We cannot stay mired in the work habits of a cadre party with a thousand activists. Instead, we must now take into account our party's multiple facets. A dynamic party of ten or fifteen thousand members cannot operate in the same way.

In the years to come, we wish to take up a range of different challenges in the social struggle, the political struggle in all its aspects, the cultural struggle, the party's development among the workforce, among young people, and among many other layers of the population. Our party boasts a very large human potential, which needs to be trained and supervised at all levels. We can channel this energy toward ambitious goals by having new, young comrades conquer new grounds, and by making room for creativity and renewal.

In a dynamic party with ten or fifteen thousand members, professionalism is required in addition to commitment. Our current party activities mostly rely on volunteer work. We really need to professionalize and leave amateurism behind. Both among cadres and personnel (employees and volunteers), it is no longer enough to "work hard" or "do one's best", work also needs to be done well and efficiently, because of our huge accountability to workers and to all those who strive for a world without exploitation. For our political commitment to produce results, we must achieve a professional attitude, efficient procedures, professional secretariats, clear job descriptions and quality-controlled work. The party must offer its many volunteers a professional environment where they can fully deploy their skills and commitment. We want to develop a personnel policy and a system for supervising volunteers that will include, amongst other matters, education, training and coaching (political, technical and pro-

fessional), standardized procedures, and a healthy and pleasant working environment.

Over the last five years, we have invested heavily in the renovation of the headquarters of our National Council, on Boulevard Lemonnier in Brussels. Thanks to the commitment of hundreds of people, the building has become beautiful, modern, functional and full of light: a new workplace. This renovation is our largest financial project since our creation, with an investment of 2 million Euros. Our project now is to make the best use of it, so that the party leadership can work together in a single building. This increases efficiency, allowing us to engage more quickly with the projects of other departments or sections. It also allows for a better national response from the party, because we dispose immediately of a bird's eye view of all the different sectors in the country.

We also intend to enhance the role of the National Secretariat as the nerve centre of the party organization. The work done by National Secretariat comrades is very important and, in the coming years, we want to invest more in its professionalism and standardize its administration (membership, elections, staff), communications (house style, press releases, press conferences, social media) and other tasks, using new handbooks.

In developing a larger party of active members, it is important to have a simple and efficient work style, based on handbooks, typical scenarios, campaign kits and guidelines, essential working tools, easy to access and use by anyone. No endless texts but practical instruments for the operation of a grassroots group: helping a branch president work as efficiently as possible, using social media, creating a new branch, managing a membership file, organizing a press conference, preparing a public debate, developing a support campaign, taking on a specific task, and so on. In the years to come, we really want to produce these handbooks because they are a basic resource for putting as many people as possible to work on as many assignments as possible. Naturally, these handbooks will not replace coaching. Therefore, we must still invest heavily in the development of effective and more professional support systems.

Our most important challenge is thinking constantly about how to expand and invigorate our structures. What new tasks are necessary for the party, how do we create new structures to achieve them and how do we immediately entrust important assignments to competent new comrades? Training new comrades, boldly entrusting them with responsibilities and well-defined projects, allowing them to mentor groups of three, four or five people, educating them through debates on different political views, but also on life choices and commitments: all these are very important. Everyone must be well informed about these challenges; otherwise, the work will yield nothing. Routine is omnipresent today, a routine which hampers the development and growth of the party. We may become victims of our growth process if we do not take it on in radically different ways.

## 2.2. Thinking strategically

The most harmful idea is to think we should temper our ambitions because there are already too many tasks. This seems a logical and simple idea, but it is not. For if we limit our ambition and creativity, we are putting the brakes on the organization and we will end up not discovering new initiatives and proposals that can attract new dynamic forces, and getting bogged down in routine to the point of merely going around in circles.

Being ambitious, we will always see a tension between what we want and what we are able to do. The solution is to start from what we want and centralize around that all ideas and proposals. This is how we can discover new unforeseen approaches. The main point is therefore the will to think strategically, to develop initiatives with a long-term vision, deploy ambitious plans in which new comrades will be entrusted with responsibilities and assume them. Moreover, the main problem is that not enough of this is happening today. Because of our workload, which is real, pragmatism and everyday tasks still play too much of a role. These events end up driving the party instead of the party driving such events.

This is why we encourage everyone, and certainly party cadres, to use their energy and creativity in solving our most important problems. We

must do so in our current multi-year strategic planning framework, in the launching and testing of new initiatives, in the exploration of new areas, in organizing synergy between our various departments, provinces and initiatives, and in recognizing the need to think *outside-the-box*. This expression means thinking outside existing structures, outside party habits, but of course always respecting our congress guidelines and rules. This goes for the whole party, because creativity should be everywhere, but it is especially incumbent on party cadres.

If we do not constantly stoke the flame of ambition and if our thinking remains mired in “available energies”, routine, passivity and bureaucracy will quickly take over, the years will pass and nothing much will change. Routine and passivity can also lead to not recognizing or seeing among party members and sympathizers the enormous potential of talent and ideas, in the most diverse of domains, and thus not taking these resources seriously, not assessing, supporting, supervising and assisting them.

We can only take advantage of such political and organizational opportunities if the party is able to formulate a project or long-term plan that gives form to these opportunities, and to support, mentor and accompany the comrades involved. Planning especially means to stimulate and develop unifying and mobilizing projects, to arouse people’s enthusiasm and give them a sense of unity. Developing such projects then helps attract, engage, coach and train hundreds and thousands of new people.

As a comrade wrote: “When we have too many tasks, or we pile too many things one on top of the other, we end up having no more time to think about the long term. I see that in my case: the CPAS council, the municipal council, directing the Doctors for the People NGO and so many other tasks. I run from one to the other and I have no more time to step back and look at things strategically. However, an initiative like Doctors for the People should continue to grow over the years. This does not happen automatically. It calls for forethought and resources to carry it out, and this is what gets underestimated.”

Three aspects are interrelated:

1. The political aspect. In the *Times are changing* section of this document are listed a very large number of political tasks that we want to continue developing. We are aiming for a wide cultural, philosophical, and social spectrum, and must therefore enlist dozens and hundreds of party members, friends, and friends of friends in order to develop on all these grounds a truly contemporary Marxist standpoint.
2. Developing initiatives, proposals and suggestions to revitalize, improve and professionalize party structures. What structures are best suited to the current development of the party? How do we manage the diversities that are the hallmark of our party efficiently? How do we ensure the party's democratic centralism (as defined in our Party rules), the staffing of the various levels of the organization, the key role of provincial branches, and the priority given to being active in the working class?
3. Developing ambitious external initiatives. How do we produce party media that can reach half a million people? How do we create large member organizations, first of all for children, high-schoolers and students, but also for women? How to organize workers, the unemployed, the elderly, the disabled and their families, refugees, immigrants, sport enthusiasts, artists and other cultural workers, academics and intellectuals, etc. ? We once set up a fantastic initiative, Doctors for the People. How can we repeat this achievement in other sectors? Many opportunities remain untapped, be it the unemployed; the issue of municipal administrative sanctions inflicted on young people, as we predicted six months before their application; the resurgence of racism; the growth of poverty; wars against Libya and Syria; the Bolivarian movement in Latin America, etc. There is an absence or a dearth of bold initiative, this despite the fact that new projects that we helped develop in a thoughtful and enthusiastic manner have been successful: for example, the movement against the dismantling of legal aid, the organization of Ford subcontractors, and mobilization for climate summits.



## 2.3. A strong backbone

The introduction of the chapter entitled *Un parti de principes* (A principled party) of the Renewal Congress (2008) draws a number of lessons from mistakes that marred the history of the POB, including the following: “Soon, there occurred a great aversion to substantive debate and socialist theory. ‘I am only interested in what is direct,’ said Anseele, the leader. He was responding to daily events, seeking to define his attitude on a case-by-case basis. The inherent characteristics of the capitalist system, socialist objectives, long-term interests of the working class... all these were soon ‘forgotten’ and sacrificed for the benefit of real or supposed advantages of the moment.”

This pressure to appear as a pragmatic, quick-response party increased with the development of our party. For pragmatism, what counts is the practical result, what is direct and easily accessible. A focus on long-term goals and a social vision is left out. This leads to the logic of merely focusing on the “saleable” character of our message, of adopting an almost mercantile<sup>21</sup> attitude: “What will this cost us?” and “Do we risk losing face?” We make do with giving a quick answer on current events; we only develop political views in order to “score points” with the media; we consider reorganizing the whole research department to focus on short-term communication. With such an attitude, we become unable to shatter the worldview and cultural hegemony of the ruling class. We carry out the odd stunt, but we do not win lasting positions. To do so, we need to move beyond our daily routine, deepen our Marxist analysis and study key strategic issues thoroughly. It is the difference between leading and being led, between submitting to our opponent’s initiative or taking things in hand ourselves. Moreover, this attitude is paramount in order to develop our own worldview and our own socialist culture in the labour world and in major progressive circles.

To strengthen our backbone, we also need more education. Education provides the vision to act in an informed way. Time has to be made free

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21 Mercantilism is the tendency to seek a profit in any activity, as in commerce.

for education. Education cannot be dropped on the pretext that “everyone is already doing so much”. This also goes for the feature articles and analyses on *ptb.be*, in our monthly magazine, *Solidaire*, and on our digital bulletin, *solidaire.org*. There is currently on our website, *ptb.be*, a tendency to settle for rapid tit-for-tat communication, and a kneejerk style of response. We thus see analysis, understanding, education and social debate gradually pushed into the background. Yet it is precisely through education and critical thinking that windows will open on the world and that people will have new ideas and themselves be able to develop new initiatives and proposals.

We are a principled party, a party with a strong backbone. In addition, we need to work at this daily, not only through comprehensive study and education, but also through debate and discussion. We are all working toward the same goal and that is a good thing. Nevertheless, there are also, and this is natural, divergent views. We must make it possible for these differences to be expressed and discussed. A friendly atmosphere is a good thing, but it is not good that an atmosphere where friendliness predominates prevents the expression of criticism. In the party sections, everyone must be able to adopt an independent position and should be able to discuss it freely and frankly, as is also stressed in our Party rules. Constructive criticism needs to find expression and we encourage everyone to adopt a self-critical attitude. For no one is perfect and everyone can learn. We therefore want to take time regularly to discuss commitment, our comrades’ lifestyle choices, attitudes and ethical and cultural values. This should not go too far, of course, and should take into account what each comrade is able to understand.

Finally, we regularly try to prepare a short assessment of the activities we organize. This is an underestimated step. We assess what the activity has brought us, the strengths we want to keep and the weaknesses we want to avoid in the future. This is an essential step to unify all participants in an activity, so as not to run from one activity to another and not to plunge from one orientation to the next without ever taking the time to assess what is successful or not. This applies to all sections and, first and

foremost, to the national leadership, the departments and the provincial leadership.

There is a die-hard myth in the party: that making such an assessment is a mammoth task requiring a lot of time. Some comrades freeze up for fear of not being able to achieve it. During an activity, however, all those who bear responsibility see, hear, feel what is going right and what can be improved. Assessing it is to record these perceptions quickly in writing and enrich them with everyone's contribution. Other comrades deliver assessments that run for dozens and dozens of pages. This is also counterproductive, as the essential becomes buried under an endless litany of details. Therefore, the message is, work fast and efficiently, and synthesize sufficiently.

Sometimes it takes more time and more thought to draft an assessment, whether it is to clarify disagreements or contradictions, or to transcribe experiences in organizational notes, handbooks or scenarios. These are then available to the entire organization and can be regularly supplemented, enriched or corrected. We thus avoid having to start from scratch each time.

## 2.4. Women

Women represent half of the population, and half of the workers whose hearts and minds we want to reach. They also represent half of the young people, intellectuals and artists we want to win over to the struggle for a different society. They are therefore not a minority.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that too few women find their place in the party. Only 37% of our members are women. In some provinces, this ratio is even less than 30%. The problem does not arise only in quantitative terms: the women in the party are mostly occupied in less political tasks, they are less visible and they have a lesser overall responsibility than men do. It is in the national leadership that the problem is most visible. To this day (2015), women represent only 20% of the National Council

elected at the Renewal Congress. The Party Bureau has only one woman in a team of eight. Added to this is a gender-based tasks breakdown: all current provincial presidents are men, while the department tasked with recruitment and the creating of party branches is predominantly female. This imbalance between men and women occurs at all levels, down to the grassroots branches and among members, and is a problem which concerns the whole party.

### **What is the explanation of this situation?**

First of all, it reflects society's influence on our party. In capitalist society, the status of women reflects additional forms of discrimination. Women generally take on the majority of household chores and assume the largest share of children's education, taking parental leave, time credits and part-time jobs. In large cities, nurseries can only accommodate 25% of children. Women are the most affected by flexible contracts and low wages. Single women are overrepresented in the population living below the poverty line.

All these factors limit their possibilities of engaging socially and politically, of freeing themselves in order to attend meetings, lectures, actions. This reduces their opportunities to learn and express their opinion. The pervasive inequalities of capitalist society permeate our party, especially since we do not fight consciously to provide them with an answer. On to these visible inequalities are sometimes grafted less visible differences, but whose impact is also important. Women often have less confidence in expressing their point of view, or await certainty before giving it. They are less likely to apply for the highest responsibilities: either they do not feel up to carrying them out or they believe someone else will do better than them... Many are more focused on human relationships than on the political agenda, or more willing than men to accept organizational tasks. The causes of this are varied, sometimes obvious, sometimes more complex. We will try to analyse them better, with the help of the new Women's Commission of the party.

## **Taking the problem seriously**

We have so far failed to grasp the problem seriously, for lack of ambition to change the status quo, or maybe because of the illusion that the process will reverse itself on its own. We have no systematic approach to this issue in the political, ideological, communicational and organizational realms.

At the political level, we intervene very little, if at all, in all the issues that specifically affect women: the combination of work and family, but also domestic violence, contraception, the right to abortion, prostitution, etc. We pay too little attention to the “gender” dimension of policies adopted by our governments, which disproportionately affect women (pension plans, unemployment, etc.).

Ideologically, we fail to challenge the image of women formatted by the advertising, fashion and music industries, and by all those who benefit from multiple forms of discrimination against women. Yet women differ greatly from all the gendered stereotypes fed to us by capitalism. We experience this daily in all of our workplaces and struggles. Too often, however, we fail to transpose our criticism of this situation into our political message, in spite of its being an essential dimension of building a new liberating and progressive culture.

We fail to analyse our campaigns and materials using a systematic *gender* lens. As a rule we do not seek gender balance in discussions or meetings. We do not entrust the women’s movement, Marianne, with the basic means it needs to thrive.

Yet such measures would help increase the number of women in our ranks.

## **A challenge for the whole party**

We need to get back on track and take firm action to give greater political importance to the status of women, to make way for women in all sectors

and at all levels of the party. This is not merely a task for women or for the Marianne women's movement. It is a challenge that all party departments and organs will need to take on.

The discussion must take place collectively and at all levels. We need to take the time that is necessary for it. It is not a question of whether women are less or more competent than men. An active woman – politically informed and sustained by a women's movement – has a huge potential, whereas a woman maintained in a situation of dependency in relation to her spouse and who must justify any militant undertaking to him is much less likely to be able to face challenges. The starting point is that we need to make the most of all those who share the thirst for an inclusive society where everyone has a place and a say. The starting point is that this potential is far more versatile than what is currently manifest and is essential for developing the party, from grassroots members to the highest level. We do not wish to discuss whether it is possible, but rather how to do it and stick to it.

Developing positions on all major issues relating to the status of women is paramount for all our departments. Increasing our ratio of female members will require discussions in all party units. "Yes, our priority sectors are mostly staffed by men," as some will observe. Still, next to most male members of the party, there is often a woman who could also be joining. Proposing membership to partners should be a matter of course. In some cases, we find it impossible to meet a woman without her husband accompanying her. Debating with our male members the possibility of their spouse also having an autonomous commitment is one of the missions of a party like ours. Moreover, women are over-represented in some professional sectors; these are other territories yet to conquer.

Debates on education and child custody concern men, in all sections of the party, not from the perspective of blaming them, but on the basis that no problem can be solved without them. Apart from the very specific periods of pregnancy and breast-feeding, there are no "natural" reasons for family chores falling to women more than men.

“I already have commitments: someone needs to take care of the children.” Yes, someone must do it, but it cannot be only the mother’s problem. Are we holding meetings at impossible hours? This must certainly also be a problem for other members: discuss together finding the best solution. If you cannot find or afford a babysitter, seek a member or sympathizer who is ready to babysit. Are actions and events taking up whole Saturdays? Let us ensure that each section or province organizes collective childcare. “I arrived in the PTB and was able to remain active, because others helped look after my child. I could not have done it if I had had to find a solution by myself.” It is this spirit that we must promote, to permit the commitment of every woman and man.

It is especially important to be mindful of this when a comrade starts a family. At all levels of responsibility, this is the most frequent dropping-out moment for women who had been involved earlier. This is not inevitable; it is a problem we can solve. It is not an individual issue, specific to each new mother. Rather, it is a collective problem, which we can only solve by appropriate discussions.

It is also strikingly noticeable that, among young people, girls are often the only ones to interpret starting a family as being at odds with their political commitment. Their fear is justified if we do not take strong measures to avoid reproducing within the party forms of discrimination that exist in society.

It may be useful to hold specific meetings, ad hoc, between women. Recent experience also shows how women getting together helps to establish a relationship of trust and facilitate speaking in political discussions. This in turn benefits the dynamics of (mixed) grassroots branches.

### **Quotas: a tool to move forward in advancing women as party leaders**

At the cadre level, a first challenge is necessary, regarding the use of quotas to foster the emergence of women in the party leadership. Quotas have proven their efficiency, as demonstrated by research and the practice of

other organizations. In our own recent electoral practices, the rules about the drawing up of lists have led many women to engage in their first public debates. These rules have also permitted the election of women who otherwise would not have been selected. Faced with these electoral requirements, we discovered unexpected resources.

Quotas make it incumbent to seek all potential candidates and not to reproduce the present inequality. We start with such a quota for the National Council, which must include at least 33% of women. As the previous team had only 20% of women, this was a major step forward. Implementing this rule calls for immediate efforts. It is also a commitment to go further in the coming years.

Quotas are a way forward, not a solution in itself. There are many constructive proposals on the table. The new Women's Commission, set up by the National Council, will have to study them closely.

### **Marianne, the women's movement of the PTB**

The development of our women's movement, Marianne, is also part of the solution. As it is, the attention and resources devoted to it by the party are wholly inadequate. We will never solve the challenge of giving women a place in our party without giving them in parallel the possibility of having their own women's movement. Why?

1. We need a mass movement to deal primarily with injustices that specifically affect women, to specialize in political interventions on these issues.
2. Specific problems and forms of discrimination that women face must also be addressed in a specific space: such a space can be more easily created in a movement like Marianne, rather than in party grassroots branches.
3. The existence of a liberating and mobilizing women's movement is, in turn, one of the keys to increasing the number of women in the party.



## 2.5. The Red Devils of politics: a bilingual and national team

We start with a vision. We want a society without exploitation, where everyone has a decent and rewarding job, where neither xenophobia nor narrow nationalism prevails and where everyone can enjoy a rich social and multicultural life. We advocate voluntary cooperation between socialist countries, a cooperation that will also be multinational and multilingual. In our view, language groups are equal and everyone is entitled to use his or her own language. Our country is not an historic anomaly in this regard, but rather the cradle of a multilingual European future. Splitting our country along linguistic lines would run opposite to the course of history, cause even more fragmentation and weaken the position of the labour movement against those who wish to divide and conquer. Separatists use the language issue to sow discord among people. Dividing the country on this basis will lead to endless linguistic quarrels. Language-based legislative assemblies veer toward a petty nationalism, quite remote from real problems. In a country like Belgium, a federal electoral district is necessary for people to have the opportunity to comment on the parliamentary work of MPs and the policies pursued by government ministers. The current separation of constituencies by language is absurd, because it makes it impossible to control part of the MPs and the policies carried out.

We see our country's bilingualism as an asset. The multilingualism of our capital, Brussels, where no separatist knows where to turn, is a future asset in a world where more and more people of different origins live alongside each other in cities. Similarly, Belgium's bilingualism is an asset in tomorrow's global society. Knowledge of foreign languages facilitates openness to the realities of other countries and other cultures and fosters international collaboration among workers and young people.

The PTB is a unitary, national and bilingual party, clearly an advantage. In the Red Devils<sup>22</sup> there is also no “Walloon”, “Brussels” or “Flemish”

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22 Red Devils is the name given to the Belgian national football team.

team. It is a single team that tends towards the same goal, with a single technical staff and administration. We have the same dynamic in the PTB. There is no “Walloon wing” or “Flemish wing”, as difficult to understand as it may seem to some political analysts. There is only one PTB throughout the country and this is natural. It is much more unusual to find completely divided parties in a country, organized on language and territorial bases. Some describe us as the “last” national party. We see ourselves more as the “first” national political force, bearing a broad emancipation movement throughout the country.

Our unitary and national character cannot, however, be taken for granted. It is subject to the pressure of our country’s objective situation. Over the last two years, a qualitative step took us closer to “confederalism”. It is a conscious (or maybe “deliberate”) policy of the most aggressive and financially strongest fraction of the ruling class in the northern part of the country. A growing trend seeks to address most of our country’s political problems on a regional or “community” basis. Among French speakers, a regionalist and even nationalist trend has been developing, in response to this nationalist trend in the North.

Of course, all these factors have an influence on the party, as the only national political force. Leading the whole party has become even more complex, since both regional government competences and political debates are increasingly different in the different parts of the country. We also feel this pressure inside the party and it is strengthened by certain imbalances within it. Historically, we have stronger presence in the North, where there are a greater number of initiatives, larger networks and more of our cadres. This has a snowball effect because that segment develops more ideas and proposals, which tends to reinforce the imbalance. At the same time, and for different reasons, it is more difficult to gain political ground in Flanders. This does not mean, of course, that it is less important. Quite the contrary: we need a lot of energy to hold back right-wing forces in the North; this in the interest of all of our country’s working class. Moreover, in the federal elections, we won two seats, in Liège and in Hainaut, and elected regional politicians in Wallonia and Brussels. In

the South, we are gaining media visibility and there is fantastic potential there, which we intend to build on in the coming years. Our federal MPs represent the whole party, the whole country, and we clearly established this right from the start. There exists, however, some community pressure to speak of them only as “French-speaking MPs”, which reinforces this imbalance: we are much more present in the French language media and so increasingly well-known on the French side. For the first time, we also have MPs in the Brussels Parliament and this once more gives us opportunities to publicize, from the capital, the party as a bilingual entity. In conclusion, despite the “community” pressure, we want the party to advance throughout the country, while being well aware that the objective and subjective situations are not the same everywhere.

To strengthen the national and bilingual character of our party, we encourage frequent contact between members (and sympathisers) in different regions of the country. Getting to know one another’s way of life and building friendships across language borders, through exchanges, visits, parties, guided walks in towns... all are positive and easily accessible ways to resist nationalism and the idea of one’s “cultural superiority”.

As for society, we approach each issue first from a materialist and class analysis. International politics, crisis policy, restrictions, privatization, the issue of pensions, taxation, health care, environmental issues, and racism – we analyse these thoroughly beforehand, asking what the aim of the ruling class is, and what the consequences are for labour and all other social classes? It is only after carrying out this analysis that we can ascertain if specificities in the French or Dutch-speaking parts of the country might possibly justify using different tactics. We should not, however, reverse the process, in other words, use particular tactics without referring to a general, basic analysis.

In a party that organizes members and activities throughout the country, it is essential that cadres also have a national profile, whether they are responsible for their full department or for some specialty. We ask each cadre to make an extra effort and go beyond his or her local and cultural

background. It is not easy, but it is not impossible either. Our main goal, naturally, is to work with all members, regardless of their place of residence or language, just as it is important to share responsibility in national activities that bring together party members from different regions. It helps to check out the VRT or VTM television channels occasionally or, conversely, the RTBF and RTL, and read press reviews in the other language. We call for at least passive bilingualism among national party cadres. For some, this will be more difficult than for others, but we want to implement special support measures to achieve this. There may be some exceptions, but they should not become the rule. In the National Council, everyone should at least be passively bilingual,<sup>23</sup> so that everyone can express him or herself in his or her mother tongue. Members of the Party Bureau and presidents of provinces and departments, should all be actively bilingual.

## 2.6. Educating to understand and act in an informed way

Thinking and acting go hand in hand. Nothing stands still, everything changes. Therefore, our reflection must be ongoing, regarding theory basics, strategy and tactics. We must constantly develop new analyses, search for ways to achieve our goals. We base our analyses on Marxism. Marxism is a living entity, constantly updated, enriched and supplemented by experience, through practice, study and debate. The results of our work show up in party documents. The documents written for the Renewal Congress (2008) and the Solidarity Congress (2015) are the cornerstones of our work, study and education. They reflect our basic principles, analyses and positions, our political practice and organizational principles. After the Renewal Congress, we published a number of books reflecting our analysis of society. *Priorité de gauche* (Left priority), *Comment osent-ils ?* (How dare they?) and *Première à gauche* (First on the Left) have provided food for a vast debate in society, but also for study

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23 To be a passively bilingual person is to speak one language and understand another, but without being able to speak it. Someone who is actively bilingual understands and speaks two languages.

and education within the party. Our Study Department also publishes numerous pamphlets on current affairs, background documents and feature articles. We also have, of course, a detailed electoral political programme. These basic works, books and articles published by the PTB play a central role in our education, as a living application of Marxism to the current situation. We also study the basic works of the founders of Marxism and try to understand which of their positions are linked to the historical context of their writing and which ideas and positions are still relevant today, sometimes astonishingly so.

Doing politics, wishing to change the world and, in that light, raising awareness, organizing and mobilizing people is a profession that calls for apprenticeship, both in theoretical work and in practice. For all who want a better, socialist society, education is a rewarding and essential process, which leads to a better understanding of things and to acting in a better-informed way. Understanding does not come into being spontaneously, it calls for study and schooling. In addition, this education should aim for depth, not remain on the surface. Some comrades tend to jump immediately to practical conclusions, skipping deep analysis and discussion. This is a mistake. Theory is important to establish principles, strategy and tactics. It is only through proper analysis that we are able, in all circumstances, to implement correct watchwords, organizational forms and proposals for action. Others tend to rely only on theoretical and analytical discussion, without turning them into practice-oriented policy and tactics. This is also a mistake. Study and schooling serve to improve practice, a practice that will generate new problems, which in turn will require new responses.

In short, our education proceeds from needs and is at the service of practice. It must contribute answers to the questions, issues and debates we are faced with. Some questions are simple and can be answered quickly in an article or brochure. Other problems are complex and require further study in order to arrive at a comprehensive and nuanced response and not fall into one-sidedness. The same goes for education. Some courses focus on a better understanding of our political programme, of major

party campaigns or specific current affairs topics. Other courses serve to deepen or acquire basic viewpoints – on political economy, philosophy or the Marxist analysis method – or to pass on our solidarity values and our worldview. Finally, some training sessions enable participants to acquire useful skills, to become presidents of a grassroots branch, to recruit and organize people or to plan and manage their own tasks.

Teaching methods deserve special attention. Without a modern and appropriate teaching approach, we remain in a rut, regardless of the quality of the course content. On the other hand, flashy presentations, with many illustrations, statistics and animations, can also hide weak content. We must therefore define for every course some learning goals, a lesson plan, an assessment and possible corrections. The aims determine the content, which in turn determines the teaching methods used, the best way to transmit the content, and the best manner of achieving the goals.

Good teaching uses a variety of methods. Wherever possible, these sessions should build on experience or on problem solving, starting from the everyday reality of those taking part. Our courses are, wherever possible, participatory and interactive,<sup>24</sup> and can make use of audio-visual tools or the Internet. Educational walks, guided visits to museums or exhibitions, theatre sessions or film screenings can be good alternatives to more academic approaches. At the end of a course, it can be helpful to hand out a short summary paper to participants.

In the PTB, everyone is entitled to schooling. Education is an essential component of awareness raising, and of any form of liberation politics. Marxist education is part of the backbone of the party and is all the more important now that the party is growing rapidly. We want to give Marxist education an essential place within the party, incorporating it into the objectives and planning of the entire party, from bottom to top. This is why we want to standardize as much as possible the content and training methods of basic education by levels. With extensive education programmes, it is indeed much easier for a section to organize a course. We

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24 Interaction: reciprocal action.

wish to have, in every province and department, someone in charge of education who can be responsible for the schooling process in his or her sector. Our monthly magazine *Solidaire* is a key element in this education, as are the feature articles posted on our *ptb.be* website and our digital bulletin, *solidaire.org*. We want to run a column entitled “Marxism for Beginners” in *Solidaire* and *ptb.be*. We also want to post, on the Members section of *ptb.be*, courses that all organized members can download.

In our party, there are different levels of commitment and responsibility. We respect these differences and we want to offer a specific range of courses for each level. Our Education Department is accountable to the National Council and responsible for all courses throughout the party:

1. Lectures and talks open to all those interested in the PTB vision about a specific topic.
2. An education session designed for advisory members and sympathizers to get acquainted with the PTB. These are the two “Encounters with the PTB”.
3. Courses addressed to branch members and grassroots branches, with a special role for *Solidaire* magazine, the *ptb.be* website and the *solidaire.org* digital newspaper.
4. A course for those who want to become president of a grassroots branch: the “Branch Presidents’ School”.
5. A specific course for branch members who wish to commit themselves more and become activists. These are the eight lessons of the “Commitment Course”.
6. A curriculum for activists, in a modular system of courses organized at the national and provincial levels. These are the “Marx Workshops”.
7. A specific course for cadres, with a national cadre school for young comrades and one for workers.

We consider education as a complete (comprehensive) and continuous process. Besides the apprenticeship process in the course itself, we attach great importance to practical coaching activities. Education does not

end with the course, but continues throughout each member's active life. Cadres and activists are thus encouraged via readings, seminars, discussions and debates. For cadres, this is primarily their own responsibility, as stated in the Party rules: "Cadres actively study Marxism and are responsible for its creative application to the advancement of the party."



## 3. A PARTY LIKE NO OTHER

- 3.1. A party of active members
- 3.2. A communist party of our time
- 3.3. A rich social history

### 3.1. A party of active members

#### (1) From 1 000 to 10 000 members

The PTB was born in the tumultuous sixties and seventies as a party of cadres, a dynamic organization that mostly relied on the constant commitment of hundreds of activists. Without this pioneering work, it would never have been possible to establish a new workers' party in our country, both in the South and the North, as well as in the capital. Nevertheless, until 2003, the party never exceeded 1 000 or, at the most, 1 500 members and activists.

In 1999, the party introduced a discussion with a view to gradually moving to a new type of party membership. We first applied it in the neighbourhoods surrounding the Médecine pour le Peuple (Doctors for the People) medical centres, and then in industry sections, during the struggle against the Pacte des Générations (Generation Pact) of 2005. During the 2008 Renewal Congress, we gave a statutory definition of the two different types of affiliation and gave them a more accurate interpretation: the advisory members, on the one hand, who pay membership dues of 20 Euros per year, and organized members, on the other hand, who are branch members and activists. These members are active in a section and are the nucleus of the party. Since then, both the number of advisory members and organized members has increased tremendously. Our intention is gradually to involve advisory members and have them become organized members, rather than “park” them in a consultative affiliation. We certainly want to make as much effort as possible to incorporate new members directly into grassroots groups and to offer advisory members the possibility of joining a grassroots branch, as we do to recruit new advisory members.

The party has grown from 2 885 members in 2008, during the Renewal Congress, to nearly 10 000 members today. That is more than three times as many. To make this possible, we have had to change our thinking. The core functioning of our party lies in the grassroots branches and sections that, day after day, are active in the field and are committed and organized to work with the party. A grassroots branch is founded on four pillars: achieving concrete projects, group dynamics and camaraderie, growth in accordance with the organizational principles of the party, and education.

In addition to branch members, there are the thousands of advisory members who play an essential role in the party. We thoroughly discussed the importance of allowing people to have a place in the party if they empathize with it, rather than leaving them outside the organization. We also stressed the importance of everyone constantly striving to recruit new members. Finally, we acknowledged as a priority the labour world, a more arduous terrain than that of local or municipal sections.

In short, our increase to ten thousand members is not only attributable to a favourable political climate; it is the result of ongoing movement. Yet two years after the Renewal Congress, we still fell short of our target. A course correction was in order. More members are bringing new recruits to the party, but it is far from enough. Many activists and branch members find it personally difficult to recruit new members. There still needs to be much training and mentoring to coach all members in recruiting activity. Our ambition for the coming years is that membership recruitment be perceived by all as a matter of course, part of party culture. We intend to stimulate that attitude constantly in order to draw the best people into the party. We need this commitment and people need the party to deepen their commitment and consolidate it within a greater collective force.

Since 2012, we have been encouraging members as a rule to become more active and join a grassroots branch. All provinces have held “meet the party” evenings, which have been attended by hundreds of advisory members and sympathisers, many of whom have decided join a grassroots branch. This is an important step. The party has long been active in

a few historical strongholds, often around a Doctors for the People medical centre. How do we ensure continuous growth for the party? This is not an easy nut to crack. Organizing “meet the party” evenings for advisory members and supporters of a certain region or a workplace has allowed us to create new sections, in places where we often had not been active. Our best results occurred when we applied the decisions of our Renewal Congress (2008), with both a principled and flexible approach.

A crucial element is that we need people to lead such new grassroots branches. The dynamics, the political focus and the strength, but also the continuity of a grassroots branch depend largely on its president’s abilities. The Branch President handbook should help them in this regard. Each branch president also receives support through monthly meetings of presidents, but also by individual coaching. The best experiences thus percolate throughout the party, allowing other grassroots branches to benefit from the experiences of other workplaces or regions. There is, however, still much work ahead. Professional training and coaching of new presidents will prove of paramount importance to the continued expansion and outreach of the party.

A developing party needs to offer many levels of commitment. Since 2013, we have also taken on the recruitment of new activists, organized members who wish to step up their commitment and devote much of their free time and energy to the party. We need numerous new activists as party tasks have increased along with our growth. These new people take on more responsibilities in our campaigns and new initiatives. They can play an important role in building up the party in workplaces and neighbourhoods, and in organizing people of the associative sector. Activists also undertake to continue their education in our Marx Workshops, which function as a breeding ground for new party cadres. That is why we have set up “commitment courses” allowing them to delve deeper into the political, organizational and social skills needed to take up assignments with responsibilities within the party. This school also broaches our political and financial principles, worldview and cultural values. Activists also commit themselves to pursuing their education in the Marx Workshops. Our number of activists, which

had remained stable for many years, has increased by half since 2013, and there has in particular been a large influx of young people who bring a fresh perspective and enthusiasm to the party. In the coming years, we want to put even more emphasis on the recruitment of new activists.

After its 2008 Renewal Congress, the Party gained considerably more recognition. More than 250 000 people voted for us in the 2014 elections. Our media, website and Facebook pages are now reaching more than 150 000 people each week. Our MPs make us even better known. The PTB is present in a number of major cities. There remain, however, many workplaces, cities, towns and neighbourhoods where the PTB is little-known. In addition, for 2020, we expect to gain firmer ground in cities and towns of medium size. We want to proceed in a planned manner, taking into account our current presence in the field, as well as the demographic composition and the economic sectors of these cities and municipalities. There are still plenty of opportunities to grow further. We are looking at a potential of some 15 000 or even 17 000 members by 2020. At the same time, we want at least a quarter of these members to organize as grassroots branch members or activists.

## **(2) The grassroots branches are the eyes, ears and arms of the party**

A party of active members has a deep connection with people, shows respect for all forms of commitment and builds the organizational strength necessary to turn this commitment into a wide social struggle for emancipation and liberation. We therefore want to continue recruiting many new advisory members and preserving enough organizational flexibility to give them a place and take their advice seriously. We need many branch members, branch leaders and activists to ensure that all members find their place within the party and can be active according to their own wishes and abilities. We also need many cadres and activists to take on new responsibilities and engage in new fields of action.

Potential advisory members teem throughout society: in workplaces, in neighbourhoods, sports clubs, senior citizens' associations or youth movements. They often have a very astute perception of how society works (or does not work) in their specific environments, which makes their opin-

ions invaluable. Each grassroots branch and each section involves its advisory members actively and creatively in its activities, several times a year, via telephone calls, visits and invitations to local events, such as a simple meal, a New Year reception or a particular initiative. Advisory members also have the opportunity of participating at least yearly in the functioning of the party, at an annual general meeting.

It is important to recognize differences among members to avoid any problems. Advisory members have not committed themselves to being really active. For an advisory member to become an active member, one must ask that person and show great respect for his or her answer. Some advisory members merely take a membership card as a gesture of support. This affiliation is very important for us. Other people do not wish to engage with the party (at this stage) because they already have other commitments or because they still want to look a bit at the party's current nature, or because they are simply not considering this option at present. We respect everyone's choice, but of course maintain the ambition to involve them and find a place for them in our grassroots branches. Ambition calls for discerning the potential of our advisory members. Bringing people to increase their level of commitment and organization is no simple task, but it is really worth our while to take it in hand.

Organized members commit themselves to concrete tasks, which they discuss in the collective context of a grassroots branch. Grassroots branches are the building blocks of local sections and operate according to party rules. Our grassroots branches are the sensory organs and motor organs of the party. They are the eyes and ears of the party: they are aware of what people are experiencing and saying at the local level, in communities, neighbourhoods, businesses, offices and schools. Because we are first and foremost the party of the people, this input is of vital importance not only for the party as a whole, but also for the grassroots branch itself.

Grassroots branches are also the party arm, leading national and regional campaigns at their level, so that we achieve good results together. At the same time, they take on local issues in their workplace or neighbourhood. This sometimes generates a tension that is deserving of attention.

To become president of a grassroots branch, five criteria are imposed: agreeing to attend the “Commitment” and the Branch Presidents’ Schools, attending the presidents’ meetings, observing the party rules and defending Congress documents as best as one can. The party’s provincial leadership must approve the election of each president.

We have already mentioned the paramount importance of grassroots branch presidents. A person who wishes to launch a new grassroots branch addresses this proposal to the provincial leadership, which will then help the candidate organize two “meet the PTB” evenings, to which existing members in the area will be invited. Such evenings aim at starting a new grassroots branch in a workplace or region. They are not open evenings, “general attendance” events, but people who show interest in working with the party can of course be invited.

### **(3) The importance of cadres and why there are still too few of them**

Cadres are organized members who wish to assume a final responsibility. They are party activists, they are committed, they do not leave problems that arise lying and they take the struggle for a dignified and humane socialist society to heart. The heart alone is not enough, however, there also has to be a head. A cadre contributes to reflection, helps to define party orientation, and expresses thoughts on fundamental issues, organization, strategy and tactics, all of this to infuse creativity in the growth of the party. A cadre has a Marxist vision of society, wishes to study and understand social transformations and communicates personal momentum and enthusiasm to all others.

There is always a relative dearth of cadres. Our ambition and goals require more people, more commitment, more ideas, more creativity and therefore more responsibilities too. Only those without ambition do not regret a dearth of new activists and cadres.

To move from a party of cadres to one of active members calls for a transformation of the functions allotted to national cadres and the top leadership. They must manage the most crucial tasks and constantly appeal to

colleagues' sense of responsibility. To lead a party of active members, one cannot revisit every issue constantly. It is better to hold a good in-depth discussion, followed by a good synthesis and good decisions, which will then be valid for a number of years. We must get rid of the umbrella system whereby every issue constantly fell into the laps of a small team of national cadres. It is of course impossible for every party activity to rest on the shoulders of a dozen Bureau members.

Final responsibility really means ultimate responsibility, and national cadres must meet high requirements. They must learn to manage on their own on the basis of meetings and instructions and take responsibility in their own field, showing ambition and creativity, taking responsibility from A to Z, really getting results. To lead a party of ten or fifteen thousand members, we need other skills than those of ten years ago, and other skills than that of a cadre party. Working in isolation will not lead to success. Each cadre must be able to put a team to work, a staff. We also want each cadre to be “red and expert”, to be politically and ideologically educated, and to master the latest professional knowledge, tendencies and developments. Our work is results-oriented: cadres want to achieve certain goals, which is entirely different from merely putting in hours. A cadre sees her or his task as a passion; otherwise, it rapidly becomes routine and bureaucratic. This means that we must go deeper into issues, not be satisfied too quickly, work professionally, quickly and to the end.

In the coming years, we will face the particular challenge of injecting new, young blood into the leadership and training new cadres. We want to devote special attention to the training of young workers, women and comrades of immigrant origin.

### 3.2. A communist party of our time

The turbulent history of our party (see section 3.3) clearly shows that the PTB is a party like no other. It emerged from the struggle for emancipation of the seventies, at a time when liberation movements and Marxism were in an upward phase. In our country, the party has always sought its

own path independently, with magnificent achievements, steadfast support for the working class and the general population, but also by committing major stupidities and mistakes, like any party that seeks its own way. At the 2008 Renewal Congress, we clearly stated our abandonment of international models and a ready-made socialism, and our will to endow the emancipatory project of socialism with a contemporary content. This is what we are currently doing with our *Socialism 2.0* project.

The PTB is a special case in Belgian politics since it expresses both a fundamental criticism of the established order and the hope and feasibility of a different society. The ruling class tries to dismiss the PTB as a traditional party akin to all the others. And if that does not work, the ruling class draws on clichés and caricatures, because it does not want to acknowledge the significance of a contemporary and modern communist party. This meaning is simple and articulated in Article 1 of our party rules: “The PTB is a communist party of our time. Its ultimate goal is a society that abolishes the exploitation of man by man and where the entire community rules society.”

Our goal is emancipation. It is important that people understand their own situation and the way society works. We must move beyond spontaneous and improvised movement on a daily basis. Our political orientation should raise new prospects for humanity and society which go further than spontaneous consciousness. Isolated individuals cannot achieve this; an organization is essential, one that can resist Big Business’s carrot-and-stick strategy. You can break a finger; you cannot break a clenched fist.

### **Why we become stronger thanks to the party**

To educate, organize and mobilize the different layers of the working world, to develop a progressive and emancipating culture of solidarity in the labour force and in other sections of society, we need a collective force. This needs to be a well-organized political force which can listen carefully and investigate issues critically and without prejudice; a force that can overcome particularities and can develop and apply a dialectical



synthesis to the emancipation struggle; a force that unites people instead of dividing them and knows how to make the best of collective wisdom and experience. Collective strength allows each and everyone to deploy better skills in the service of all, turning his or her ideals into a material force for change and developing these values through study, education, discussion, and the sharing of a common practice.

People who commit themselves to the party know that their experiences, ideas, creativity and skills will serve much more widely than in their own workplace, neighbourhood or circle of friends. No one can be active in all fields. Knowing that comrades are working in other areas to achieve the same goal on the same basis is a strong motivation. Everyone will eventually meet problems, pressures or serious setbacks. It is very difficult to manage entirely on one's own. Within the party's collective structure, one can count on the help and support of comrades who are committed to the same ideal. Committing oneself to the party is a good investment. Each person's experiences, ideas, creativity and skills have a positive impact on his or her work, among friends and in the neighbourhood. Educating, organizing and mobilizing large groups of people are complex endeavours. We must be able to develop good strategies and tactics for each situation. This calls for the experience of thousands of party members, of those waging this struggle for emancipation elsewhere, and of the rich history of the labour movement.

It is unusual to see a party sticking to its specificity and refusing to comply with dominant standards and practices. It is good for the party to retain this determined and rebellious nature and not align with everyone and everything. Our party refuses to turn politics over to professional politicians. It sets people in motion, involves, educates, organizes and mobilizes them. It is active in the field, in the neighbourhood, in the workplace, wherever people work, live and interact. The party also has an international vision and develops practical initiatives of international solidarity and cooperation. It has principles, clear rules on the income of all cadres and elected representatives, thereby keeping away careerists and opportunists. The party joins word and deed and distrusts idle rhetoric with no

practical result. Yes, the PTB is a special case in Belgian politics, and we are very proud of that.

### 3.3. A rich social history

It can be said today that the Parti du Travail de Belgique has become an adult party. Indeed, its creation dates back to 1979. Some parties are older, others more recent. All have changed since their foundation, changing their name (or not) with much fanfare. The PTB has also changed, but with a little less fuss. Here is an overview of the main developments of this Marxist party. It had to wait until 2014 to corral a quarter million voters and make its debut in Parliament but, in terms of activism, it has undisputedly been a frontrunner for a long time.

#### (1) 1966-1979: The beginnings

The sixties, those famed golden sixties, were full of contradictions. While the Cuban revolution had just triumphed and the (formerly Belgian) Congo had become independent in 1960, in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the armies of Uncle Sam were massacring millions of people with bombs and napalm. The wheels of business could not have run better. Yet in 1966 in Zwartberg, a Limburg municipality, police forces shot down two miners fighting to keep the mines open. Everywhere, socialist-inspired popular movements were struggling against oppression and exploitation: the working class was restless. It was a time of great changes and demystification of taboos. Students inspired by Marxism united, among other places at the University of Leuven, within the Studentenvakbeweging (SVB - student union movement, 1967) and the University of Ghent, in the Gentse studentenvakbeweging (GSB - Ghent student union movement, 1968). Even before May 68 in Paris (and at the ULB in Brussels), the storm was already raging in Leuven in January. Right-wing students were screaming, “Walen buiten” (Out with Walloons). “Out with bourgeois” and “University for the people,” replied the SVB, which had a massive following. Marxism was gaining ground everywhere. Along with Berlin students and liberation theologians such as the Colombian priest Camilo Torres, who was studying in Leuven at the time, members of the SVB discovered

the works of the founders of Marxism. This was the age of great ideals and strong discussions on how the world had to change. Aspirations were high: Belgium had to undergo drastic changes, capitalism had to disappear and socialism would reign on earth. In 1968, in a world of tumultuous changes, these claims did not seem exaggerated.

Today, it has become fashionable to separate May 68 from the social struggle. The desire to change society and put an end to war, exploitation and injustice is thus recast into a personal desire for strictly personal happiness. Nothing could be further from the truth. In Leuven, students took to the streets against a mostly French-speaking Catholic establishment. But they were also fighting the bourgeois Flemish and the elitism of the Flemish university, with its dearth of working class children. They were not calling for “flower power” but for a true democratization of higher education. Women organized to claim power over their future and their choices against the patriarchal society of the three Cs (Church, Children and household Care). They claimed the right to abortion. They also wanted equal pay for equal work. In 1966 – two years before May 68 – an 8-week strike of 3 000 women workers at the FN factory in Herstal demanding “equal pay for equal work” had already had international repercussions. Democratic Lawyers did not advocate a policy of “anything goes”. They were denouncing – decades before the *Mouvement Blanc* (White Movement)<sup>25</sup> – the fact that anything is indeed allowed to a certain segment of the population, in a class-based justice that the rich were increasingly sidestepping while commoners were given the runaround in the state apparatus maze. In several neighbourhoods, young lawyers organized accessible ragtag legal clinics. Medical students were not demanding freedom to “experiment with drug use”; they were criticizing a medical system that only allotted three minutes per patient, and the systematic prescription of pills by a caste of elitist doctors, often sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry. The peace movement denounced

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25 The White Movement arose in the wake of the Dutroux scandal in 1996. Dutroux was at the heart of a case where children were kidnapped, raped and murdered in Belgium. After his arrest, hundreds of thousands of marchers demanded a reform of justice and police institutions, and better protection for Belgian children.

the imperialist USA intervention in Indochina. The anti-racist movement grew in solidarity with the U.S. Black Liberation Movement.

The idea of a united front between workers and students coincided with a wave of solidarity with liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In October 1968, students joined a strike at Ford Genk, and in March 1969, they support textile industry strikes in Ghent. A truly critical choice occurred a year later when, in January 1970, 25 000 miners begin a wildcat strike that would last six weeks. Given the influence of the nationalist Volksunie in mining, young miners, people inclined towards social justice and members of the SVB joined together in a strike committee entitled *Mijnwerkersmacht* (Power to the Miners). In April of that year, the workers of the Cockerill Naval Yards went on strike. These meetings and the study of Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* led to the idea of founding a new workers' party: not just a struggle committee or an independent workers' committee, but a new communist party.

Words lead to deeds: leftist students decided to give up a career in medicine, psychology or education and take up jobs as labourers in dozens of companies. At first they met with suspicion but, at the same time, their qualities were appreciated. Gradually, they began developing this new workers' party and laying the groundwork for the PTB's entry into the largest workforces of the country.

October 5, 1970 marks the first issue of *Alle macht aan de arbeiders* (AM-ADA) (Tout le Pouvoir aux Ouvriers - TPO), a newspaper that would be published every three weeks, at a price of 10 Belgian francs. The budding new party took the same name. In the working-class district of Hoboken (Antwerp) the idea of Doctors for the People was born and a medical centre opened on January 1, 1971. In service to the people, ideals became reality. Hoboken was followed by Genk (1974), Lommel (1975), Zelzate (1977), Herstal (1979) and, later still, six other medical centres. At the time, free medicine was still a taboo issue for the ruling class. The ultraconservative Order of Physicians began waging a long war against Doctors for the People. When the Order tried to seize the furniture of a

young doctor who refused to pay professional dues, hundreds of patients took up his defence. Doctors for the People medical centres provided a significant outreach for AMADA. “Rely on the people” was the motto of the young party builders, and they were not empty words. In 1974, the party organized a support campaign in order to fund a weekly and, almost immediately afterwards, another campaign to finance its own printing press. Activists collected the equivalent of 100 000 Euros of today. The budding new party had national ambitions from the start. Several discussions to achieve unity with the Marxists from the student movement in Wallonia and Brussels failed because we were either too radical or not radical enough, or because of different interpretations of Marxism. After countless attempts at unification, the young AMADA decided (in the years 1975-1976) to begin campaigning by itself in the South, under the label All Power to the Workers (TPO).

In France, in the spring of 1968, ten million workers went on strike and sided with protesting students. The movement ended with the Grenelle Compromise: a 10% wage increase, a 35% increase in the minimum wage (SMIC), a reduction in the working week (44 hours) and the acknowledgement of labour rights in the workplace. The right to abortion became a reality, and student and parent councils were accredited in schools. In our own country, the storm was not as strong, but the spirit of May 68 also rocked the business world in the early seventies. Nearly 700 strikes broke out in Belgium between 1970 and 1973; mostly wildcat initiatives, unrecognized by the trade unions. The most well-known occurred at Ford Genk (1970), Forges de Clabecq (1970), Citroën Forest (1970), and Vieille Montagne in Balen (1971). Other strikes at Boel Shipyards (Temse, in the Waas region), Tessenderlo Chemie and Glaverbel (Gilly), were union-led.

During this period, the young AMADA was also committed to the defence of democratic rights, demanding decent housing for new immigrants who had been parked in huts, and the regularization of refugees. It also opposed the creation of a professional army. In January 1973, tens of thousands of high school and university students took to the streets against plans for such an army. A major campaign also prevented the adoption of

strike-busting legislation by Social-Democrat Minister Vranckx, who was taking aim at strike committees and wildcat strike pickets.

The period was full of changes. In the US, agitation against racism and discrimination was growing; the Black Panther Party led the fight against the oppression of Afro-Americans. The liberation movement was developing worldwide to re-appropriate the wealth of the people. From Algeria (1962) to Angola (1975), this movement culminated with the liberation of Vietnam in 1975, where, after 1.5 million Vietnamese deaths, a determined people forced occupying American forces to their knees. This liberation struggle of a small nation against the first military and economic world power dominated news bulletins for years and made a big impression in our country. In Portugal, the Communists played an important role in the Carnation Revolution (1974) that overthrew fascism while in Greece, that same year, a popular uprising ended the extreme-right Colonels' regime. It was a time when everyone had to choose sides; neutrality was not in tune with the times.

When, in April 1973, thousands of dockers stopped work in Ghent and Antwerp, Belgian ports were thrown into disarray. The strike lasted eight weeks. Dockers did not receive strike pay and their families were starving. A strike committee organized assistance to needy families. Dockers' wives were called upon to support their spouses. They took the lead in a banned demonstration calling for strike pay. They set up the Dockers' Wives Committee, which was to join AMADA. The strike unleashed a great wave of solidarity. Small shopkeepers provided food, artists organized benefit shows in many places, and collections were organized. In the wake of the dockers' strike and based on a trumped-up charge, 17 dockers and AMADA activists were sentenced to long prison terms in the "docks trial". These sentences were later reduced on appeal.

For the young, idealist party, the dockers' strike proved to be a hard lesson, its baptism of fire. Our Party rules and national leadership had to reshape the young organization into an effective party in which workers could feel at home, far from the chaos of a student organization. This was

not easy. The carefree student ethos of the past made way for very high demands and the core remained small. At the political level, the party approach remained immature: lengthy tracts dispensed general truths about socialism, far above the heads of people and their daily reality. In 1976, AMADA decided to correct its sectarianism and dogmatism, in a spirit of self-criticism. The young party sought practical achievements, built on patience, accentuation of positive developments, thinking in function of the majority, and implementation of a wide range of activities and fronts around concrete points of action. These guidelines would again become priorities at the 2008 Renewal Congress.

On the trade union front, too, a new approach prevailed. The party came to life in a period of wildcat strikes and had drawn false conclusions about the impossibility of undertaking anything with traditional unions. Combative union leaders, such as those of the Boel shipyard in Temse and others, educated the party about its mistake. It therefore decided to support militant tendencies within existing unions. In 1976, Amada-TPO organized a national solidarity campaign for the reinstatement of FGTB shop steward Miel De Bruyne in the SIBP oil company. And when, in 1978, 250 workers and employees occupied the RBP oil refinery, they could count on the support of AMADA-TPO. For eleven long months, the occupiers struggled to keep the company going, in an effort that ultimately proved successful. In Wallonia, during the same period (1978), TPO played an important role in the strike of the FTA inter-communal electricity company, opposing the sacking of shop steward Louis Dujardin by the Socialist bosses (supported by André Cools, PS president at the time).

On January 3, 1976, a storm completely ravaged and flooded the town of Ruisbroek. Town residents were angry and blamed King Baudouin for “finding 30 billions for aircraft flying noisily above our heads, but no money for the consolidation of dikes”. Dozens of young AMADA members helped residents clear away the rubble. This was also an example of “serving the people”. The party, however, remained a very small group. At its beginning, AMADA had dismissed elections as an “electoral carnival”, but in 1974, it nevertheless took up this battle. In the 1976 municipal

elections, AMADA won 2.2% of the vote in Antwerp and 1.8% in Genk. Its best score was achieved in Hoboken, with 10% of the vote and 2 municipal councillors to boot. This remained an exception, for, at the national level, the party failed to break through. In the parliamentary elections (for the House), AMADA-TPO obtained 0.4% in 1977 and 0.8% in 1978. Still, those results did not dampen the enthusiasm and commitment of the nascent young party. Those activists knew how difficult it was to build a new party in a highly polarized political landscape.

AMADA-TPO was not only concerned with workplace sections and international solidarity; it was also active in many other fields, such as public health and the fight against lead poisoning. In Hoboken, a major campaign took on the lead pollution caused by the factory Métallurgie Hoboken, nicknamed *de zilver* (a reference to money). When test results established that local schoolchildren had too much lead in their blood, a large “action committee against lead poisoning” was set up in April 1978. Doctors for the People and AMADA mobilized within it, along with the parents of Moretusburg children, workers of Métallurgie Hoboken, Young Socialists, the four sections of the Hoboken KWB (Christian Democrat movement), the Oxfam World Solidarity store and local youth centres. Doctors for the People continued its effort against this severe pollution for years, until the Moretusburg district soil was finally cleansed at the expense of the Union Minière, a major shareholder of Métallurgie Hoboken. AMADA also initiated environmental struggles and social and ecological urbanization efforts in other sectors. In the spring of 1979, the municipal authorities of Deurne (Antwerp) authorized construction of twelve-story blocks in a green area situated in the middle of the Arena District. Hundreds of local residents occupied the meadows of the Arena for months, published a mobilization bulletin (*'t Arenake*, the “Little Arena”) and created Radio Arena, a propaganda tool that police forces proved unable to seize because the transmitter changed position daily. Every night there were debates, artistic performances and lectures. Young AMADA activists were very active in supporting and organizing this action. On November 13, 1979, when the site was forcibly evacuated, there were 180 tents occupying the Arena meadow.



## (2) 1979-1989: The neoliberal years

The PTB was officially founded on November 4, 1979, at the Brussels Rogier Centre, after almost ten years of preparation. Four thousand people attended its launching. During a series of preliminary meetings, delegates approved a programme developed in two parts: one on socialism and another on a minimal programme for social progress, democracy, peace and national independence. The new party advocated in particular the nationalization of key sectors, as a reply to the problems of the population. Its intention was to become a real political force in Belgium and to discard the dogmatism and sectarianism of its initial years. AMADA-TPO evolved from a simple slogan to a political party inspired by all struggle movements and by the positive aspirations of workers and of progressives. At that point, the party decided to publish a bilingual weekly. Its name was no longer to be *Tout le pouvoir aux ouvriers*, but *Concret*. From 1982 on, it would be known as *Solidaire*. At its founding congress, the party approved new party rules concerning its structures: elected provincial and national leaders.

The oil crisis of 1973 revealed an overproduction crisis and caused a recession throughout the world. In the United Kingdom (1979), the US (1981) and West Germany (1982), conservative governments rose to power. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan applied the aggressive neoliberal economic policies of the Chicago School (Milton Friedman). During the previous decade, it was still possible to extract wage increases. Starting from this time the labour movement resisted the dismantling of rights and previous gains, and the imposition of flexibility, social security restrictions, rationalizations, plant closures and rising unemployment. In 1984, the whole of Germany experienced a major strike in metallurgical enterprises. German steelworkers demanded and won a 35-hour week.

Crisis conditions existed everywhere and the labour world was on the defensive. Some of the 1968 activists reneged on their commitment and, like Manuel Barroso<sup>26</sup>, now aimed for a successful career within the

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26 Manuel Barroso, a Portuguese politician who presided over the European Commission between 2004 and 2014.

system. Several Maoist<sup>27</sup> parties dating back to May 68 were on the verge of disappearing. New theories came into vogue, such as “goodbye to the working class”. The young leadership of PTB did not take this slippery path and, in 1983, organized a second orientation congress. Both at the ideological and organizational levels, the party confirmed its principles and thus strengthened the core of the organization. But this approach was one-sided. Given the gradual withering of the dynamic born in May 68, the party shelved the change of direction initiated in 1976 that advocated true openness, concrete achievements, patience, supporting positive developments, prioritizing majority sentiments and creating a wide range of activities around concrete action. This change of direction came to an end much too soon, as we would observe a quarter of a century later, in 1999. In addition, the party expressly stated that, in the circumstances, it could not be anything other than a “party of cadres” and therefore not a large “members’ party”. Cadres and militants had to meet stringent requirements. In addition to almost daily activist work in just about every social struggle, they devoted time and energy to study, in order to strengthen the backbone of the party. However, these harsh membership criteria turned many people away from the organization, and party sympathizers were relegated to the “Friends of the Party” section. Despite its good intentions, the PTB continued to suffer from sectarianism.

Politically, things were also grim. During the Cold War, the world often found itself hovering on the brink of a large-scale conflict. In the eighties, one theme dominated the news: the nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. The threat of war became even more tangible when the US stationed its Tomahawk and Pershing II missiles in Belgium. Peace organizations mobilized over 400 000 demonstrators against these missiles on October 23, 1983, for what proved to be the biggest demonstration of the post-war period. Peace activists believed that the nuclear winter they were warning against was dangerously close. Ever since its creation, the PTB had been critical of the many signs of at-

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27 Maoist: a reference to Mao Zedong, leader of the Chinese Communist Party and President of China. Maoism is a political movement inspired by the ideas and actions of Mao Zedong. Its popularity peaked in France and Europe around 1968.

trition of socialism in the Soviet Union and had become closer to China. The PTB had always remained independent vis-à-vis the latter, but the young party adopted without hesitation certain views of the Chinese. One such problematic Chinese position relied on the famous Three Worlds Theory,<sup>28</sup> which made the Soviet Union the most dangerous superpower. This erroneous analysis and theory really harmed the PTB. It resulted in a sectarian attitude, which judged the communists of the Communist Party (CP), progressives and liberation movements strictly on the basis of their position with regard to the Soviet Union. Many years would elapse before the party reconsidered this mistaken position.

In the meantime, other crucial issues became a driving force for the young party. “Serve the People”; “Dare to struggle, dare to win”; activists must be “like fish in water”; “Knowledge stems from practice”: those beautiful phrases reflecting ideals were put into practice; first, with the founding of new Doctors for the People medical centres, but also when the party moved into new national headquarters. In 1984, the party purchased the 171 Boulevard Lemonnier site in Brussels through a major support campaign which, in current figures, brought in no less than 340 000 Euros. Hundreds of workers and young volunteers pitched in to set up the offices. This commitment and volunteer work was from the outset a hallmark of the PTB, which received no subsidies from the State or powerful financial groups. These principles maintained party health and guaranteed its independence. At the time, many people, rightly or wrongly, had issues with certain political positions of the young party, but appreciated such strong commitment and volunteer spirit.

During the eighties, Belgium had ten successive governments: nine led by Wilfried Martens and one with Mark Eyskens as prime minister. “The end of the tunnel is near,” promised Martens and Eyskens as they imposed their stabilization plans one after the other, with the added bonus of three index jumps between 1982 and 1984. From April to September

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28 According to the Three World Theory, the two superpowers (the US and the Soviet Union) constituted the First World, the Soviet Union being the most dangerous. All other capitalist countries formed the Second World. The Third World comprised all countries that were dominated by the First or Second worlds or that had managed to attain their freedom.

1981, 2 000 workers went on strike for five and a half months at Boel (Temse), standing together to oppose 128 lay-offs. A committee of 50 people, headed by the chief shop stewards Jan Cap (CSC) and José De Staelen (FGTB), led the strike.

In 1982, the Cockerill Yards shipyards, one of the PTB's foremost bastions, closed down. The Walloon steel industry experienced deep restructuring. In early 1982, angry steelworkers demonstrated in Brussels. It was a time of major struggles with, in April 1982, the Great Youth March for Employment and a railroad and public services strike in September 1983. The terrorism of the Walloon Brabant gang of killers and the bomb attacks of the CCC<sup>29</sup> created a climate of fear, which was used to strengthen police forces and discredit social resistance. This did not prevent 200 000 people from taking to the streets in Brussels in 1986 in protest against the Martens-Verhofstadt austerity regime, called the Val-Duchesse plan. The PTB launched the slogan "Make the rich pay for the crisis". On May 1, 1985, Jan Cap, the charismatic chief shop steward of Boel Shipyards (Temse), joined the party.

Between March 1984 and May 1985, 140 000 miners went on strike in Britain against the pit closures announced by the Thatcher regime. Throughout Belgium, members of the PTB mobilized in active support. They distributed half a million solidarity-leaflets, organized 62 support meetings, raised 100 000 Euros and organized 29 support visits to Britain. Party members proved their generosity. During the Easter vacation of 1985, the Limburg section of the party warmly welcomed some twenty children of British miners in families in Genk, saying "La mia casa è la tua casa" (My house is your house). A little later, between 1986 and 1989, the last "black gold" coalmines of Limburg, the province's main economic resource, also closed down, despite the miners' exemplary resistance. On the Waterschei picket lines, a new symbol of the combative trade union made its appearance: the red and green scarf. Thousands were produced, literally setting fire to the sewing machines. With its presence in the trade unions, the influence of the PTB increased within social movements, to

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29 The Cellules communistes combattantes (Communist Combat Cells) led fourteen terrorist attacks in 1984 and 1985, resulting in 2 firefighters being killed and 28 persons wounded.

the dismay of the ruling class. “The phenomenon of extreme left agitators is arising in almost all large industrial concerns”, wrote the daily newspaper *Het Belang van Limburg*.

In the South, the liberation struggle was making significant progress in Nicaragua, El Salvador, South Africa and Palestine. The party supported a broad campaign of solidarity with Sandinista Nicaragua and the FMLN<sup>30</sup> in El Salvador, where, in 1987, Dr. Michaël De Witte from Limburg was to lose his life. The party supported Mandela’s ANC<sup>31</sup> in South Africa in its struggle against the apartheid regime as it did the PLO<sup>32</sup> of Yasser Arafat, in Palestine. In 1988-1989, Dr. Jan Cools from Antwerp was held hostage in Lebanon for 13 months. A new organization, Doctors for the Third World, was set up along the lines of Doctors for the People. The PTB thus evolved from one social intervention to another, applauded by those whose interests it defended, reviled by most of its political and social opponents.

In 1988, hundreds of PTB delegates met again for the party’s Third Congress, the Trade Union Congress. The congress took stock of the struggle movements of the eighties and made a strong plea in favour of activist trade unionism, with due respect for unity with labour unions. It also dealt with the internationalization of the economy, the rise of new technologies and the new composition of the working class.

Despite its dogmatic and sectarian aspects, the PTB has always been a party of the working class. But it failed to transfer to the electoral level the influence it had acquired in the labour world. Major campaigns attempted to elect a Member of Parliament but did not succeed. In 1985, the last two Communist Party MPs disappeared from Parliament, while in the district of Antwerp, the PTB obtained some 2.8% of votes and maintained, at national level, its 0.7 % score of ten years earlier. The party would have to wait another thirty years before landing a first seat in Parliament.

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30 Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN).

31 African National Congress.

32 Palestine Liberation Organization.

### (3) 1989-1999: A changing world

On March 23, 1988, a decisive battle against apartheid unfolded in Cuito Cuanavale, Angola. Angola (MPLA) and Namibia (SWAPO) prevailed, helped by tens of thousands of Cuban volunteers. Nelson Mandela declared this battle “the turning point for the liberation of our continent and my people from the scourge of apartheid”. With the defeat of the racists and of their American mentors, the South African occupation of Namibia was dealt a fatal blow. The defeat accelerated the start of negotiations with the ANC which would soon afterwards finally overcome the racist regime of South Africa.

The world was changing rapidly. In 1987, the PTB began questioning its earlier assessment of the Soviet Union. The theory of “the most dangerous superpower” was wrong: the Soviet armies withdrew under duress from Afghanistan, and the Moscow regime collapsed like a cheese soufflé. The Berlin Wall fell in 1989. In other Eastern European countries, we were also witnessing the overthrow of an ailing socialism, which gave way to unbridled capitalism. The fall of socialism in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe was associated with euphoria for capitalism and a hysterically anti-communist campaign. “This is the end of history, liberalism has triumphed for good,” exclaimed Fukuyama. The largest communist party of Western Europe, the Italian PCI, morphed into a social-democratic party. From 1997 on, it would co-lead the Italian government after a strong rally to neoliberal values. In our own country, certain pundits believed that the history of the PTB must end, and the party was under severe pressure.

At its Fourth Congress (1991), the party engaged in a first analysis of the fall of the Soviet Union and of the new world order that had surfaced since then. The party faced two major tasks: it must revise its own analysis of the Soviet Union, an analysis hitherto heavily influenced by China, but that had been manifestly proved incorrect. Concurrently, it must assess the system taking its place and its significance for the worldwide emancipation struggle. It was largely in the ensuing period that the party acquired the reputation of being an almost uncritical defender of Soviet

Union history, without any nuances. One cannot underrate the achievements of the Soviet Union in education, health, science and culture, nor its decisive role in the defeat of Nazi Germany. But it is clear that the USSR had significant problems, not only in bureaucracy, but in abuses of power, economic stagnation and criminal interventions against real or perceived opponents of the regime. The PTB would have to wait until its Renewal Congress of 2008 before making clear that it no longer used models or replicas of socialism, and intended to follow its own creative route to emancipation.

In 1991, capitalism supporters hoped that the overthrow of socialism would bring relief to the crisis that dragged on, but the opposite was true. The Warsaw Pact fell apart, NATO was thriving and launched a series of new wars of aggression, starting with Iraq (1991). The PTB fully supported the peace movement, and in January, tens of thousands took to the streets in Brussels.

Ultrnationalist forces tore Yugoslavia apart and, throughout Eastern Europe, neo-fascist organizations sprang up like mushrooms. Racist violence was increasing, with pogroms against refugees in places like Rostock (East Germany). In France, the Front National was gaining ground, as was the MSI in Italy. In our own country, on the Black Sunday of November 24, 1991, the Vlaams Blok and the Front National obtained a record number of votes. Shocked, high school students went on strike against racism, with the active support of Rebelle, as the PTB youth movement was called at the time. Many progressives, including representatives of the PTB, launched the “479 917” petition in favour of equal rights and automatic naturalization after five years of legal residence. The aim was to collect as many signatures as the far Right had obtained votes. The campaign on this theme lasted more than two years and eventually harvested a million signatures. Racism had yet to be defeated, but by conducting tens of thousands of discussions in all settings, the goal of laying the foundations for a security cordon around the fascist parties, proposed among others by the Hand in Hand action committee, was achieved. The Vlaams Blok fascists were effectively kept from accessing power anywhere. The

PTB was unable, however, to prevent the progression of the far Right in dispossessed neighbourhoods, especially in the traditionally Red suburbs of Antwerp. The disgust towards social democracy benefited the far Right and not the PTB, which had not enough influence in working-class districts and remained perceived as too sectarian.

In Maastricht, in February 1992, EU leaders renamed the European Community European Union, and decided to create a European super-state with a common currency, the Euro. Member states faced drastically restrictive criteria, and the PTB was the only party in Belgium which criticized this project. In December 1993, in the midst of a turbulent period of trade union resistance, it organized a Euro-Stop event in Brussels. On October 24, 1993, the Social Christian and Socialist Dehaene government announced its *Global Plan*, whose menu included a wage freeze, manipulation of the health index, reductions in social security contributions by employers, an increase of the Value-Added Tax and restrictions of 1.9 billion euros on social security. The plan corresponded to the guidelines of the *Maastricht criteria*. Upon the announcement of these measures, a spontaneous strike broke out in Cockerill-Sambre, in Charleroi. The FGTB called for a national demonstration in Brussels, in which 70 000 people took part. The PTB was active throughout the country in the protest movement. In November, the joint trade union front CSC-FGTB organized three Fridays of general strikes. On November 26, the whole country ground to a halt. Nevertheless, the plan was applied. The government also liberalized Belgacom and subsequently sold the CGER<sup>33</sup> to Maurice Lippens. The Agusta scandal broke out in 1993: Social-Democrat ministers had accepted bribes from the arms industry to influence their choice of military helicopter purchases. In the European elections of 1994, the PTB obtained 60 000 votes, or exactly 1%.

The Fifth PTB Congress (1995) engaged in introspection. The world had undergone deep changes. The congress called for a greater sense of responsibility, more political and tactical efforts and an in-depth rectification away from bureaucracy in order to adapt the party to the new reality.

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33 Caisse Générale d'Épargne et de Retraite, created in 1865 as a public institution, but completely privatized in 1998 and absorbed by the Fortis Bank, today a branch of BNP Paribas Fortis.



Yet the Congress remained focused on the party itself; it produced no analysis of the political situation in our country six years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. There was much “cut-and-pasting” of past operating principles, with little regard for the new situation. Very little was done to develop a programme based on people’s needs and to define a new strategy and new tactics corresponding to the new era. This reinforced the image of the party as a “besieged fortress”. Minds were not yet ripe for a new approach, which would only surface in 1999 and truly make headway at the Renewal Congress of 2008.

This is not to say that the PTB avoided various struggle movements. Quite the contrary.

“Among the people” remained its motto, and the great movement that swept the education world in French-speaking Belgium between 1994 and 1996 became its first test. During the teachers’ strikes in schools and universities, youth and student PTB organizations made great steps forward. Then, in the summer of 1996, the police arrested Marc Dutroux, an event which sent a massive shock wave through the country. The party opposed a strictly “economist” worldview, only interested in the social and economic struggle, and joined up with the *Comités Blancs* (White Committees). On October 20, 1996, 300 000 people travelled to Brussels to attend one of the largest demonstrations of post-war times.

Since its inception, the PTB had supported nationalist and revolutionary forces in the former Belgian colony of the Congo. After the Rwanda genocide (1994), the party launched a massive humanitarian campaign. In 1997, when the Congolese chased off the dictator Mobutu, the party also organized a solidarity campaign with the new Congo. Solidarity links also developed with other liberation movements, with a full range of projects, campaigns, travel and tours. For instance, solidarity with Cuba became a priority in 1994.

Meanwhile, the economic crisis continued to rage, and in 1996, with the announced closure of *Forges de Clabecq*, steelworkers went into resistance. The PTB supported their struggle and on February 2, 1997, over

70 000 people demonstrated in Tubize in solidarity with steelworkers at a march for Employment. A few weeks later, the announced closure of Renault Vilvoorde signalled the beginning of the dismantling of almost the entire automotive sector in our country. The PTB remained very active in the struggle movements, but continued to slip towards sectarian and dogmatic positions. The strategy of confronting labour unions resurfaced, with a jettisoning of every item adopted at the 1988 Trade Union Congress. The party showed intractable rigidity on other topics too. At its Sixth Congress (1998), it turned further in upon itself with the result that, in the 1999 elections, after thirty years of activism, it recorded its worst result ever with 0.6% of votes. Ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the PTB was on the verge of an internal crisis.

#### **(4) 1999-2008: From Party Crisis to Renewal**

“The elections are a major political defeat for the party, a defeat which speaks for errors that have accumulated over many years,” said party leaders about this electoral setback. The debate proved difficult because these errors and sectarian conceptions had persisted in the organization for over twenty years. “The comrades who defended the most leftist and sectarian attitudes should be the first to question certain party habits. The electoral defeat should at least force them to think. Instead, we see the opposite happening, with very little energy spent perusing our faults and weaknesses,” wrote one leader. These words were harsh but justified.

A broad survey canvassed party supporters. Fighting spirit, enthusiasm, commitment, idealism, initiatives such as Doctors for the People and the working-class character of the party emerged in its results as salient points. At the same time, it became clear that our own supporters were increasingly disturbed by sectarianism, overly rigid thinking, lack of nuance, dogmatism and sloganeering, preachy tones, lack of humour, too many demands from the organization and a too restricted action terrain. The party faced a stern mirror.

The municipal elections of 2000 showed a small breakthrough, with two representatives elected in Zelzate, two in Herstal and one in Hoboken.

Hundreds of surveys had enabled municipal programmes to be drawn up that reflected people's hopes. But on September 11, 2001, when two planes collided with the World Trade Center skyscrapers and a global fight against terrorism was announced, discussion started all over again with even more virulence within the party, led by the general secretary. Under the influence of trendy ideologues such as Negri and Hardt, the party distanced itself further from the working class. It took the daily problems of the people less and less into account, with everything being subordinated to the struggle against US aggression. Instead of supporting a broad social resistance against the new wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the PTB opted for confrontation by creating a radical anti-war coalition, StopUSA. Party structures tottered and it was mainly the provincial leaderships, labour sectors and the high school movement that paid the price. This is what constituted the essence of the Seventh Congress in 2002. It is clear that no real consensus existed about the lessons of the 1999 defeat. There was an elitist conception of the party among people who thought they knew everything better than others, and who cared very little for practice.

This radicalistic confrontation strategy reached a new peak with the Resist electoral alliance, in 2003, a slate comprising the PTB and the Arab European League (AEL). Compared to 1999, the party lost another 71% of its votes in Flanders. It could not go lower...

The debate led to a severe crisis within the national leadership. The time had come to throw all windows wide open and let in a breath of fresh air, as things could not go on this way. Such was the opinion of most of the party's rank and file, harshly critical of the leadership. The latter made a self-critical assessment of the situation, rejecting the elitist tendency to turn our backs on the labour world. It criticized leftism and dogmatism, confrontational strategy and lack of interest in the material problems people were facing. United around the General Secretary, a handful of cadres refuse to change course. After a sad period of factionalism and division, these diehard leftists were eventually excluded from the PTB. In late 2003 and early 2004, a new leadership, composed of young cadres,

but also including early generation cadres, gradually worked at breathing new life into the party. It was not before time. Finally, in 2004, Doctors for the People launched their “Kiwi campaign” in favour of inexpensive prescription drugs. This was a first major campaign in favour of the everyday needs of society. It was also the beginning of a renewal movement in the PTB, ending the sectarian and dogmatic aspects of the previous twenty years.

The crisis in the party was in fact what made this profound change possible. It became essential given the gradual drift toward the centre of the social democratic parties, frightened by the new neoliberal offensive. Di Rupo, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Telecommunications, described privatizations as a “strategic consolidation” and, in August 1999, Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder launched *Die Neue Mitte*, or the Third Way, a manifesto that predicted the modernization of social democracy through embracing some aspects of neoliberalism. In 2002, with a government made up of Social Democrats and Greens, Schröder applied his programme in Germany, creating a large low-wage sector, the famous “mini-jobs”.

On October 28, 2005, 100 000 workers demonstrated in Brussels against the pension reform of the Verhofstadt II government. At the congress of SP.A (the Flemish Socialist Party), hundreds of trade unionists literally turned their backs on social democracy. The PTB was regaining credit in the trade unions, now that it had finally abandoned its pedantic and irritating confrontation line. Membership conditions were eased and hundreds of trade unionists became members of a PTB in full revival mode. Their input and experience would be very important for the continuation of the party’s renewal movement. This was an essential step in the transformation of a cadre party into a members’ party.

In the 2006 municipal elections, the party’s change of direction resulted in the election of 15 local representatives in six towns. In Zelzate, the party rose to over 21%; in Hoboken and in Herstal, it exceeded 8% and in Deurne, Seraing, Lommel, Genk and La Louvière, the party obtained its

first representatives. The party's wind of renewal went on being discussed in numerous debates, and with our many new members. The reorientation won increasing approval, but also faced some reluctance. In late 2007, the party had 2 800 members and, after four years of discussion, the PTB felt ready to lay out new orientations with its Renewal Congress (2008). *A principled party, a flexible party, a party of the workers*, is the title of this congress orientation document.



3.

# **SOCIALISM 2.0**

## **THE WORLD ON A HUMAN SCALE**

1. **Paradigm change: the world on a human scale**
2. **A better world is possible and necessary**
3. **Socialisation of the economic levers**
4. **Planned development**
5. **A sustainable model of society**
6. **Active participation in government**
7. **Fundamental rights and freedoms**
8. **Internationalism, solidarity and peace**
9. **A rich cultural development**
10. **Socialism 2.0 is just a start, on a different basis**

# CONTENTS

1. **PARADIGM CHANGE: THE WORLD ON A HUMAN SCALE 159**
2. **A BETTER WORLD IS POSSIBLE AND NECESSARY 163**
  - 2.1. Living together cannot happen alone 163
  - 2.2. The production base of society 164
  - 2.3. Human action is the driving force of history 166
3. **SOCIALIZATION OF THE ECONOMIC LEVERS 168**
  - 3.1. Key sectors in the hands of the community 168
  - 3.2. Public sectors to ensure fundamental rights 170
  - 3.3. Common heritage, knowledge and development 171
4. **PLANNED DEVELOPMENT 174**
  - 4.1. Human needs as the driving force of the economy 174
  - 4.2. Planning a collective household 174
  - 4.3. Freeing planning from the yoke of private ownership and profit 176
  - 4.4. An efficient and participatory planning 177
  - 4.5. Innovation, creativity and diversity 178
  - 4.6. The technological basis for planning 181
5. **A SUSTAINABLE MODEL OF SOCIETY 183**
  - 5.1. Labour and nature: the two sources of wealth 183
  - 5.2. A different kind of growth 185
  - 5.3. A sustainable economy 188
6. **ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT 190**
  - 6.1. People Power 190
  - 6.2. Reduction of working hours as a prerequisite for broader development 191
  - 6.3. A rich democratic life 192
  - 6.4. Direct and representative democracy 193
  - 6.5. Separation of powers 195
  - 6.6. A constitutional state 198
7. **FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS 199**
  - 7.1. Three generations of human rights 199
  - 7.2. Fundamental rights and freedoms 201
8. **INTERNATIONALISM, SOLIDARITY AND PEACE 209**
  - 8.1. Internationalism 209
  - 8.2. A policy of international solidarity and peace 210
9. **A RICH CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT 212**
  - 9.1. Solidarity is a fundamental pillar of human development 212
  - 9.2. A broad process of cultural struggle and new ideas 213
  - 9.3. An innovative and progressive culture 215
10. **SOCIALISM 2.0 IS JUST A START, ON A NEW BASIS 219**



# 1. PARADIGM CHANGE: THE WORLD ON A HUMAN SCALE

For centuries, astronomers believed that the sun and the planets revolved around the earth (*geocentrism*). Gradually, problems arose with predicting the orbit of the planets. Most astronomers merely ignored the new data. Because they so stubbornly clung to the existing model, they simply could not imagine the possibility of another model. Then, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, more and more new facts came to light. Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo proposed a new model: the earth and other planets revolve around the sun (*heliocentrism*). They were viewed and treated as heretics. After a few generations, the law of universal gravitation of Newton made it clear that their model was consistent with reality. This brought about a change in the way people thought about the earth and the universe. When the prevailing mind-set changes dramatically, we speak of a paradigm shift. Another example of a paradigm shift is the way we look at the origin of the different species of life on earth. Charles Darwin profoundly changed this with his theory of evolution, which toppled the worldview of the scientific community. The different species of life, including humans, evolve over time. Man is the product of a few million years of evolution and natural selection.

In turn, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels provided an entirely different frame of thinking about the evolution of human history. They sought an answer to the question of how, throughout history, one form of society can turn into another. They saw that people have always organized themselves around production: to live, to eat, to house themselves and to develop people must produce. The development of techniques, skills, of science and knowledge, is an essential driving force of human progress. The other driving force is human activity: through social interactions and the communal struggle for a better society, humankind was able to use new insights and a better knowledge of production for social progress.

Of course, the paradigm shift that Copernicus, Darwin and Marx each worked out in their field does not mean that nothing has changed since

then. Science is constantly evolving and new insights and knowledge develop. Nonetheless, the new worldviews that they introduced remain essentially valid today.

An economic system is obviously not determined by natural laws. It is man-made, and can therefore be changed by humans. The Pharaohs of Egypt, the Athenian aristocrats, the Chinese emperors and the nobility of the Middle Ages were all convinced that their empire would be eternal and that no other form of society was possible. Nevertheless, their model came under pressure: by new developments in science and technology, by new production possibilities and by new ideas. Social tensions ran so high that the form of society was bound to change. A new society does not break through in one go. Even capitalism needed a very long time to settle, with first attempts in Genoa and Venice in the second half of the fourteenth century, and then the development of capitalist relations in sixteenth-century Holland and England. Only after a long process of conflicts and compromises with the old feudalism did capitalism manage to become dominant in the nineteenth century as a political system. Capitalism was not successful from the very start. It would therefore be very narrow-minded to dismiss socialism because it was not a success from the very beginning. It reflects a long historical process of trial and error with some wonderful achievements, but also with serious mistakes.

The key question is whether capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can offer a future for humankind and for the planet. Absolutely not, in our opinion. Capitalism has had historical merits, but can no longer ensure a future for people and nature. In the *Times are changing* section, we pointed out the link between the profound economic, ecological, democratic and cultural crises of today. As the world evolves, future generations will face developments such as a widening gap between rich and poor, the threat of war, the global warming of the planet and authoritarian tendencies. These developments are generating popular resistance everywhere. People are starting again to seek actively a better future and a form of society able to guarantee it.

We now need a new paradigm shift, an alternative way to understand the world, humankind and nature, widening our horizon in order to look at

the world in a completely different manner. We are convinced that a contemporary socialism, a socialism 2.0 set in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is becoming not only possible but also necessary. This would be a 2.0 version of socialism, reflecting the human scale, one that would guarantee the things that really matter. Where one can live in dignity, even with a physical or mental disability. Where employment would offer a living wage, without any excessive workload. With free time to relax and to fulfil ourselves. Accessible and quality health care. Equal rights and opportunities for women and men. An education that is versatile, both in teaching modern techniques and in general culture, critical and stimulating rather than restricting. A pension accessible early enough for people to enjoy healthy retirement and a fulfilling life. A good and affordable roof over one's head. A safe civic environment, with no place for violence or criminality. Public banks that correctly manage people's savings. Participation in one's district, but also in debating key social priorities. Justice that protects against exploitation, arbitrariness, cronyism and corruption. Free speech, freedom of press, freedom of association and assembly, and freedom of conscience, by effective separation of church, religion and state. Rich and broad cultural development, rather than passive consumption of values imposed by commercialism. Guaranteed access to nature, and to clean air, clean water and safe food. Urban environments with plenty of greenery and space, for healthy living. Where people have equal rights, regardless of their origin, culture, language, religion, gender or sexual orientation. Where differences are not exploited to divide people and where diversity is seen as enriching. Finally, an economy that does not destroy natural resources, but protects and manages them in the interests of the population.

Therefore, this is not about a few details to be changed here or there. Socialism 2.0 points to a very different society. Neo-liberal soothsayers call this endeavour a "dangerous illusion". They refuse to consider the ruins left behind by the greatest illusion of recent times: the big lie about the superiority of the free market. The more these ruins accumulate, the harsher the crisis becomes and the louder we hear the profiteers of this system claim there is no possible alternative..., the more people will then seek an emancipating and liberating worldview. "Truth is the daughter of

time, not of authority,”<sup>1</sup> Galileo answered his accusers in a play by Bertolt Brecht. One should not attempt to run society based on profit, but rather on people. It runs best on a human scale.

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1 *Life of Galileo*, a play written by Bertolt Brecht in 1938.

## 2. A BETTER WORLD IS POSSIBLE AND NECESSARY

### 2.1. Living together cannot happen alone

Everyone knows those bitter sayings: greed and cupidity are what drives man, who always wants more possessions; narrow self-interest is the great motivator; *Homo homini lupus est*, man is a wolf to man. This argument would even condone capitalism as a lesser evil, deemed to reflect human nature. That's the way it is. Conversely, a socialist society is deemed non-functional, as running counter to human nature.

Nonetheless, we work together, live together, go out together, whether to football matches, Dour and Werchter festivals or the Brussels Zinnekeparade; we commit ourselves to supporting tsunami victims or Haiti or we volunteer for various causes. Still we hear every day that greed is supposed to be man's basic instinct. That selfishness is our only motive. That one can only "move up" by trampling on others, by eliminating competitors. That society is best served if we individually pursue our own interests.

Yet, this is not the ideology of "mankind", it is merely the ideology of today. Or rather, it is the ideology of the ruling class of our epoch: deadly competition, taking over an opponent's market, pulling the rug out from under his feet in order to increase one's capital and profits. These are all characteristics of capitalism. They fall under a single heading: self-interest. Ruling-class ideologues would have us believe that these specific traits characterize all societies. Marx said, "The ruling ideas of each age are the ideas of the ruling class". This has become even more obvious in the last decades. High unemployment and job activation measures attempt to set all job seekers in competition with one another. Exclusion and loneliness create more and more ill health. What remained of public sector services – health care, pensions, energy and water supply, culture – has been depreciated and entrusted to market forces and private interests. *Rich in 100 days* is the newest best-seller of this society. Play the stock market. Invest and speculate.

Man is a social animal, “an animal that can develop into an individual only in society,” wrote Marx. Living in society is not each living in his or her corner. Social animal species, such as humans, are not able to survive outside the community. Individuals must work together. Neo-liberal ideologues misuse Darwin’s *survival of the fittest* principle, translating it as some kind of biological selfishness.<sup>2</sup> *The fittest*, however, are also the best-adapted social animal species and thus the ones who, in the course of evolution, were most able to co-operate.

Empathy<sup>3</sup> often seems like a complex feature, the object of a conscious decision. Renowned scientist Frans De Waal explains that, on the contrary, empathy is part of “an inheritance as old as the class of mammals,” which makes empathy a robust feature and not merely a recently applied veneer of civility. Empathic behaviour pays off in the long term for the human species and emerges, therefore, by evolutionary selection mechanisms, says De Waal. The “self” cannot exist without the “other”.

Friedrich von Hayek, the proponent of classical liberalism, tried to present the community and the individual as mutually exclusive, one or the other. Nothing could be further from the truth. “Only in community [has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible”, wrote Marx and Engels. Personal well-being aligns inextricably with general social welfare. This also means that individual freedom cannot be severed from an environment of collective freedom; the two are inseparable.

## 2.2. The production base of society

In order to live, people have to eat, drink, dress and house themselves. They must “produce”. The initial ideas of *Homo Sapiens* did not address abstract concepts such as “the meaning of life”. They involved production. How to find food and drink today? How to keep the fire going?

- 
- 2 Biological selfishness: acting out of narrowly defined self-interest, on the pretext of staying alive.
  - 3 Empathy: the capacity of representing other people’s emotions, of putting oneself in their place.

The communities of nomadic hunters and gatherers did not suddenly settle somewhere as farmers because an individual of genius flashed on the idea of founding a city, but rather because the river banks along the Jordan River, the Nile River, the Yellow River and the Mekong River overflowed each year, leaving fertile river silt. This made possible the creation of a society with crops and livestock. The former hunters and gatherers could now stay in one place. Wandering around was no longer needed to acquire food, and agriculture yielded more calories per hectare than hunting or gathering. Those circumstances made possible the discovery and the invention of irrigation canals, fertilizer, animal traction, wheeled vehicles and sailboats – in short, the entire Neolithic<sup>4</sup> revolution.

Gordon Childe, one of the fathers of modern archaeology, revealed that the first scripts and numerical schemes anywhere originated as mathematical stock listings. Technological progress made it possible to keep any surplus as a buffer against crop failure. In summary, innovative ideas that lead to social change do not evolve in a vacuum. They are the product of their time, of the social and material conditions of their time.

Manufacturing, engineering, scientific knowledge and skills provide the foundation of society. Human beings use all their abilities and talents in that context, from simple tools to complex methods and today's digital environment. In this production process, humankind uses all it can draw from nature as raw materials or energy. In other words, every production process originates in nature. The relationship between economy and nature is there from the very beginning. Labour and nature are the two main sources of the wealth issuing from production. One could say that “Labour is the father of wealth, and nature its mother”.

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4 The Neolithic revolution was the first agricultural revolution and it made possible the transition from a nomadic society of hunter-gatherers to a society of people living in settlements, who farmed and practised animal husbandry. This revolution took place independently in several regions of the world. In the Mediterranean region, it happened around 6500 BC, and in Northern Europe, from 5500 BC onwards.

## 2.3. Human action is the driving force of history

Societies evolve; nothing is forever. Fortunately so. When an old form of society has become a permanent brake on the evolution of science and technology, it is ready to turn into another form of society. Tensions between classes run so high that social relationships have to change. One then speaks of a social revolution. Thus, between 1750 and 1850 a feudal society evolved into a capitalist society in continental Europe. A new class, the bourgeoisie, took over the helm of government and society from the nobility. Big Industry created the world market, announced by Europe's discovery of America and the route to the East Indies. This gave an incredible boost to trade, shipping and land traffic. As industry, commerce, shipping and railways extended, the new bourgeoisie developed, displacing all the old classes inherited from the Middle Ages.

Our country was, along with Britain, one of the first countries to industrialize. As industry emerged, another class came on the scene: the working class. Instead of the freedom, equality and brotherhood promised by the French Revolution, severe exploitation became its lot. Many writers have dedicated thick books to the misery of the working class, but the young revolutionaries Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels went a step further. They not only saw the wretched situation, but also perceived the potential power of the working class, producing the wealth of the new era in huge smoke-filled factories. Without the working class, there can be no prosperity, they argued. A new society stripped of man's exploitation of man, could only come from the working class itself. Socialism is not a figment of dreamers, but can be the result of developments in modern society. "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past," wrote Marx.

Marx thought that a new world of equality would come soon, and some Marxists after him defended a certain "determinism", as if the development of society would automatically lead to a new socialist society. This is not so. The advent of a world without exploitation calls for a ripe material



base, but ultimately it is human action itself that is decisive. Human action is the driving force of history.

In the last two hundred years, the world has undergone enormous changes in science, technological development and the organization of production. Mankind could achieve great things with these advances; for example, the eradication of poverty, the guarantee of basic rights such as education, health care and housing; a production that uses a minimum of fossil fuel, and does not pollute the soil, water and air; full decent employment and the end of mass unemployment. That, nevertheless, does not happen, since science, technology and the organization of production remain mired in the private ownership of the means of production, which – by nature – only aims to maximize profits.

Throughout the world, large industrial and financial mastodons control the various economic sectors, with the help of states and political authorities. Everywhere people rise in resistance against this absolute power and the collaboration of governments to maintain it. They do this in the most diverse of fields. They organise to obtain better pay and working conditions and strive for social progress. They take to the streets for a healthy environment and the preservation of the Earth for future generations. Alternatively, they work for public participation in a society with more democratic rights and democratic space. They work at creating cultural diversity, freed from the grip of commerce. Others again are engaged in international solidarity movements to struggle with other nations for emancipation from imperialist and neo-colonial plunder. They work for peace, against the growing threat of war, militarization and the build-up of NATO. In all these areas, the social struggle is growing and people clash with the absolute power of the capitalist monopolies. Social activism helps people win social, ecological, cultural, democratic and progressive victories. However, none of these achievements is sustainable as long as monopolies stay in control of the production and distribution of socially produced wealth. Not until the various struggle movements coalesce into a larger force, one able to impose profound social change. Then, the community can regain control over production – a highly developed production with a huge potential – and achieve social, ecological, cultural and democratic progress.

## 3. SOCIALIZATION OF THE ECONOMIC LEVERS

### 3.1. Key sectors in the hands of the community

When financial giants do not succeed in avoiding situations where they need handouts from the community, what justification remains for letting private companies perform such activities? Is modern capitalism structured for large private firms to make huge individual profits when all goes well, but for the State – and therefore taxpayers – to rescue them (temporarily) when things go wrong, footing risks and losses? If this is the case, why do we not definitively place those economic levers under public ownership?

The question is relevant because it is unacceptable for some sectors of the economy to say “Let’s make lots of profit, as much as possible. If things go sour, the taxpayer will cover the losses”. This is especially true in sectors that cannot be allowed to fail, for fear of ensuing chaos. Such sectors should logically be in public hands.

This would at least be an attempt at genuine democratic control. Such a policy is crucial for the banking sector, but also for other key economic areas. The energy companies, for example, are also *too big to fail*. They control the electricity distributed to families. Is this a reason for us to be obliged to rescue firms like Electrabel GDF Suez, if the need arises? These companies rake in exorbitant profits in quiet times – and sometimes even in times of crisis.

Under capitalism, the state becomes the foot-servant of these monopoly companies, handing them outlandish profits on a silver platter and bringing back to the kitchen a bowl full of leftover losses. In a typical household, no one would put up with that. In capitalist society, this is the rule. The socialist solution would place society’s main economic

levers under public ownership. This is much more logical, more rational and cheaper. Electrabel and its ilk would no longer possess “natural, inalienable” rights. They would become public institutions serving a public purpose.

The only consistent solution for the key sectors holding together the economy is to “socialize” them, with the community taking them over. Their goal would then no longer be to maximize shareholders’ profits, but to organize production according to the needs of society, framed in a planned development and respecting social and environmental standards. The proceeds of the production would then flow back to the community and possibly alleviate public needs.

When the State becomes its majority shareholder, the “public company” can no longer operate as a private company ruthlessly competing against others on the market. Public companies cannot operate as private companies with CEOs who earn mega-salaries while auxiliary postmen, for instance, have to survive on minimal income. Instead of being run by bureaucrats or politicians, public companies should be entrusted to people actively committed to social interests. There can be no question of double mandates and there should be transparency with public boards of directors and meetings monitored by the media or on Internet. Control must be in the hands of workers, unions and end-point users.

Socialization is a necessary measure to transform the finality of such sectors. Their goal should no longer be to satisfy shareholders with returns of 12 or 13 percent, but to provide a public service, making these sectors society-driven rather than profit-driven. For the energy sector, the goal would be to provide society with energy in a sustainable manner. For banking, it would mean offering credit where necessary, and not speculating on the stock market. The key sectors then become state agencies that serve a public and ecological purpose.

### 3.2. Public sectors to ensure fundamental rights

A core task of a socialist society is to guarantee basic fundamental rights as formulated in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and approved by the United Nations. Where there are rights, there are also duties. Duties for society and duties for citizens. Socialism 2.0 must ensure the basic rights of every citizen, and the citizen must respect and protect collective goods. The government should ensure that essential social sectors remain structurally out of the hands of the market. The market does not pursue the public interest, but the maximum profit for shareholders, which is a completely different matter. The market does not think in the long term, but runs to the beat of quarterly shareholders' meetings.

We observed this during the 1990s, with the liberalization of energy, telecommunications and banks, which paved the way for privatizations. In addition, we see the same thing happening today (in the 2000s), with the liberalization of the postal service and railways acting as a springboard for privatizations. Some in the European Commission are now thinking of also liberalizing care for the elderly, childcare, health care, water supply and a lot more. Each time it is claimed that this would be best for the citizens, for efficiency and for the staff. And each time the contrary occurs: services prove more expensive and less accessible to the public, less efficient, and worse for the staff.

The market does not serve the public interest; by its very nature profit-driven, it deepens the gap between rich and poor. If we want to implement the fundamental social rights of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, society must take control of these social services, to ensure that health care, education and teaching, comfortable housing, public transport and social services are guaranteed for everyone, not on paper but in reality. Those sectors then become social sectors, under public control.

The core mission of a public service is to provide services to the community. Public services need to be based on “use value” (the benefit of citizens) and not “exchange value” (the profit they can generate), which is

determined by the market. For example, a public service can decide to offer some goods and services at a cheaper price than their actual production cost, because they satisfy basic needs of the population. This requires that society hold a monopoly on these goods and services. The population can then enjoy an increasing amount of “socialized income”: the part of wealth that is produced collectively and reinvested in collective, public services that are affordable or free and accessible to everyone. And where society is so organized that it structurally guarantees basic rights to everyone.

Whether it is for a day care centre, school, library, bus stop, post office, refuse collection, swimming pool, electrical service or finances, in a socialist society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, services provided by society determine a large part of our daily life. Modern public services are a cornerstone of socialism 2.0. They should ensure the equality of users, and serve them in proximity. This means they should be distributed over the whole territory and charge identical flat rates in sparse or densely populated areas. Public services must also ensure the participation of users, staff and trade unions to reduce any bureaucratization and optimize work performance. Here, consumer and environmental organizations can play an important role. A right of initiative should allow placing items on the agenda, organizing hearings and holding participation sessions. Public services are an essential element of the social fabric. They facilitate encounters and contacts between residents of a neighbourhood. They are a guarantee of long-term continuity, because the public interest takes precedence over profits. This is why public services receive sufficient resources to provide prompt and quality services with the most advanced technological means.

### 3.3. Common heritage, knowledge and development

The most important forms of wealth belong to us all. They are common goods that we must protect actively and manage for the benefit of everyone. Air, fresh water, oceans, biodiversity and the atmosphere must be protected from degradation, pollution, acidification, depletion or global

warming. They belong to the common heritage of humanity. We should organize human production and activities so that they do not lead to degradation of the environment.

Natural resources and the subsoil must again become a collective heritage, so that their stewardship and exploitation may occur with awareness of their finite nature and with full knowledge of any harmful side effects. That is a prerequisite in applying a precautionary principle, which is impossible when private monopolies rule the exploitation of raw materials or foods. This should prevent or limit damage, safeguard the regenerative character of nature as much as possible and repair environmental damage. As Marx said, the earth needs to be preserved and improved for future generations in accordance with the principles of good household management.

The community ought also to be in a position to decide on the use and development of science and knowledge and its transformation in technology and consumer goods. After all, science can serve both to produce increasingly more sophisticated<sup>5</sup> weapons of war, as well as to build sustainable economic systems. Today, fundamental scientific research is first and foremost a public and common good, while applied research and technological applications are often in the hands of private companies, supported or not by government grants and academic assistance. Society ought to control these forms of scientific research, their results and their practical applications, in order to implement socially and environmentally useful choices.

Yet, we see the opposite happening today. Intellectual property rights, defended tooth and nail by large corporations, block any collective use of emerging products and hinder technological development. Licenses and patents capture scientific results, making it difficult to give them general application or to have scientists test and improve existing models worldwide.

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5 Ingenious, advanced, well-researched.

A healthy and rationally controlled society would recognize that the natural resources of the planet and the collected knowledge of humanity constitute a common heritage. No one has the right to monopolise this common heritage for profit, self-interest or quick profits. Cultural heritage must be protected and under collective ownership. Monuments, parks and historic buildings belong to the whole community and cannot devolve to private hands. This heritage must also be freely accessible to all.

## 4. PLANNED DEVELOPMENT

### 4.1. Human needs as the driving force of the economy

The development of technology and skills has reached a point where humanity can set itself goals that we previously would have thought impossible. It is now perfectly possible to eradicate world hunger, or to reduce current work speeds. Yet, rather than work for the welfare of human beings, contemporary technology is only serving the profit machine, and humans are enslaved more than ever to an infernal tempo.

The level of scientific and technical knowledge, the state of information technology and telecommunications, as well as sophisticated manufacturing methods give humankind unprecedented opportunities to organize production in a rational manner. All resources are available to the productive forces to meet the demands of the population and thereby respect the finite resources of nature and the environment.

The economics of socialism 2.0 are about meeting human needs. The “use value” of products is central, in contrast to capitalism where everything rests on their “exchange value”. The central objective of socialism 2.0 is a useful, social and sustainable development. We strive to eliminate the harmful side effects of production for man and nature, both at the place of production, along the supply routes (choice of products, raw materials and transport) and in product alienation (recycling or disposal of waste...). In doing so, we leverage progress in production and technology to guarantee everyone a decent life and to respect the limits of nature. This is how an economy becomes society-driven rather than profit-driven.

### 4.2. Planning a collective household

Socializing the strategic economic levers of society is a prerequisite step to planning. Through socialization, the proceeds of production can flow



to the community and be allotted according to a plan. Material welfare and cultural development can thus be stimulated and socially determined ecological objectives be achieved, replacing the race to profits with social and environmental benefits. The collective household – an alternative view of the economy – emerges as a new form of organization.

The goal is more social initiatives, quality and accessible public services, a lesser income and pay gap, maximizing everyone's abilities, full employment in viable and rewarding jobs, a better quality of life and a better environment.

We achieve this by planning production more efficiently, with less waste, with a harmonious and sustainable growth, without crises, cutthroat competition or conquest wars.

Socialism 2.0, therefore, organizes production according to another logic, that of meeting social, cultural and environmental needs. Planning is thus essential: in production, investment, research and the distribution of produced wealth. The chaos of the capitalist market no longer determines what is produced, for whom and at what price. Planning must guarantee a harmonious, efficient and sustainable development in which raw materials, labour and technology are actually being deployed in accordance with priorities reflecting democratic choices by society. Self-employed people and small businesses will therefore operate in a different context and better resist big chains and transnational corporations. Voluntary co-operation will be encouraged and planning will permit an optimum use of all human potential. Planning means looking beyond one's nose, past short-term interests and at much-needed long-term objectives for humankind and nature.

Planning is a prerequisite for a genuine participatory democracy. The major strategic options of society, the budget choices and investments will no longer reflect shareholders' interests, but will be subject to public debate. Planning is a process that calls for the active participation of all workers and consumers, the population playing a maximum role in determining

and implementing economic policy, at the macro-economy level, but also at the micro level, within socialized sectors and enterprises.

### 4.3. Freeing planning from the yoke of private ownership and profit

Our plans must therefore address the great challenges of social progress, ecological balance, democratic development and peaceful coexistence. However, make no mistake; planning is already happening today, and at full steam. It happens behind the closed doors of transnational corporations' boards of directors. Private empires such as Bayer and Unilever plan from A to Z, in incredible detail, the extraction of raw materials, their transport and processing and the manufacturing and distribution of their products all over the world. It is a tightly scheduled process but one entirely controlled behind closed doors. For the only end goal of this planning process is a greater concentration<sup>6</sup> of capital and a larger share of the market. No social or environmental considerations influence those decisions.

A handful of CEOs and administrators decide on this planning on behalf of the major shareholders. This planning naturally focuses on their own corporation's interests. However, because every organization plans for itself alone, they end up planning for too much production capacity. Everyone wants, after all, a larger piece of the market. This overcapacity leads to crises of overproduction.

All this planning aims at accumulating as much capital as possible in order to deploy it in the competitive race. Winning and protecting markets take precedence over society's basic needs. When the government of South Africa decided to take over the production of AIDS inhibitors in order to market them at a discount, the large pharmaceutical companies took the State to court. Another example is the first Ebola virus attack, which took place in 1976. The big pharmaceutical companies have had forty years to develop and test an Ebola vaccine. This still has not happened because

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6 Concentration: assembling and accumulating capital.

the African population is too poor to pay for such a vaccine. Large agricultural seed companies produce seeds with a “terminator” genetic lock, a process that makes the plant sterile, unable to provide farmers with new seeds. Sellers thus keep their monopoly and maximize profits. Under capitalism, the hunt for profits determines planning, one that is neither rational, ecological nor social.

Government agencies certainly make plans on the policy level. Such planning can help by supporting chosen orientations with subsidies or tax policy. They may impose certain limits, but cannot determine the choices and strategies drawn up by the industrial and financial giants. What do we produce? For whom? How? Hundreds of thousands of workers have no say in these decisions, and neither does society. We must strive for a modern, democratically planned economy under the control of the population.

#### **4.4. An efficient and participatory planning**

Democratic participation in the planning process is an essential pillar of socialism 2.0. The population is actively involved in the major choices of society, the vision of the future and the road towards it. The point is that socially important decisions go through a democratic process, addressing the balance between economic and social investments, energy choices, the development of strategic sectors, and structural orientations in the fields of culture, environment, urban and transport infrastructure, implementation of leisure or economical activities, and priorities for research and innovation. Long-term planning must coordinate with a short-term planning that is more flexible for quick adaptation to changing circumstances, new opportunities or fluctuations in demand.

Naturally, an efficient and participatory planning is not meant to regulate everything in detail, down to the description of the smallest bolt. The point is that major decisions that involve all of society are not to be left to the interplay of competition and profit. They must consciously respect social and environmental priorities, while making the most efficient use

of available opportunities. Planning must be an instrument ensuring collective processes, with everyone's cooperation. The planning framework should create new opportunities for creative initiatives at the individual and collective levels, which are the bases of innovation and advancement in technology and science. Planning is meant to place these initiatives and decisions in a global framework, in order to achieve the most important social, cultural and environmental objectives and to ensure that one initiative does not hinder another.

Efficient participatory planning is only possible if everyone has access to adequate knowledge and information. A reduction of working hours creates more time for community involvement and a broad personal development. It also further reduces the separation between intellectual and manual occupations. Production is now showing a trend towards versatility and a growing importance of information technology in command systems. Each manual labourer has to be in his or her way a bit of an engineer, able to school him or herself in optimizing the production process and participating in plant management. Conversely, intellectual professions should be closer to the practical implementation on the ground. We must strive to form people who can perform different types of employment in their lives: from unskilled to skilled jobs, productive work to care duties, and repetitive labour to creative activity. A working week or a career can consist of various combinations of care obligations, democratic tasks, artistic endeavours, manual labour work and social commitment.

## 4.5. Innovation, creativity and diversity

Socialism 2.0 starts from a paradigm change: thinking differently about society, economy and production, bringing in a different logic, alternative motives and developing new methods. Innovation is a good example.

Under capitalism, the pursuit of profit is the driving force of innovation, technological advancement and research. Self-interest is praised as the source of progress and as a universal morality. One cannot deny that self-interest is indeed a powerful incentive to develop new products and

production methods. However, this focus also leads to waste, produces unhealthy or environmentally toxic products, prioritizes a demand that is often superfluous, and generates mass investments in military technology and warfare.

How can a society that does not revolve around competition create more progress and innovation than capitalism and produce a wide range of product choices? Socialism 2.0 will stimulate scientific research according to social, cultural and environmental priorities and free the necessary resources, on the five following bases:

1. The *first* premise is to rely on the power of collective research. A network of scientific teams that specifically search together for answers, can force many more breakthroughs than the sum of individual profit-oriented companies, which often duplicate similar tasks working in parallel. A foretaste of what collective research can achieve is the nuclear particle accelerator at CERN in Geneva, a 27-km underground circular tunnel, constructed to discover the ultimate building blocks of matter. CERN is a public initiative that brings together 7 000 physicists from around the world. They have committed themselves to processing their data in a computer network (*grid*). The results are ground breaking: in 2012, they managed to prove experimentally the existence of the Brout-Englert-Higgs boson particle.

Less spectacular but equally important are the numerous initiatives of the Open Source project. These free software programmers make their code available to others throughout the world, making it is possible to adapt and improve the products collectively. This combination of forces stands in sharp contrast to the “intellectual property rights” of the monopolies and leads to ever-higher performance products such as, for example, the Firefox Web browser, the Linux operating system and the web designer Drupal. Linux came about through the collaboration of 3 000 programmers working in at least 90 different countries.

A lot of time, energy and money can be saved by centralizing research and distributing a limited but sufficient amount of product variations based

on the best results. Of course, socialism 2.0 seeks to maintain a balance between efficiency and a sufficiently diversified supply.

2. The *second* principle is relying on the ingenuity, practical experience and intelligence of people. Socialism 2.0 needs everyone's talents and builds a society of active and creative citizens. The mobilization of all workers and all people, as community members and as consumers, is an essential source of innovation. Society must seek out innovative ideas instead of nipping them in the bud as insufficiently lucrative.

3. A *third* premise is relying on the willingness and motivation of people to work for the community. Research shows that people perform best when they have an intrinsic<sup>7</sup> motivation. Three important motives stand out: *autonomy, mastery & purpose*. People are motivated if they can work autonomously, if they can train themselves to improve and if they clearly see a social benefit in their work. The socialist context ensures that these three intrinsic motives find optimal use. We are convinced that employees find more motivation in working for substantive social progress than they do for a maximum return to shareholders. Moreover, employees will have a say about what and how they produce. Moreover, why would scientists be less motivated if they developed products for the community rather than for private companies? The majority of economically crucial inventions already come from university-based scientists, public service researchers and independent inventors for whom the profit motive is not decisive. Even most technological gadgets are indebted to public university research in the context of space programs or military applications.

4. The *fourth* premise appeals to socialist emulation as an incentive. Under capitalism, there is fierce competition between firms for the conquest of markets. Socialism eliminates that kind of competition in public sectors, but maintains emulation between teams to encourage basic research and technological progress for finding solutions to social and environmental needs. For example, seeking the best proposal for ecological district heating or social urban regeneration. In most sectors, different firms

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7 Intrinsic: characteristic and essential of a thing or an individual, regardless of external factors.

will seek their own path to innovation, efficiency and improvement, in order to foster diversification and innovation.

5. The *fifth* premise is recognition of material incentives too. Talent is encouraged in moral ways, but also by material means. Socialism 2.0 would abolish the absurd and obscene inequality gap whereby barely one percent of the world population owns half of all the wealth of the planet. Such blatant inequality becomes impossible, and society ensures that no one falls by the wayside. This does not entail a complete equalization of everything. There will remain differences in wages, there will be those who bear more responsibility or take greater risks (in hazardous occupations), there will be specialists, people with demanding occupations and in understaffed occupations. In this context, material stimuli also encourage creativity and innovation.

## 4.6. The technological basis for planning

We want to free planning from the grip of private property. This is how democratic control becomes possible and public debate can occur on the objectives of production. It is one way to avoid overproduction crises and wastage and to respect the environment.

One should therefore make use of the most advanced technological means available. Today's technical planning means are immeasurably greater than in the last century. There was a time when punch cards, input-output tables and paperwork called for a huge bureaucracy to effect planning. In the sixties and seventies, primitive computers were unable to grasp the complex relationships of a modern economy, but today's largest mainframes are a billion times faster, providing the global networks of transnational corporations with stupendous management tools.

The computer allows the development of feedback,<sup>8</sup> interaction and real-time systems.<sup>9</sup> Just look at the organization of commercial supply with

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8 Feedback: return effect interaction, permitting a correction based on practical terrain data.

9 Real-time systems are management systems with a focus on simultaneity. Tasks are done at specific times and according to priorities determined by the user.

just-in-time methods, or the distribution of air traffic in airports. After the attack on the New York Twin Towers, the entire international air traffic was reorganized in a few hours. Algorithms and powerful computer systems control automated production lines and speculative stock market transactions.

“Information technology plays a prominent role within our own organization,” reads the Unilever website. “It is quite a task to build an infrastructure and keep it up-to-date for 200 000 colleagues worldwide. This requires clear process engineering<sup>10</sup> and developing powerful systems and software.” And the website concludes: “This is how technology helps us maintain an edge over our competitors.” Would it not be better to imagine a society where technology would help achieve a public planning that is social, democratic and ecological?

The new media and communication technologies also create more opportunities for organizing democratic debates on macro-economic priorities and budget choices, or on major urban and infrastructure planning. The tools for planning thus become better, more efficient and more transparent. In its new management system, the Flemish government draws up five-year plans for its policies and implements this planning for cities and towns uniformly. This is worked out digitally and proves to be an efficient system for aligning the schedules of the various levels of government (regional, provincial and municipal).

Those are great assets for complex planning tasks. However, it does not mean that everything is determined centrally. A transparent planning relies on interplay between possible decentralization and necessary centralization, unlike the opaque and hyper-centralized regime enforced in the headquarters of large transnational companies.

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10 Process-engineering or process technology deals with the design and management of large and complex systems.



## 5. A SUSTAINABLE MODEL OF SOCIETY

### 5.1. Labour and nature: the two sources of wealth

Contrary to what we sometimes hear, Marx and Engels not only paid attention to social problems and economic exploitation, but also studied the relationship between man and nature. Like the classical liberal economists, Marx saw nature as a free gift to humanity. The first capitalists claimed nature for their own. The most powerful groups such as the Société Générale were handed the king's and the Belgian state's colonial conquests, as a "gift of nature". Of course, this was not what Marx had in mind. Under capitalism, private parties appropriate the soil and its substrate and give it a market value, whereas according to Marx, these resources should only have a use value. As a gift of nature, they should be managed and used to improve the welfare of humankind.

Besides human labour, nature is indeed a source of wealth, Marx and Engels wrote. Moreover, man himself is a part of nature, its intelligent part. This makes it possible, argued Marx and Engels, for humanity to "control nature, learn its primal forces and control them". Primitive man learned to make tools to cultivate the land and a centuries-long process of technical and scientific progress culminated in the industrial revolution and the development of capitalism. That system not only looted labour, Marx wrote, but it also interfered with the exchanges, the metabolism between man and nature. Marx sometimes spoke of nature as the inorganic<sup>11</sup> body of man, an early reference to the concept of "ecosystem". Engels added the following warning: "at every step the facts remind us that we are far from in control of nature in a way a conqueror controls the people of invaded countries". And that if we behave like conquerors and colonizers of

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11 Inorganic refers to inorganic substances, which belong neither to vegetal nor animal life. Metals, salts, rocks, clay, sand and gravel are inorganic. Organic refers to the living world.

nature, it will take revenge, “because we belong in our blood, flesh and mind to her and are situated within her”.

Man is superior to other living beings, said Engels, because of his ability to understand the laws of nature, so he can learn to deal with it rationally. Marx once addressed a warning to the world that the runaway development of chemical agriculture was leading to the depletion of soils and that urbanization was disturbing the relationship between city and countryside. Today, we have reached danger levels regarding the depletion of some resources, pollution of land and oceans, water losses, deforestation and biodiversity loss. And we are rushing headlong into a major climate change disaster.

Humans must arrive at a better interaction with nature, without sacrificing progress and prosperity: this is the meaning of the *sustainable development* concept. The Brundtland Report of 1987<sup>12</sup> explained: “Sustainable development means a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. It is actually a variation on what Marx said as he pointed to the responsibility of the current generation to maintain the earth in a spirit of “good housekeeping” for future generations.

The relations between man and nature are not static, but they have to be sustainable. This is not about “freezing” the planet in its present state, but about preserving a liveable planet for human beings. We consider the wealth of the earth not “in isolation”, but in relation to the needs of humanity. We look at nature in the interest of humanity, from the point of view of nature’s intelligent part. Humanity cannot survive without the wealth of nature and the depletion of this wealth irrevocably damages human beings’ living conditions and survival. As rational beings, humans should be aware of their limited insight into the complex relationships between biodiversity and ecosystems, and therefore, behave cautiously

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12 The Brundtland report was ordered by the United Nations General Assembly. An international team in the World Commission on Environment and Development prepared it. It was given the name of its Rapporteur, the Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland.

and with respect for nature. A merely utilitarian<sup>13</sup> vision carries the risk that apparently “superfluous” elements of nature come under pressure and disappear, with the risk of far-reaching consequences.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Marx already believed that this was a strong argument, besides the social justice issue, to plead for a socialist society of “socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature. It is about achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature.” (*Capital*)

## 5.2. A different kind of growth

Socialism 2.0 wants to use the human potential and natural resources according to a different logic, in which the economy is built around use value instead of exchange value. This calls for production adapting to the needs of the population, the improvement of living conditions and the limits of nature. The *ecological footprint*, which compares the consumption of natural resources and the “emission load” on the planet with the recovery, absorption and reproductive capacity of nature (*biocapacity*) must therefore be taken into account. That balance today does not look good. In simple terms: it now takes eighteen months to reproduce the renewable resources that the world population consumes in twelve months.

Here we face a crucial question: how can progress (creating better living conditions for the majority of human beings) be consistent with the protection of ecosystems? In other words, is humankind condemned to stagnation or decline in order to redress the balance? How can there ever be prosperity for all in the developing countries? How can a socialist society fulfil its promises of social progress?

Firstly, socialism 2.0 makes a true redistribution of wealth in the world possible. The fact that today, eighty people on this planet own as much

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13 Utilitarian: focused on immediate utility.

as 3.5 billion other people is unprecedented in human history. The immense wealth of this top layer of the super-rich, the UHNWIs (*ultra high-net-worth individuals*) is hard to imagine. A democratic redistribution will therefore free an enormous amount of wealth to invest in social and environmental projects and in industrial innovation. In this way, many needs will be met without a requirement for additional productive forces.

Secondly, socialism 2.0 aims at supporting the development of productive forces, in order to achieve social progress and an improvement of living conditions mainly through increased productivity and efficiency of the existing production apparatus. Improving efficiency and productivity is an important alternative to implementing all kinds of additional, sometimes energy-intensive, forms of production. For capitalism, “production for production” is the norm, and arbitrary growth (of the GDP) is the absolute standard. Capital accumulation is the ultimate motive, and the compelling principle of capitalism. Growth functions as a fetish, regardless of production output, even if the goods produced prove harmful to people and to nature, as long as there is a demand for them. If necessary, demand is even created artificially. The consumer, in the bad sense of the word, is a lifeline for capital accumulation. That is the meaning of “productivism” under capitalism. It is nothing like the completely different approach to production under socialism 2.0, where the norm is production for the satisfaction of social and environmental needs. The dual standard of this production is utility for people and protection of the use value of nature. It is according to this vision that socialism stimulates the efficiency of productive forces.

Building a sustainable economy requires not only a rapid shift to renewable energy sources, drastic savings in heating and an all-out development of public transport, but also all kinds of new resources in the longer term. This calls for developing new technologies, new production methods and increasing productivity. Their combination will probably cause somewhat of a decrease in terms of GDP. Still, these reforms will achieve a “richer” economic growth in terms of quality and durability.

Socialism 2.0 has a different starting point than “consumerism” as we know it today, the one based on releasing a continuous stream of stimuli addressed to sectors of the population with more or less purchasing power. It is no coincidence that the advertising industry is one of the largest sectors in the world. Its function is to generate that stream of impulses for immediate material gratification, on command from the shareholders of the world’s greatest monopolies. The constant advertising of useless disposable products and gadgets, some of them harmful, is aimed strictly at generating profits. Human needs and necessities devolve to material consumption opportunities, rather than addressing the social, ecological, cultural, democratic and intellectual needs of humankind. A society that no longer runs on profit can eliminate much wastage and luxury consumption of overpriced and superfluous products by the richest one percent.

Socialism 2.0 wants to put an end to the deliberate methods of producing goods that have a very short life. Not only do consumers pay more for having to replace products faster, but such production also wastes more resources. Other products are designed in ways that make them impossible to repair, so eighty percent of what we produce is used only once and then thrown away. Socialism 2.0 calls for revising the whole production cycle in order to develop modular products that prevent that. Product developers can ensure that less durable parts are replaceable. One can examine how, once defective, a product can be processed as raw material for another, equivalent product. Such circular economy, or *cradle-to-cradle* production, fosters huge savings in raw materials and energy. A new culture of systematic recycling and repair assumes that all new products be designed and built as ergonomically as possible, with easily removable and interchangeable parts, all of which can be recycled. This requires a re-tooling of the technical environment, clear instructions for designers and new programmes in schools. Financial planners need to take into consideration not only the standard “money” parameter, but also the production consumption of energy and raw materials. All this involves many more work hours, so new jobs can take the place of those which could possibly be lost through increased efficiency and productivity in industry.

Revising production and distribution systems to streamline them can do away with unnecessary and fuel-intensive transport. Is it not absurd that every day lorries with Spanish strawberries drive to Belgium and lorries with Belgian strawberries to Spain? A planned approach to the implantation of companies and distribution centres can greatly reduce transport, one-third of which is food transport. Our food supply increasingly depends on imports whereas we can grow many foods locally, close to the consumer. We also wish to foster agro-ecological production.

Finally, we also need to think in socialism 2.0 about consumer habits and give priority to efficient and ecologically sustainable models in terms of food, clothing, transportation, housing and recreation, with less of a toxic impact on the environment.

### 5.3. A sustainable economy

Socialism 2.0 can certainly build on the high-tech knowledge inherited from capitalism, but it will need to make very different choices in its application. We judge a socialist society on the development of economic models that are sustainable in the long term. On water consumption that does not deplete underground aquifers. On irrigation that does not drain rivers. On production models that do not lead to a climate crisis. On production with minimum waste. On a stable, ecologically and socially responsible management of our common heritage.

We strive for a low-carbon economic activity, for non-fossil energy, for maximal recovery and recycling of materials, for a generalization of the best available products and technologies. Residential and transport policies must be reviewed with a view to energy efficiency and collective transport, for the support of modern ecology-friendly agriculture, and to foster new, socially and environmentally responsible distribution and consumption models.

Attaining sustainable production calls for at least two measures: The primary rule is ending the current anarchy of production, where each trans-

national corporation produces in terms of its own interest, to haul in the largest possible share of the market. The repercussions of this policy appear much later, notably in terms of the destruction of natural resources and cycles. Eradicating this market calls for planned, environmentally responsible choices. Large-scale production must become social, united in a common goal to provide in a sustainable manner for the needs of people and the planet. Scientists and engineers can then use their creativity to conduct targeted research into recyclable materials, environment-friendly transport systems and increasing the efficiency of renewable energy sources.

The second measure is introducing substantive participation in the development of production. This can occur with a democratic system giving everyone a say on the planning process, or through direct participation of users. An economy respectful of the environment presupposes a transformation of habits, infrastructure and consumption patterns, with such choices being open to collective public debate. This should not come at the expense of choice: a wide range of products should be available. Socialism 2.0 will be colourful, diverse and respectful of nature or it will not happen. Large modern firms are perfectly able to produce a range of various products. Current production and communication technologies allow society to respond very quickly to new needs and expectations, on condition that the ingenuity and creativity of producers and users are put to work. Quality control and product improvements will no longer be mere ways of working faster and more flexibly, but will be at the service of a creative, efficient and sustainable production.

## 6. ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT

### 6.1. People Power

Today, the vast majority of people learn, from day to day, what is decided above their heads regarding their jobs, pensions, wages, health care and so on. People may comment on their situation in readers' forums or radio talk shows, but they have no real say in decisions. Never in history has such a small group – transnational corporations, industrialists, financial lobbies – had so much control over society and the directions it is taking. This small group employs a whole team of professional politicians far removed from real life, who transfer as much of their power as possible to the executive (government) and actively attempt to marginalize opposition forces in society.

Power is in the hands of financial institutions, industrial giants and a few top politicians and technocrats. It is a democracy for the elite, a democracy for the one percent. The new strategy of crisis capitalism involves government by managers, technocrats and other non-elected officials, governments with unlimited powers, sometimes including a temporary suspension of democratic rights.

Democracy will have to be captured from this elite group, in order to achieve, for the first time in history, in the words of Lincoln, “a government of the people, by the people and for the people” (Gettysburg Address, 1863). Socialist democracy will need to be a democracy for the 99 percent, a democracy of the 99 percent. It cannot be a mere “continuation” of the current elite democracy. Rather, socialism 2.0 aims to ensure a society guaranteeing and enlarging the fundamental rights and freedoms of the 99 percent, one that creates true equality, does not plunder nature and empowers new cultural values in society.

Socialism 2.0 is not looking for “a new 1 percent, a new establishment, a change of power at the top. Of course, a change of power will have



to take place in order to break the absolute power of the elite, but our goal is that of governance by the 99 percent. Giving millions of ordinary working people, for the first time, a real political and social voice as well as participation in all the essential levers to organize society and life together. And this at all levels – district, company, province, country. So that everyone can actively decide on the objectives of the civil household (the economy). The main fundamental decisions about society are taken by direct democracy<sup>14</sup> (participation): drafting or changing the constitution, major economic and ecological choices, organizing health care and education, protection of the environment, and ethical issues. Democracy is brought to a deeper level, that of participatory democracy; the state guarantees that the new democracy remains in the hands of the 99 percent. The social struggle for a new society without exploitation will bring forward new democratic institutions giving form to participation under socialism 2.0.

## 6.2. Reduction of working hours as a prerequisite for broader development

If the people are to have a real say in the fundamental choices of society, they must also have time to do so. Socialism 2.0 has to free up leisure time. This becomes possible by guaranteeing people their major collective rights, regardless of the size of their wallet. This allows people to stop worrying about the costs of education and health care, and about their retirement pension. It can also happen because workers will have regained control over technological progress and science.

Computer science and robotics lighten the work load, reduce working hours and thus make more free time available. Among other benefits, the digital revolution has made us more and more productive, expending ever less labour. However, technological development is now being used against people. Huge masses of wage-earners are losing their jobs, with

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14 Direct democracy: involves, for example, referendums on important issues. Direct democracy complements representative democracy, where decisions happen in neighborhood councils, municipal councils and parliaments.

permanent jobs replaced by highly flexible or part-time, underpaid jobs. If production improvements brought about by technical progress were used to redistribute work, workers would gain quite a lot of time. All studies in this field indicate that people with a stable job and more free time, spend it mainly on quality cultural and sports development. Only in these conditions will self-fulfilment, emancipation and lifelong learning be more than empty slogans, but become reality for the vast majority of the population.

Everyone will then find the time to acquire sufficient knowledge for true participation in decision-making. Indeed, participation without information only leads to haphazard decisions. Conversely, well-informed people can involve themselves in social governance rather than be treated as a mere voting public of political consumers. This is how we intend to build a society where men and women will be able to master their own progress.

### 6.3. A rich democratic life

Over the past 150 years, a rich democratic life has developed in our country. 150 years ago, that was difficult. The working class had no right to create its own organizations. Despite judicial persecution and crippling poverty, courageous workers set up mutual aid funds, which later became credit unions and health insurance funds, offering mutual protection against illness and accidents. Out of the credit unions also grew strike funds, the first seeds of trade unions to come. However, trade unions were banned, and people could lose everything: wages, food, health, liberty and even their lives. Yet, they took root: first, one firm after the other, then by sector, and only much later on in federations and inter-sector associations. Out of socialist cooperatives, such as De Vooruit (Forward) in Ghent or Jolimont in La Louvière, and, from Christian worker circles, grew a thriving cultural life that offered gymnastics groups, libraries, adult education, theatre and film events, and youth organizations. The working class thus gradually created its own counterforce, its own democratic life and its own popular organizations.

During the wave of democratization in May 1968 and the 1970s, new grassroots initiatives flourished. Neighbourhood committees, popular

medical centres, storefront legal clinics, youth centres, cultural fronts, women's organizations, peace movements, anti-racist organizations, environmental groups and action committees proved to be great sources of democratic creativity. Consumer and end-user organizations emerged afterwards. This is how people today became much more socially aware and active than half a century ago. There arose from the bottom up a very diverse associative world reflecting an essential and necessary part of democratic life.

For us, this multitude of popular organizations is a cornerstone of a new democracy. People work together and build their social circles, their personal background very often making them true experts in their field. This democratic force is ignored today or, at best, limited to a consultative role (youth councils, senior citizens' councils, environmental councils, sports councils, women's councils, etc., which are allowed to give advice, but with nothing being done afterwards). The main councils and popular organizations ought even to receive direct representation in the legislative assemblies. Because it is important for people to share decisions in the name of this emancipation-based civil society. In this manner, abandoning Parliament to a separate layer of professional politicians, remote from democratic life at the grassroots level, can be avoided.

## 6.4. Direct and representative<sup>15</sup> democracy

How can people wrest more control over their housing, working and living conditions? How can we ensure that they really have their say in the most fundamental life choices? We will need new democratic models to make it happen. How can the decisions that affect daily life be taken as closely as possible to the population, in the factories, in the neighbourhoods and cities, so that direct democracy can play an optimal role? Of course, the major decisions will have to happen at the highest level in order to avoid short-sightedness. But how can we combine this concern with the widest possible control on elected representatives and with broad democratic debates?

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15 Representative democracy: a system of indirect democracy, effected through elected representatives.

*The key to participatory democracy lies at the grassroots level.* It is locally – where people live, work and produce – that the population can best give shape to the structure of society. This local level – either the neighbourhood or the workplace – would not only be in charge of local government, but would host once or twice a year public debates on national policy choices (such as the budget). For participation to be as extensive and diverse as possible, it would be best to involve the major social organizations, such as the major trade unions, but also youth groups, environmental groups, women's groups and consumer organizations.

Representatives of these grassroots instances will run for office where they live and work, in neighbourhood constituencies and local companies, so people truly know each candidate and can therefore assess his or her selfless commitment to the community. This direct form of elections and close monitoring can be a solid buffer against all kinds of careerists, opportunists and bureaucrats.

We want elected officials to report periodically to their constituents; they will be liable to dismissal for reasons of self-enrichment, corruption or bureaucracy, or if they act against the views of the majority of their constituents. We also want a transparent government: authorities must maintain publicly accessible accounts of key debates and justifications of decisions.

In a participatory democracy, the elected parliament should truly be the highest democratic body, without financial powers and lobbying groups guiding the hand of elected officials to write or amend legislation. This parliament will truly stand above the government, instead of bowing to a culture of *economic governance*<sup>16</sup>, managers, technocrats and other unelected executives. A parliament unlimited by special powers and that can only be dissolved by itself, in accordance with its Constitution.

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16 *Economic governance* is the official name of the system of strict economic controls set by the European Union to impose budget restrictions across the EU and call to account any country or government deviating from its dictates.

At election time, all candidates will have the same resources at the start: there will be no major advertising campaigns, no excessive budgets, and all candidates will have equal media time, as essential principles for democratic elections.

We do not want MPs with a salary of up to ten thousand Euros a month, living apart from their electorate; representatives will live on the income equivalent to the average wage and will not incur financial profit or other gain from their position. They will not be full-time or “professional” politicians who feel superior to society, but people who have a regular job and have freed the necessary time for parliament tasks. This will allow for not only lawyers or other university graduates to be elected, and for parliament to be a mirror of society.

We believe that a truly democratic parliament is composed of representatives with a permanent connection to their rank and file: in their constituency, district or company. This can happen if candidate nominations are submitted for approval in places where they live and work and where their commitment can best be assessed. A rich gamut of civil society organizations can also be involved in this process.

Legislators should also have a hand in the application of laws and be accountable to the people. We want deputies who are also responsible for the implementation of their decisions, just like any other citizen. They should monitor the administration’s application of their decisions.

Major social choices (such as the Constitution, Criminal Code, organization of health care, education and the like) will be subject to referendum approval. There will need to be sufficient information and time allotted to ensure the widest possible public participation in these policy choices.

## 6.5. Separation of powers

Separation of powers is a principle that set apart the various functions of the state. Locke and Montesquieu, who theorized liberalism, established

this democratic rule in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They made the following distinctions:

- the legislature, entrusted to a Parliament, writes the laws;
- the executive, entrusted to a government, enforces the laws and directs the police, army and administration;
- the judiciary divides into a judicial branch, entrusted with the settlement of private disputes between individuals, and an administrative branch, called on to settle disputes between administrations and individuals.

This separation of powers was a major democratic breakthrough of the bourgeois revolutions that attacked the absolutism of the Ancien Régime.<sup>17</sup> The Ancien Régime concentrated all power in the hands of the king, who made laws, implemented them and arbitrated justice in case of conflict. The requirement of independence between these different powers was a direct response to feudal arbitrariness.

Separation of powers does not mean that the three branches of state power function independently from each other. It does mean that each has some autonomy and that their mutual relationships are defined by law.

However, capitalism has never achieved a true separation of powers. The strongest economic, industrial and financial groups and families control the three pillars of state power through numerous contacts, influences and ties. This is especially true of the legislature (parliament), but also applies to the executive branch and the judiciary. Hence, the separation of powers under capitalism is essentially formal, with the three orders ultimately serving the same interests. In the specific relationship between the different powers, the bourgeoisie has imposed the dominance of the executive from the early days of the labour movement. In quiet periods,

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17 Ancien Régime: a period of European history running from the end of the Middle Ages (feudalism) to the French Revolution (from 1400 to 1789). The emerging middle class and city craftsmen had little or no political influence and power. Farmers were disenfranchised and at the mercy of landlords. Kings, nobles and prelates exercised all power and appropriated every privilege.

there is a little more space for parliamentary debate and the judiciary retains some leeway in its control over the executive. However, in times of crisis, there are many ways to render the legislature powerless, and the judiciary may be brought under the control of the executive (through prosecutors and police authorities, for instance). That is an essential factor when fascism arises and can lead to the absolute dominance of executive power during fascist periods.

A socialist society naturally has the same three branches of state power, with legislative assemblies, courts and executive bodies. However, in socialism 2.0, the elected parliament is the supreme instance with respect to the other powers. As already mentioned, parliament cannot be dissolved by either a president, a government or a high court judge; only parliament can take that decision.

Parliament chooses and controls the government and the heads of the various executive bodies (ministries, police, agencies, committees, etc.). Nevertheless, parliament is not a body that approves laws with no accountability for their application. Members of parliament must ensure the implementation of their decisions. This does not mean discussing every detail, but that MPs must consider how the administration carries out their decisions and remain watchful as to their application.

Under socialism 2.0, it is parliament – and not the executive branch – that controls the application by the judiciary of its policies. This does not involve specific judiciary interventions, but the State's overall penal policy and priorities. Judges are not appointed by the government, but by parliament; they may also be elected directly. Our aim is to make it possible for as many community representatives as possible to speak the law alongside professional judges.

The judiciary should also monitor the executive. Every citizen can address the court if he or she deems that a specific government decision or police intervention contravenes the law or the constitution. The judiciary also plays a role in the fight against corruption and abuse of power.

Finally, administrative courts at the regional or national levels are empowered to assess the legality of decisions taken by the executive.

## 6.6. A constitutional state

Socialist society is one governed by the rule of law, rather than by arbitrariness. Acknowledged rights determine relations between citizens and those between citizens and the state. These rights are contained in laws, decisions and regulations that are accessible and understandable. People can only be prosecuted and convicted based on existing laws.

In socialist society, the law is written by and for the people.

There is a clear hierarchy between the different legal rules. A local government cannot impose rules that conflict with higher standards. Moreover, higher standards have automatic priority over lower-level standards.

In socialism 2.0, the government actively combats abuses of power by government officials, police or courts. When the state (at the local, regional or national level) transgresses legal rules or commits errors that cause harm to people, courts can sentence it to award compensation for damages.



## 7. FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

### 7.1. Three generations of human rights

The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* ('Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen') is the basic text of the French Revolution of 1789. It marks the overthrow of the feudal state and its replacement by the bourgeois state and establishes a set of individual rights. For example, its first article affirms the concept of equality: "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good". This article expresses the abolition of the social orders and the privileges of the Ancien Régime.

Proclaiming the transition from a regime of privileges to a system of equal rights was a major advance in the history of humankind. We speak of the *proclamation* or promulgation of a new regime of equality in law because the new regime could not guarantee this equality in fact. The rights introduced by the French Revolution are often called the *rights of the first generation*. They were the right to life, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, but also the right of property, the cornerstone of civil law and so important to the bourgeois regime.

Despite this great advance, Marx exposed the limits of those rights. In theory, the people have all the liberties, but a legion of laws makes it possible to arrest labour leaders and prohibit newspapers, pamphlets, demonstrations, meetings and gatherings. "Each paragraph of the Constitution contains its own antithesis," Marx pointed out. "Freedom as a generalization, the abolition of freedom as a specification". From the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, the labour world struggled with the contradiction between the proclaimed rights and their non-application in practice. From its beginnings, the workers' movement committed itself to demanding that democratic rights be extended to the majority of the population, via the

transition from suffrage based on the poll tax<sup>18</sup> to universal suffrage – initially only for men; the feminist movement had to go on fighting for nearly thirty years to obtain it – the right of association in trade unions and in workers’ parties, and so on. All that the labour movement has obtained, it achieved by its own strength: by organizing, campaigning and achieving a balance of power. The right to organize, the right to strike, the right to vote, paid holidays, the eight-hour day and forty-hour week, social security, all these came about only through hard struggle between the working class and the class of bosses.

The balance of power that managed to wrest political and democratic rights was built from the grassroots but it also evolved thanks to international pressure. In 1893, 1902 and 1913 three general strikes took place in our country to obtain, among other demands, universal suffrage. It is no coincidence that we had to wait until after World War I before universal suffrage was granted – only for men – in the context of the October 1917 Revolution in Russia and of the November 1918 Revolution in Germany. Only in 1921 did the eight-hour day and the forty-eight hour week become a fact. Only then did the state abolish the infamous Section 310 that made collective action and strikes almost impossible. This was not a chance occurrence in the international context of uprisings and budding Soviet republics in Finland, Hungary and Bavaria and given the development of the Socialist Soviet republic in Russia.

Only after the Second World War and the defeat of fascist barbarity, did *second-generation rights* appear worldwide on the table. These are known as “collective rights”: economic, social and cultural rights such as the right to work, to housing, to social security and so on. In France, this programme was defined by the Conseil National de la Résistance and later enforced through social security, exactly like in Belgium with the Social Pact and the introduction of Social Security. Under pressure from the Soviet Union and from Communists in various governments, the United Nations, on December 10, 1948, included the right to work, to social security

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18 On the basis of this form of suffrage, only the rich and powerful could participate in elections. Immediately after the founding of Belgium, a mere 2% of the population was entitled to vote.

and housing in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Ultra-liberal economists such as Friedrich von Hayek looked from the beginning with horror on the introduction of such collective rights. He wrote, “This is an attempt to merge traditional Western liberal rights with the completely different conception issuing from the Russian Marxist revolution”. However, these second-generation rights exist only on paper and are not binding. The current crisis highlights more than ever the distressing contrast between paper rights to labour, housing, health, social protection, and the real lives of tens of millions of people.

The victory of the Soviet Union at the end of World War II gave a huge boost to the anti-imperialist liberation struggle, which led to a struggle for independence throughout the world. In the slipstream of these anti-colonial movements, *third-generation rights* were defined: those of peoples, including the right to independence and national sovereignty, and the right to independent development. This third generation of rights is under constant pressure. Finally, there is much talk today about the “right to the common good”, a trans-boundary reality. We thus consider the atmosphere, oceans and, indeed, biodiversity itself as a common good of all humanity.

## 7.2. Fundamental rights and freedoms

Poverty, exploitation and social exclusion are an affront to liberty. Someone who has to devote all her or his energy to getting through the month, and can make no life plans, is not free. For there to be any self-fulfilment and freedom, there has to be at first an economic, ecological and social basis. The first guarantee of any innovative constitution is that the population actually exercises power: it is the necessary condition for the exercise of fundamental rights. The sovereignty of working people means that society itself controls the main natural resources, energy, production and the financial system.

The socialist vision does not consider the three types of rights (individual rights, collective rights and rights of peoples) separately from one another.

Fundamental rights are interdependent and reinforce one another. Socialism 2.0 will have to ensure the three types of rights. Fundamental rights are more than the sum of the individual rights of each citizen. They are universal and indivisible. Today, a lot of fundamental rights already exist on paper, for example, in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. However, they are not binding. An innovative social and ecological society can only be democratic if fundamental rights are binding, if society has to implement them. We list hereunder a number of fundamental rights and freedoms that a new socialist constitution should guarantee. Obviously, this list is not exclusive, but it gives an idea of the direction we wish to take.

1. **Right to life.** The prohibition of slavery, torture, and inhuman or degrading treatment is absolute. The death penalty is prohibited. The revanchist mentality of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth has nothing to do with a socialist approach.
2. **Freedom of expression, assembly and association.** The right to freedom of expression, assembly and association, freedom of thought and conscience will be fully guaranteed. Those rights can only be limited by restrictions that are “determined by law” and “necessary in a democratic society”, as is also stated in the *European Convention on Human Rights*. The law can thus prohibit the expression of racism, impose restrictions on organizations or groups in the interest of national security or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. Freedom of the press must be guaranteed and extended. Socialism 2.0 will also have to guarantee the right to privacy, life and conscience choices and the creativity of all people, in short, guarantee individual freedom. In a context of collective freedom, social protection and social security, it is essential that people can make their own choices about the lifestyle they wish, the cultural expression they choose, how they organize their free time, and whether they are religious or not.
3. **Right to work.** Everyone is guaranteed the right to work. Socialism 2.0 must ensure that people’s place in society no longer depends

on the social status in which he or she was born, nor on inherited wealth, or any other exterior factor. Each person's labour, personal activity and creativity, sense of initiative and personal growth then become the gauge of his or her development. Throughout a working life, many retraining opportunities will abound, so not everyone has to work at the same function for his or her entire life. In the workplace, a right to be heard is essential to an efficient organisation which fosters well-being. Having "the right person in the right place" is a principle applicable to both managers and employees. An active socialism cannot be a safe-conduct to a lifetime appointment, regardless of job performance. Nevertheless, socialism 2.0 must eliminate the cancer of mass unemployment, which we have come, mistakenly, to take for granted, so that everyone can have access to a job and contribute to society. In short, there must be a social and community base where the goal of "taking responsibility in one's life" becomes feasible. Then, we can go in the direction of a society where human beings become the creators of their own existence and contribute to the prosperity and well-being of society. People with disabilities should have the opportunity of full-waged adapted working conditions. Those who are unable to work will receive from the state a guaranteed income sufficient to lead a decent life.

4. **Right to education.** School is a place of emancipation, of education and socialisation, where each child can develop her or his talents and social skills. This presupposes that the school respects the rights of each child and student: the right to learning, to explanations, to help, to a listening ear. The right to live, to play, to express oneself. The right of having time for oneself, without permanent pressure. The right to a comfortable seat and desk, nice classrooms and good meals. And especially the right to a basic multifaceted education. This so that everyone can receive a solid base of socially relevant knowledge in order to become an articulate and critical citizen, as well as a general overview of the main production techniques and their scientific basis. The school pays close attention to balanced development and to the general welfare of each child, including his

or her intellectual, physical, cultural and emotional needs. It acts as a vector of intellectual, manual, sporting, cultural, social and emotional skills. Socialism 2.0 should, in other words, provide a basic polytechnic<sup>19</sup> education until age 16, where everyone would receive a good foundation of general knowledge, technical expertise and sporting and cultural skills. The right to education, including higher education, will become effective; all children need to access similar academic opportunities. Knowledge will no longer be a matter of social origin. Education is organized by the state and proposed free of charge. The young will have freedom of choice regarding their curriculum.

5. **Right to housing.** The government plays an active role in the creation of socially and environmentally responsible housing for all. It maintains or renovates existing constructions or builds new ones, if necessary. Urban development policy should strive for residential space to be responsibly delineated, classified and justly divided. The rental cost of accommodation must be limited and based on objective criteria. Affordable social housing prevents people from falling into debt.
6. **Right to health.** An optimal health is a fundamental human right and not a commodity, as in capitalism. Health is more than the absence of disease. It is each individual's whole well-being: physical, psychological and social. Individual health is, of course, not separate from the health of society. Humans are a diurnal species. Protecting one's biorhythm is essential to one's health. Socialism 2.0 intends to build a general, public and free health care system, predicated on prevention and health promotion, with high-quality curative<sup>20</sup> health care, rehabilitation<sup>21</sup> and social integration. It will also become possible to consider mental health care in its social context, and not just to

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19 A polytechnic education is the contrary of narrow and premature specialization in education; it seeks a longer period of common training for all students. Polytechnic education advocates organizing workshops and productive work in school, in addition to general subjects.

20 Curative: healing.

21 Rehabilitation: recovery period.

medicalize it<sup>22</sup>. The creation and implementation of a public health care service, in the framework of an integral and integrated<sup>23</sup> health policy, must also ensure that there is sufficient skilled medical and paramedical<sup>24</sup> staff, instead of organizing a shortage of nurses, doctors and other health care providers. In a multi-tier health system, the district health centre or multidisciplinary primary care centre plays a key role as entrance gate, guidance and synthesis point for patients. In the context of establishing and developing the general public health policy there must be sufficiently trained medical and paramedical personnel and no shortage of nurses, general practitioners and health care workers. In a multi-stage system, the local health centre or the multidisciplinary primary-care centre plays a central role as entrance gate, guidance and synthesis point for patients. In a multi-disciplinary primary-care centre, general practitioners and nurses work as a team, supplemented by other paramedical health professionals (social workers, physiotherapists, psychologists...) attuned to the needs of their district. They collaborate with district organisations and authorities at ensuring a healthy living environment for the neighbourhood.

7. **Right to cultural development.** The right to a quality culture must be guaranteed for all and not be the preserve of an elite. Appropriate facilities will be built, offering a sufficiently varied and accessible range of activities, and a well-trained personnel. Cultural centres, sports facilities and sports grounds, vacation resorts and a green urban environment will be priorities. Cultural creators will benefit from financial and material support. Education will serve to promote the arts and foster the artistic talents of each child. Technical progress will also reduce work duration, offering everyone substantive opportunities to exercise the right to cultural development.

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22 Medicalize: to explain everything in terms of health and disease.

23 Integrated: setting all elements and facets in a coherent whole.

24 Paramedical: health professions besides those of doctor, midwife or dentist.

- 8. Substantive equality between men and women.** Under capitalism, equality between men and women exists only on paper. Women are first and foremost a source of cheap labour while culturally, they are too often reduced to an object of male pleasure and to their role in reproduction. The potential power that the liberation of women could release is enormous. Socialism 2.0 supports wages based on work, not gender. It is the only way of reducing the income gap between women and men. This needs to happen in conjunction with a proactive policy allowing women to take an equal place at all levels of society. It also means that all sexism, male chauvinism and violence against women must be actively fought against. Guaranteeing quality, accessible childcare is also crucial, just as is an extension of maternity leave for mothers and paternity leave for fathers, to facilitate balancing work and family life. Information will be made available on the best contraceptive methods which will be distributed free of charge; abortion services will also be freely available at no cost.

There can be quite a lot of energy released as society takes on a larger responsibility in the upbringing and development of children. Not everything should depend on the family to the last detail. When districts offer enough playgrounds and green spaces, when people get to know each other better by participating in collective activities, this provides all children with access to a social network, which includes social control and protection. Schools should provide hot meals and organize, according to demand, the sport and cultural development of children. One can also design a collective system for socializing some domestic tasks (e.g. neighbourhood restaurants, laundrettes, ironing workshops, etc.), a system that would be accessible to all interested parties and that would provide much relief from these tasks. Firstly, this policy would free much time for women who still take on the lion's share of housework today. However, even then, there will need to be a more equitable distribution of tasks. The children's parents will of course continue to play a major role in children's education of the child, with the possibility of sharing without stress quality time with them.



9. **Right to security.** Safety is a basic right, like employment, health and education. We believe that in society, everyone has the right to live in safety. The degeneration of capitalism fosters brutal violence and crime. Economic violence, fiscal fraud and counterfeiting, white-collar crime, war crimes, terrorism, armed robberies and attacks against people's physical integrity must be severely punished. Under capitalism, the largest economic sectors are the arms and drugs trade. To eliminate this, we need a fundamentally different society, based on cooperation rather than selfishness and cultural and social development rather than fast gain. Such a society eliminates structural inequality and, therefore, the main breeding grounds of major crime; it guarantees people strong social security and social justice. Social prevention becomes possible when it proceeds from a sense of social protection, a carefree attitude to the coming day. In short, socialism will have to follow a dual track: effectively punishing offenses, while also eliminating the antisocial dynamics that cause crime and giving everyone a dignified and fulfilling place in society.
10. **Right to food safety.** Food safety means, on the one hand, the assurance of sufficient food for everyone, and, on the other hand, the certainty of this food's quality. Food safety is closely linked to social and economic security. Socialism 2.0 wants to put an end to the situation in the European Union where 40 million citizens can only afford to eat a full meal every other day.

There will be strict protections against harmful substances, pollution in the food chain and unsanitary conditions. A socialist approach to food security includes the precautionary principle and provides protection against dangerous experiments by agro-multinationals with genetically engineered crops. There will also need to be more attention given to food safety in the broadest sense as a component of public health. Healthy food should become affordable. There will be a ban on noxious additives in food. Campaigns will foster a healthier lifestyle and a more balanced nutritional culture.

- 11. Right to clean air, pure water, uncontaminated soil and the enjoyment of nature.** The limits and recovery capacity of the ecosystem must be a crucial test of our environmental policy. A comprehensive approach to it must first address industrial pollution and the emission of harmful gases. There must be a prompt focus on 100 percent renewable energy sources, energy efficiencies and improvements to the mass transit network. A large proportion of privatised nature reserves must be reopened to the public.
- 12. Right to a discrimination-free society.** We must ensure equal rights, regardless of sex or sexual orientation, religious or philosophical beliefs, origin, culture or language. Socialism 2.0 is a society where racism and male chauvinism meet with active opposition, in education and in the wider culture, and where people are raised according to the “equality in diversity” principle. This principle is not cast as a mere personal responsibility; the community assumes responsibility and actively opposes structural discrimination.

## 8. INTERNATIONALISM, SOLIDARITY AND PEACE

### 8.1. Internationalism

Capitalism created the nation-state. It eliminated the barriers inherent in feudal society: the duchies, counties and other feudal entities with their different weights and measures, taxes at the city gates, and specific dialects. It created one national market, one law, one state.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, economic development created a world market. This led to the formation of three imperialist centres: the United States, Japan and a European Union under construction. Although its development is ongoing, the European Union is a fact. This is not at odds with its present vulnerability and that of the Euro zone in the current crisis. It is not impossible that the European Union and/or the Euro zone will fall apart. What is certain is that a return to regional fragmentation or to small national markets would be a step backwards.

Even if it were not for the EU, the geography of Europe itself forces workers to think in terms of a continental framework. The growing globalisation of the economy makes it seem impossible to achieve only in Belgium the change of paradigm leading to socialism 2.0.

Our objective is a universal emancipation and liberation to make the planet habitable for future generations once again. Socialism 2.0 is an international project, as an alternative to global capitalism. Of course, no one can predict what the future will bring, but it seems likely that the processes of change will mainly happen first at the continental level. The current crisis is fostering a rise of social and popular movements for a better future everywhere on the continent. It is possible that, further down the road, various countries will choose a form of socialism 2.0 and voluntarily join forces to cooperate on a basis of respect and mutual support. They could then adopt a policy based on eliminating regional disparities, thus

suppressing the main breeding ground for nationalist tensions. The full equality of each language group will thus be recognized, as well as everyone's right to use his or her own language. Socialism 2.0 will be multilingual, and that multilingualism will serve as an asset for further progress.

That is even more important today since more than half of the world's population lives in urban settings, and large, rapidly growing cities. "Super-diversity" is already a reality in European cities. More than half of the population of the largest urban centres have migrant roots. Instead of considering this evolution as a threat and dividing people on the basis of origin, gender, religion or sexual preference, large metropolitan centres should play a leading role in developing a rich internationalist culture and implementing socialism 2.0, thus making it also ultra-diversified.

## 8.2. A policy of international solidarity and peace

Imperialism and its compulsive pursuit of expansion, domination and hegemony is a permanent source of war. In *Capital*, Marx quotes a British economist: "With adequate profit, capital is very bold. A certain 10 percent will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 percent certain will produce eagerness; 50 percent, positive audacity; 100 percent will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 percent, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple..."

In the war against Iraq, it seemed the U.S. would stop at nothing: war crimes, torture, illegal detention camps, the use of depleted uranium and white phosphorus. The campaign of the capitalist great powers to achieve geostrategic goals and wrest control over raw materials creates an obscene legal order – or rather an illegal order. Capitalism seems to expend human lives coldly in its incessant hunt for raw materials, markets, transport routes and cheap labour. The 20<sup>th</sup> century racked up 110 million war victims. In 2012 alone, the world spent 1 756 billion dollars on arms, and that amount continues to rise. This is only beneficial to the military-industrial complex and to arms dealers – producers and traders

in death. For a more complete picture, add to this the continuing threat of thousands of nuclear weapons, terrible weapons of mass destruction that have no place in a civilized world. Another society is necessary, not only to get rid of exploitation and oppression, but also to bring an end to war and to the arms race. In socialism 2.0, the principles of peace, solidarity and international law form the basis for countries and people to live and work together, with no more competition for profits and markets, but respect and understanding for each other, fair trade and mutually beneficial investments, without interference in each other's affairs.

The first peace measures of socialism 2.0 will be our withdrawal from NATO and the launching of negotiations on global nuclear disarmament: a legal ban on the presence of nuclear weapons, active support for treaties to set up nuclear-weapon-free zones and to ban nuclear and chemical weaponry. There can be no question of participation in foreign military interventions, or other forms of pressure to undermine the sovereignty of other countries.

The slogan “no money for war, money for social needs” will become reality by shifting current resources from an exclusively military security policy to a universal safety policy. There will be a drastic reduction in the defence budget, which will be devoted exclusively to territorial defence. Like other policy areas, security and defence will fall under democratic control, with full public access to military agreements and purchases.

Internationally, socialism 2.0 will initiate peace and disarmament initiatives and focus on development cooperation. We want an equitable world economic order and are in solidarity with all the workers and peoples who stand up elsewhere for democracy, social progress, peace, development and a sustainable climate and environment.

## 9. A RICH CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

### 9.1. Solidarity is a fundamental pillar of human development

When we discuss society, we are talking about the environment in which people grow up and live their lives. And what is society other than living together? In that society, people acquire new ideas. How one lives, where one grows up and grows old, largely determine one's ideas, and not the other way around. The person who grows up in a society where solidarity, mutual respect, care and mutual aid are completely normal will think differently about "human nature" than those who live in a world where everything is up for sale, even human relationships, and where "Think only of yourself" is treated as the highest value.

For shareholders and company directors, self-interest is a survival issue. The more economies in the production process, the higher the profits. The more people are sacked, the higher stock prices and dividends will rise. On the contrary, for workers, solidarity is a prerequisite to life and a basic pillar for human development. Through ups and downs, workers organize. They have always done so. Being one of the earliest industrialized countries in the world, ours has a very rich workers' history. Ghent textile workers, Antwerp dockers, and the Borinage miners found ways to organize despite gruelling workdays, child labour, arbitrary policies, the police, the ban on trade unions, etc. They risked losing everything: wages, food, health, even their lives. Still their collective life kept on growing, with solidarity funds to help sick comrades, the first mutual insurance companies, cooperatives, the youth movement, the trade union movement and the Socialist Party. However, there were also petitions, marches, meetings, demonstrations and strikes. Belgium was one of the first countries where workers held general strikes. A movement of Catholic associations was also born, with its own health insurance funds, trade unions, youth organisations and farmers' unions. Our country boasts a rich background

of associative life, which thrived at a time when “conspiracies” and “coalitions” were outlawed and the ruling class tried to dissuade workers from organizing.

Even in today’s tough times, people regroup, organize, and help those in need. Our associative life is a very important factor, an eloquent answer in itself to all the high priests of selfishness. Writing poetry may be a solitary activity, but cultural self-development occurs mainly among groups. Youth and sports associations, photography clubs, neighbourhood committees, support groups, cultural associations, women’s groups, organizations of people with a migrant background and, of course, the trade union movement weave a social fabric of solidarity.

## 9.2. A broad process of cultural struggle and new ideas

Two hundred years ago, the bourgeoisie was able to claim a coherent and rational world vision. Today, it has neither rationality nor coherence to offer. The prevailing morality is that of the market, the law of the jungle. Everything can be bought. People are assessed according to their “utility”, like any other merchandise. Individualism dehumanizes human relationships. The cold, indifferent ethos of monetary gain creates an environment in which human existence is primarily perceived as lonely and isolated. The mass media do not serve people’s cultural, social and moral development, but act as a substitute for society in these times of great loneliness. Moral confusion, commercialization of culture and relationships, irrationalism, thriving egotism, cruelty in human relationships and becoming used to war and violence characterize the moral decline of this era. They are at odds with human dignity.

Nevertheless, those values and standards are not cast in stone. Culture changes throughout history and evolves in parallel to the way we live together. This means that ethics reflect people’s historical, social and cultural environment: there is a material basis to our ideas. Where capitalism creates individualism, socialism 2.0 should create the material basis

for solidarity. Where capitalism abandons people to their fate, fostering the “every man for himself” ethic and setting people against each other, socialism 2.0 should aim for social integration.

That is not a mechanical process, as Marx correctly emphasized. A progressive and rich cultural development with new progressive values will not emerge by itself. It will call for concerted grassroots efforts, in relationships and social organizations, in new forms of democracy and communication, in education and cultural creation. Not tomorrow, but today, in the social struggle.

Every existing order so far has drawn its power not only from the monopoly of violence detained by the ruling class (police, army), but also because the governed (the people) accept the worldview of the ruling class. The philosophy of the ruling class is popularized and promoted to the point of becoming what is perceived as “common sense”. Therefore, workers are led to accept the morals, the habits and the precepts of the society in which they live. To oppose the cultural hegemony of the shareholders, the financial community and the super-rich, we want to develop a counter-hegemony. To break the consensus on the prevailing model of society, we need a new worldview, a progressive social, democratic and ecological conception of life, developed from below. This is a historic process where people play a conscious, active role. The French revolution was prepared by decades of cultural struggle and radical ideas developed by the thinkers of the Enlightenment, in a process of awareness-raising. That wide process of cultural struggle needs to resurface today.

“A new culture will not come about as long as we do not immediately apply in our struggle the values of the new society that we want,” Angela Davis told us. We are talking, amongst others things, about mutual aid, solidarity, collaboration, collectivism, respect for one’s fellow man, unity in both word and deed, respect for labour, rationalism, no racism or sexism, self-confidence and self-control, sense of initiative and internationalism as progressive values.



### 9.3. An innovative and progressive culture

Capitalism is a matter of one-upmanship, careerism, individual dominance, instant gratification and generalized competition. Socialism takes root in other values and standards, which must be fostered by making them socially possible. “Personal responsibility” then ceases to mean “individually looking out for ways to survive in the jungle of the market”. Personal responsibility and commitment then become substantive answers to submission and fatalism; they encourage an active citizenship that contributes to society’s prosperity and progress.

A renewed and progressive culture is the opposite of the passive consumption mentality of a standardized culture. On the contrary, it signifies love of art and creativity, solidarity instead of individualism, cooperation instead of unhealthy competition, passion for science and technology instead of idolizing the words of experts. It is an illusion to think that these innovative values in socialism 2.0 can become reality instantaneously. Achievements require work, even in a socialist society. Here is a brief summary of the highlights of a progressive culture, knowing that there are many others.

1. **One for all, all for one.** The word society means living together. One cannot live in a society and be detached from it. Whether we like it or not, social relationships affect people and build part of their personality. That is the basis of a collective attitude that gave birth to Alexandre Dumas’ famous motto, “one for all, all for one”. Bourgeois dogmatists and extremist ideologues such as Von Hayek claim that collectivism and the individual are mutually exclusive. Nothing could be further from the truth. Both are in a dialectical relationship. Any person who truly seeks the fulfilment of all talents, creativity and a sense of responsibility can only do so in a society based on solidarity. We wish to provide, with socialism 2.0, objective social preconditions for a diversified and harmonious human development. A development which fosters everyone’s talents and chances in the best possible way.

2. **Labour as emancipation.** In every class society, attitudes towards labour remain controversial. On the one hand, labour is the fundamental precondition of any human existence. On the other hand, labour is the source of wealth for the ruling class, which appropriates the fruit of working class labour. Labour thus acquires an imposed, compulsory character. Under socialism 2.0, labour is the source of wealth for the whole of society, and socialism must imbue labour with social, cultural and ecological usefulness for everyone. Under socialism, labour is the main criterion by which society assesses anyone. Individuals no longer depend on their birth status, inherited wealth or any other factor outside themselves. Autonomous activity, self-initiative and personal growth become the yardstick of development. Human beings are viewed not only as capable of taking on life responsibilities, but as socially expected to do so. Men and women truly become the builders of their own existence.

People who cannot become involved in labour processes because of a physical or mental disability must be allowed to choose a life project in which they can fulfil themselves to the fullest of their capacities.

3. **Rationalism and humanism.** The human species has the possibility of consciously meeting its needs and that of the planet. Socialism 2.0 wants to do this in a way that will benefit all people, rather than only a few privileged folks, and that future generations can emulate. Socialism 2.0 is consistent with humanism, an optimistic and generous philosophy with faith in the human potential. Humanism derives from the Latin word *humanitas*: humanity. It stands for respect and love for humankind. It is a plea for a society where people live, in essence, a carefree existence. From humanism grew a rational life behaviour based on the ongoing developments in modern science. That means that we base our opinions on facts and scientific observations, but with absolutely no place for intolerance towards religious philosophies.
4. **Sense of responsibilities.** Unity of word and deed, a self-critical attitude, modesty, responsibility for one's personal choices (including

the wrong ones), openness to other suggestions and opinions, and setting a good personal example are all pivotal socialist values. Together they form the sense of responsibility to which we are committed, a necessary route to creating a dynamic society of responsible and critical citizens.

5. **Self-confidence and self-control.** Collective development and individual growth reinforce each other. That is why the goal of self-confident individuals believing in their own possibilities is in phase with the choice of a collectively managed society. Indeed, optimism and faith in progress also convey to people a sense of self-esteem, without boasting or presumption.
6. **Equality between men and women.** Under capitalism, equality between women and men exists only on paper. Socialism is not a panacea, of course, and a lot of work will be needed to put an end to our society's male chauvinist culture, even under socialism. The potential power that the liberation of women could release is enormous, if this equality is effectively achieved. Education and the media can and must help here, but every active citizen will have to develop an attitude of respect and equality.
7. **Respect for one's fellow man, without racism or discrimination.** Every human being is essentially equal to others, with equal rights and obligations, regardless of gender, ethnic origin, nationality, philosophic beliefs or sexual orientation. That is why racism and discrimination call for active opposition. In an ultra-diverse society there is a permanent, dynamic, mutual and interactive process between different cultures, groups, the young and the elderly, newcomers and so on. This process means that it is incumbent on us to shape society collectively.
8. **A proactive environmental stance.** Since its inception, humanity, in order to survive, has done more than merely "adapt" to nature. Labour has allowed human beings to transform nature constantly in

order to survive. Today, society is facing major challenges. How can one go on extracting from nature the elements necessary to secure humanity's existence? Moreover, how can we respect, at the same time, the carrying capacity of nature, in order to preserve it for future generations? A fundamental ecological attitude that respects the carrying capacity of nature, counteracts pollution and waste, and safeguards the planet for future generations, is an important ethical starting point. There are two other possible positions: a sentimental attitude (idolatry of nature), and a short-sighted utilitarian attitude (which allows the destruction of nature).

9. **Internationalism.** From the moment Marxism arose in the labour movement, internationalism became an essential element of socialism. Internationalism is not only an objective necessity; it calls for practical implementation. Internationalism is an attitude towards the world. An internationalist stance tends to concentrate the best practices of class struggle throughout the world: the international struggle between labour and capital, the struggle movements of different peoples against imperialism and the praxis of building a socialist society in socialist countries are all part of a large collective experiment. Internationalism also implies unconditional rejection of narrow nationalism and all forms of racism. Anti-racism is a communist ethical value.

## 10. SOCIALISM 2.0 IS JUST A START, ON A NEW BASIS

Progress, be it scientific, technical, philosophical, cultural or artistic, can never include all of material reality. As both science and the world develop, human beings will always want to know more about our planet, our solar system and our universe, in order to deal with challenges we are not equipped to face at this stage. We can develop projects to improve our response to natural threats constantly. We can improve work by eliminating heavy labour and thankless tasks in favour of rewarding and enriching activities, which require innovative thinking, from design and development right up to practical applications (so that thinking and working remain in phase). To that extent, socialism 2.0 is not the end of history, but only the beginning, on a new basis, of a society without exploitation. The goal of socialism 2.0 is a classless society, where everyone contributes according to his or her capabilities and that can meet everyone's needs. That is a society operating as it should, a truly collective or communist society.



ANNEX

# THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF BELGIAN SOCIETY

1. **Why analyse the social structure of society?**
2. **The social structure of Belgium**
3. **The working class and its allies**

# CONTENTS

- 1. WHY ANALYSE THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY? 223**
- 2. THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF BELGIUM 224**
  - 2.1. General **224**
  - 2.2. Classes in society **225**
  - 2.3. The establishment **226**
    - (1) Belgian and foreign multinationals: the monopoly companies **226**
    - (2) Large companies without a monopoly position **227**
    - (3) Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) **228**
  - 2.4. The working class **228**
    - (1) Wage earners **228**
- 3. THE WORKING CLASS AND ITS ALLIES 234**
  - 3.1. A global vision of the working class **234**
  - 3.2. The working class and its allies in the independent middle class **235**
  - 3.3. Special allies: young people, students, intellectuals and artists **237**



# APPENDIX: THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF BELGIAN SOCIETY

## 1. Why analyse the social structure of society?

Analysing the social structure of our society is important in order to spot the main forces bringing about social change, observe how they relate to the establishment and develop a progressive and inclusive strategy for change.

Our society is structured by a complex set of social classes and layers. We intend to study the social structure of Belgian and European society thoroughly. This is important because many aspects of social life reflect people's place in society. Their social status is not only defined by work relationships and wages; it also includes lifestyle, social awareness, culture and opportunities for social interaction. All recent studies show that people from the working class, and especially those from its most disadvantaged sections, are more at risk of unemployment, have higher health risks, access fewer opportunities in the housing market, in education and so on. This group also shows lower average birth weight and higher infant mortality, and its members die at a younger age.

What especially catches the eye, and has surprised many social scientists, is that despite numerous social changes, these class inequalities show a great stability. Even in areas such as education and health care, where the rhetoric of equality is strongest, there are numerous indications that relative class differences have remained stable or even increased over the last few years. The working class has therefore the most to gain from the elimination of class-based inequalities. In fact, it plays a pioneering role in the emancipation struggle and pulls along with it the other oppressed classes and strata of society. The working class in its emancipation battle

comes in conflict with a small economic elite of super wealthy families who own or control the key sectors of the economy. This establishment, often called the “one per cent”, has every interest in maintaining the status-quo.

The world and its social structure are continually changing. Consider the internationalization of the working world, contracting of (parts of) the production and the development of production chains, the growth of franchising<sup>1</sup> and the dwindling of truly independent producers, the increase in the number of falsely self-employed persons, the increase of paid domestic work (service vouchers), the introduction of mandatory community service, the greater diversification (people who work in paid employment and are also part-time self-employed) or the transformation of independent farmers into various forms of agricultural wage labour. It is therefore necessary to take a “snapshot” of our contemporary social structure and to sketch its evolution. Let us simply offer a general overview.

## 2. The social structure of our country

### 2.1. General

A little over 11 million people live in our country. Seventeen percent of the population is under 15 years old, 8.8 percent between 65 and 75 years and 8.8 percent over 75 years. The ratio of young people (-25 years) is decreasing, and the number of elderly people is increasing. This is a trend throughout Europe.

- 7.2 million of our compatriots belong to the *population of working age*. Those are the people between 15 and 64. The group includes three categories: the acknowledged working population, the unemployed labour force and the inactive population.

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1 Franchising: An entrepreneur (the franchisee) concludes a contract with a larger company that gives him or her the right to run a business using its banner. This practice is common in supermarket chains and fast food restaurants.

- 4.5 million people of working age are effectively working and form the *recognized professional population*. These are people who work in paid employment as manual workers, white-collar workers or civil servants and/or as self-employed at least one hour per week.
- 650 000 of our compatriots are *jobless or job seekers*. There are among them at least 100 000 young people who have completed their studies and 300 000 laid-off employees who used to work full-time.
- In 2014 there were a million *self-employed* people in Belgium (including people with a secondary profession and pensioners who continue with an activity).<sup>2</sup>
- Finally, more than one in four 15 to 64 year-olds are considered *not active*. The vast majority of these 1.9 million compatriots are pupils and students, but there are also people who have retired or taken early retirement, people who have never exercised a professional activity, and people with disabilities.

## 2.2. Classes in society

Our contemporary society comprises a complex set of social classes and layers. A *small economic elite* of super rich families accounts for the top layer of Euro millionaires and business owners. They often possess or control the largest industrial and financial companies of our country. The group also includes, of course, the senior management and the directors who run their businesses. Finally, some of the top executives within the state apparatus belong to this group.

Facing them is the working class, the vast majority of the population, who work in exchange for a wage or salary. The working class may have evolved but its place in society has remained, in essence, the same: it is the beating heart of the system.

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2 Institut national des assurances sociales des travailleurs indépendants (INASTI) (National Institute for the social security of the self-employed), *Annual report 2014*.

The *self-employed persons* form a heterogeneous group. They include people who do not rely on the wage labour of others; people who have their own businesses with a few paid employees; and owners of very small or family businesses employing up to 10 employees.

### 2.3. The establishment

The establishment, or ruling class, comprises the shareholders of multinationals and large companies (those with more than 250 employees). They represent about one percent of companies. In many of these companies, shareholders and top executives are the same group. An estimated 15 000 families belong to this establishment that, in classical economic terms, is defined as “the big bourgeoisie” or “Big business.”<sup>3</sup>

The owners of large companies reward a top layer of managers and directors with huge salaries and bonuses. Statistics conflate this executive team with mere employees. However, these top executives form a special layer, since their material situation, their worldview and their action modes directly mimic those of Big Business. Through their very high salaries some top executives belong to the great bourgeoisie of large shareholders and speculators. Their number is increasing. That too is a European trend.<sup>4</sup>

There are many channels allowing this financial elite to exert pressure and even control over key government functions. It tries to install executives within the government, the administration, the army, police and justice personnel, who intervene economically and ideologically according to the interests of this elite. Those top executives also belong to the establishment.

#### (1) Belgian and foreign multinationals: the monopoly companies

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, large and very large companies and production chains

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- 3 On the basis of a study entitled *The Global Wealth 2013*, about rich people who own more than 5 million dollars. Multiplying the number of large companies by their number of shareholders or administrators produces an estimate of approximately 15 000 families.
  - 4 A 2000 study calculated the number of executives in 3 185 companies with at least 15 executives and 100 employees, and ended up with 144 163 executives.

control entire economic sectors. They arise through the concentration and accumulation of capital. We call them monopoly companies, because they (often together with other giants) occupy a monopoly position in a given sector. International monopoly companies are generally called multinationals, because they are active in several countries.

*Foreign multinationals* active in our country are mainly large American, German, French and Dutch companies. They account for 46 percent of the industrially employed. The working class creates 58 percent of total added value,<sup>5</sup> and these companies are responsible for about 30 to 40 percent of Belgian exports. Foreign multinationals are therefore in a dominant position, which allows them to play an important role in the Belgian balance of power. For instance, 500 companies belonging to The American Chamber of Commerce have 1 800 branches in Belgium, with the top 50 employing 90 000 people. German companies have 420 branches or majority stakes in Belgium. The German presence is especially concentrated in the port sector, with key performers in the petrochemical sector.

There are also *Belgian multinationals*. In Flanders and the Brussels Capital Region, these companies account for 32 percent of industrial jobs, with the working class producing there 25 percent of added value.<sup>6</sup>

## (2) **Large companies without a monopoly position**

Our economy has 513 865 companies, including 216 775 with private employers, who own 13 865 companies defined as large (more than 250 people in paid employment). These are 292 companies (0.13%) employing each more than 1 000 people, 367 (0.17%) with 500-999 employees and 1 123 (0.52%) employing 250-499 people. Some of these companies belong to international capital and/or have a monopoly position, others do not. This calls for closer examination.

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5 J. Konings, *Uittocht uit de industrie onstuitbaar*, November 2012.

6 *Ibid.*

### (3) **Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)**

Our country has almost half a million SMEs, but this term is somewhat misleading, as a concept encompassing different realities: medium-sized companies with 50 to 249 employees (and an annual turnover of less than 35 million Euro), small businesses with 10 to 49 employees (turnover below 8.8 million Euro) and micro-enterprises or very small enterprises with less than 10 employees (turnover below 2 million Euro).

The owners of medium-sized enterprises belong to the world of employers, but (usually) not to the monopolies that control various sectors. The owners of small businesses with 10 to 49 employees count as small employers.

The category of companies with fewer than 50 workers is difficult to classify. There are 210 000 such companies, including 36 000 small (10 to 49 employees) and 174 000 very small enterprises (1-9 employees). In Wallonia, they account for 97.5% of employers and half of private sector employees (300 000). In Flanders, the figures are 96.5 percent of employers and 40 percent (650 000) of employees. In the Brussels-capital region: 96.5 percent of employers, and 26 percent (150 000) of employees.

Research is paramount concerning other criteria we can use to assess their reality further. Which SMEs are dependent on large multinationals? Which work mainly for the export market? Which of them work primarily for the domestic market and are therefore dependent on the purchasing power of the working population? Equally important is the question: what small businesses are actually medium-sized enterprises that split in order to avoid dealing with trade union delegations (or for other reasons)?

## 2.4. **The working class**

### (1) **Wage earners**

**Global vision.** We have a global vision of the working class. A vision that unites instead of dividing. Whether it is the struggle of the steel workers,

the anger of the white-coated workers in the health sector, the teachers' movement in education, the actions of the unemployed, or of employees in restaurant chains or in banking, we speak of a single class of people working for a wage. The 4.2 million wage-earners in our country are divided by status as follows:

Manual worker <sup>7</sup>	1 239 006
White-collar worker <sup>8</sup>	1 730 366
State employee	796 590
Job seeker <sup>10</sup>	457 785
Total	4 223 747

Nearly 3.5 million people are wage earners with a status of manual worker or white-collar worker in the *private sector* (job seekers included).

Traditionally, economic sectors are classified as the *primary sector* (agriculture, forestry, fisheries: 24 416 people), *secondary sector* (industry and construction: 713 568 people), *tertiary sector* (distribution, transport, hotel and catering industry, information and communications, banks/insurance, real estate, administrative and support services: 1 531 540 people), and *quaternary sector* (government employees or government-supported employment: 1 132 177 people). This last category includes, among other fields, public administration and defence (201 581), education (373 373), and health and social work (445 136). Production is achieved in all of these four sectors, but not by all categories of workers. Further study must analyse all these parameters.

**Manufacturing industry.** In Belgium, 9.5% of people draw a salary from manufacturing industry or industrial production. We are talking about half a million wage earners (473 001). Large employers employ a great number of workers. More than one in three workers (36.6 percent) work for companies employing more than 1 000 employees (0.13 percent of all employers). Again, further research must refine this analysis.

The ten largest employment branches for industrial wage earners are the food industry (88 762), metal manufacturing (53 741), the chemi-

cal industry (40 669), automotive assembly (36 599), machine production (33 112), non-metallic mineral products (26 746) and basic metals (25 809), pharmaceutical products (25 581), textiles (23 004) and furniture (17 859).

As everywhere on the continent, the share of industry in national wealth (gross domestic product, GDP) has dropped significantly in the last thirty years, because of automation, productivity increases and relocation choices. Nevertheless, these figures give a distorted picture since many service activities have been subtracted from those previously included in the industry category, for instance: maintenance, transport, food preparation, security and so on. There are presently 503 000 wage earners working in such services, parts of which are linked to industrial activities.

Industry also connects to five major sectors:

- (a) *Transport and logistics.* The supply of raw materials and semi-finished products and the transport of finished products are inextricably linked to material production. This sector is a first additional stratum of manufacturing industry: 3.7 percent of the active population work as wage earners in transport and storage (181 071). This includes the 34 185 workers in the public railways system.
- (b) *Business services.* These form a second stratum complementing production and include a diverse range of services: accounting, maintenance, supply of temporary staff, engineers, security, advertising, etc. Together, employees from this sector constitute 12.4 percent of the active population (620 066). These also include the 31 655 wage earners in postal and courier services, among whom 13 942 are state employees of the Postal service. No less than 21 606 workers are employed in the telecommunications industry, 5 836 of whom are employed by the semi-public communications company. Both sectors combine services to businesses and the public.



- (c) *Finance and insurance activities* form a third stratum. Further research should elucidate what proportion of their services goes to companies in comparison with those to the public. 2.5% of the active population are wage-earners in this sector (125 351).
- (d) *Trade* concerns the marketing of goods produced at home and abroad. This fourth stratum accounts for 9.7% of all employed persons (482 634).
- (e) *Energy and water supply and drainage* are essential to all production activity. Wage earners in these sectors together represent only 0.7 percent of all active services, but these are certainly key sectors (33 611).

**The construction industry** is responsible for the building of commercial facilities and private homes. Further research is crucial to determine the proportion of each. In addition, 4.5% of active citizens are employees in the building, the exploitation and the trade of real estate (223 496). Compared with the industry sector, employment in the construction industry is much more fragmented.

**Government.** The public sector employs approximately one million people, counting all authorities and statuses. In Belgium, the public sector includes federal, regional, provincial and municipal administrations, military, judiciary and police personnel, public companies (rail, post, associations of local authorities), education, social welfare agencies, etc. Federal and regional authorities employ a total of 696 728 people, 432 329 of whom are manual workers and 219 974 white-collar workers. Another 364 261 people work in provincial and local administrations. Not every public sector employee has a permanent appointment. In 2012, 134 641 statutory civil servants worked in provincial and local administrations, as well as 167 532 contract workers and 62 088 subsidised contract workers (APE-ACS).

**Job seekers.** We consider the vast majority of the 457 785 unemployed job seekers as being part of the working class (and therefore not as a part

of the non-active population). Of this group, 190 998 people have been out of work for more than 2 years. Currently, 58 240 job seekers are under 25. The main subgroups within the group of unemployed job seekers are those who lost a full-time job (332 176) and those who recently left school (100 308).<sup>7</sup>

**Non-active population.** The non-active population belongs largely to the working class. In 2012 in our country a small group of 4.3 million persons aged 15 and older were inactive. They did no paid labour, were not actively looking for work or were not available for work. They accounted for about 1.8 million men and 2.5 million women. More than half of the inactive people are pensioners, pre-pension or on early retirement. 20.5% of the inactive population aged 15 and older are high school, college or university students, 11.2% are housewives (or house-husbands), 7.6 percent are disabled and 9.1 percent are inactive without belonging to any of the above categories.

## (2) The self-employed

The self-employed are either self-employed as their main activity (685 495) or self-employed in a secondary activity (230 970).

Self-employed persons are a heterogeneous group. They are either self-employed workers who do not use the wage labour of others, self-employed persons who have their own business with a few salaried workers and the owners of very small or family businesses who employ less than 10 employees. The owners of very small businesses (employers of 174 000 persons in our country) therefore belong to the independent middle class.

There are, in general, five types of self-employed activity:

- (a) *Independent producers:* crafts people (such as bakers, tailors, printers, jewellers, furniture makers, car demolishers...), building sector trades people (self-employed carpenters, plasterers, bricklayers, electricians,

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<sup>7</sup> ONEM, 2013 figures.

heating engineers, restorers, handymen...), parts of the transport industry (small transport companies, freight forwarders and express messengers) and part of the repair trade (automotive garage owners, repairers of household appliances, cobblers), and cleaning workers.

- (b) *Agricultural producers*: small farmers, gardeners, foresters, flower growers, poultry farmers and fishermen.
- (c) *Small independent service providers*: hotel, restaurant and café proprietors; as well as caterers and canteen managers, entertainment and recreation (managers of dance halls, nightclubs, gambling halls), tourism (small travel agencies; campground managers), body care and aesthetics (hairdressers, beauty salons, sauna and fitness centres), mediation work (matrimonial and matchmaking services; labour market mediation), information transfer, education and training (from vehicle driving to computer training).
- (d) *Professionals*: self-employed doctors, dentists and medical specialists, lawyers, advisors (tax consultants, brokers, insurance intermediaries, advertising experts, marketing and merchandising consultants), organisational and management specialists, therapists, freelance journalists, translators, artists, models, photographers, members of audit firms, owners of small engineering and software businesses.
- (e) *Small independent traders* (shopkeepers, retailers, market traders, bazaar and boutique owners, antique dealers) and *money and insurance profession traders* (small currency dealers, exchange offices, lenders, for example, financing the purchase of a car or for personal loans, small business managers or insurance commission offices).

**Farmers** constitute a distinct layer within the self-employed. In contrast to countries such as France, only a small percentage of the Belgian working population is engaged in agriculture: all in all, 79 078 self-employed, 22 069 manual workers and 1 558 white-collar workers. Over the last thirty years, the Belgian agricultural workforce has shown a dual

evolution: on the one hand, a slight increase in the number of employees per company (from 1.6 in 1980 to 1.95 in 2012), but on the other hand, an increasingly important proportion of non-family labour (from 3.9% in 1980 to more than 20 per cent in 2012).

### 3. The working class and its allies

#### 3.1. A global vision of the working class

The working class today is very diversified and no longer the great mass of people concentrated in a few large companies, as was the case in most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, some sectors still show a *concentration of the working population*. Fifty-four percent of all wage earners work for one of the 1 782 large companies with more than 250 employees. These companies account for only 0.8% of the total number of employers. Detailed analyses should reveal where that concentration occurs and what changes it has undergone. The other half of the wage earners thus spreads across tens of thousands of small and medium-sized firms.

There is an *increasing integration of intellectual and manual labour*. In recent years, the technology sectors of information, communication and transport in particular have experienced an ultra-rapid development. The production process requires more technical knowledge, with the result that, in many sectors, the distinction between blue-collar and white-collar workers has become completely arbitrary, in that they all work in production. The social rights linked to both statuses remain different but those differences are growing smaller.

The group of *wage earners with a manual worker status* is increasingly faced with different contracts and statuses. The number of wage-earners with a full-time job and a permanent contract is decreasing, while those with temporary or part-time jobs is increasing. One-third of people under 24 have temporary jobs and about 45 per cent of working women have part-time jobs. With the incentives given to low-wage job creation full-time jobs tend to be replaced with precarious employment, with a

resulting increase of the *working poor* category. This is particularly true for wage-earners of foreign origin.

A large social differentiation<sup>8</sup> exists within the white-collar sector. The number of “bottom rung” clerical jobs is increasing. Many of them earn less than the average worker’s wage and enjoy no additional benefits. In addition, there are “middle rung” employees, with certain middle management tasks, who receive certain salary benefits. The bosses are actively trying to interest this layer in their worldview, but these workers’ experience is that of a gradual impoverishment. Finally, there is the top layer, which consists of top executives.

As for *public sector workers*, those with the status of government workers, who enjoy job security and better retirement entitlements, they are systematically being replaced by workers under contract. There is also a *growing diversity in such contracts*.

### 3.2. The working class and its allies in the independent middle class

The working class in its broadest sense is at the heart of our agenda. However, we do not limit our outreach to this class. This is important, because there are several other classes and social strata in today’s society who also experience domination by monopolies, large shareholders and people of private means. We then speak in the first place about the *lower layers of the independent middle class* and about *farmers*.

Large sections of the professions and artists are victims of dependency on bank loans, and on agreements between the monopoly companies in their trade. They have suffered from the concentration of production, are weighed down by the burden of indirect taxes, and feel the diminishing purchasing power of the population. These factors lead to a degradation of small businesses’ futures in manufacturing, trade and agriculture.

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8 Differentiation: process of developing distinctions inside social groups.

The self-employed with 1 to 9 employees and the owners of small businesses with 10 to 49 employees belong to the small employers' category. They have other interests than the large employers, sometimes downright opposite interests. Their interests also differ from government policy. Government policies in the field of taxation and notional interest<sup>9</sup> as well as aid to large multinationals systematically favour the largest players and monopolies – at the expense of many small businesses. These various measures enhance the concentration and accumulation of capital. Consequently, many small businesses go bankrupt.

Subjectively, a large part of the independent middle class strives to become a large company or monopoly itself, but objectively this same monopoly formation pushes them into bankruptcy. Very few of the self-employed are doing very well (20 percent of the self-employed realize 60% of the income).

The professions, for example, pick up an average net yearly income of 30 313 Euros. However, various independent professions feel the impact of the crisis. The self-employed saw their overall net income fall by 4.5 percent in 2014. In 2012, a self-employed professional person earned an average of 20 492 Euros net yearly. An estimated 70 percent of the self-employed have an income that does not exceed that of a worker, although further investigation is called for into the link between the official numbers and reality. Moreover, 16 percent of the self-employed earn less than 833 Euros per month, well below the poverty line of 973 Euros. The lowest average annual incomes occur in service sectors such as beauty care (hairdressers, pedicure...) with 12 685 Euros, agriculture with 12 427 Euro and trade with 19 157 Euro. Self-employed persons cannot rely on a minimum wage or replacement income in the event of a loss of income. They must finance their social security themselves. Prolonged low sales results keep many self-employed persons from setting aside reserves for dealing with disease, life setbacks or even saving for a pension, because they already use all their financial resources to keep their heads above

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9 Notional interest: companies can deduct a fictional interest on equity (2.74%) from their profits. The amount of notional interest was estimated at 3 billion Euros in 2014.

water. In 2012, 83 761 self-employed persons started their own businesses, 38 026 went out of business, 7 778 of them because of bankruptcy.

As for farmers, scaling up does not lead to a noticeable improvement in their average income, on the contrary. According to the 2013 annual report of the Boerenbond<sup>10</sup> (Farmers' Union), the average income of a full-time working farmer amounted last year to 23 304 Euros, less than 2 000 Euros a month. Due to increasing costs, farmers' incomes have been diminishing in recent years. There is also a growing contrast between farmers and owners of agricultural land (speculation). European agricultural policy strangles small farmers and favours large landowners.

There is therefore an objective basis for a progressive cooperation between the working class, the lower layers of the independent middle class and the small farmers.

### 3.3. **Special allies: young people, students, intellectuals and artists**

Finally, we focus on four categories of people who can be special allies to the working population in what we call a "progressive convergence". We wish to go on investigating their specific composition and role in society.

(a) *Young people.* (See section 1.2. Party of youth)

(b) *Students.* (See also section 1.2. Party of youth). Belgium has just over 450 000 students between 20 and 29 years old. The 25-29 demographic has grown especially over the last decade. Students form a specific social layer; they come from different classes, although the number of students of working class background remains very small. In addition, students leave to join various social classes after their studies. However, in the meantime, they form a specific world of their own. In a "progressive convergence", we are reaching out to all students who want to make the choice to work for a socially equitable society.

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10 An organization representing Flemish farmers.

- (c) *Intellectuals.* Simply defined as people who have had the opportunity to pursue higher education, intellectuals play a very important role in a complex and politicized world like ours. In a high-tech production environment, they play a vital role in fostering scientific research and the development of production. At the same time, intellectuals – in comparison with other social groups – have achieved a strong media presence. They play an important role as opinion-makers and trendsetters, or as mouthpieces for certain ideas. Every liberation struggle has a need for intellectuals who choose sides, the side of the working class, that of the progressive convergence.
- (d) *Creative artists, artists, culture creators.*







Les gens d'abord, pas le profit