

Unity Congress

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**Unity  
Congress  
2021**



**Party of the  
working class**

**Party of  
the youth**

**Party of  
socialism**

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# Introduction\*

Dear comrades,

Yesterday, I went to visit Dr. Erik Vanobbergen. Erik is sick, he has cancer. Erik is one of those pioneers who built the PTB and Medicine for the People.

“Our commitment does not end with ourselves, it continues through future generations. For us, the vitality and strength of the party is the most important gift,” he told me. This is to his honour, and it also honours the life commitment of all the pioneers. In recent times, we have had to say goodbye to far too many of them. It is certain that, without this generation of pioneers, the PTB would not be here today. And it is also certain that current and future generations will continue the work that they started.

In less than twenty years, the PTB has grown from a small, committed party to a major political player in Belgium. It’s an amazing story, because it really went against the tide. This progress has been made possible by the revitalisation process that began in 2004, when our members voted overwhelmingly in favour of a party renewal. This was the tipping point, and it saved the party. Since then, the party has gone from having 80 to 400 grassroots groups and from 800 to 24,000 members today.

No one can deny that the PTB is increasingly becoming the party of the working class in our country. “If you have a picket line, you have a nine out of ten chance of running into a PTB member,” a financial newspaper recently noted. The party

\* | Closing remarks at the second plenary session of the Unity Congress, Saturday 6 November 2021.

has a growing influence on the class struggle in our country, and has established itself as a powerful driver on the left.

With the PTB, a congress period lasts one year. Why? Because we want to involve everyone. And that takes time. It is a question of respect for the participants, and a question of respect for the substantive debate. For us, a congress is not a show or a spectacle, as we have recently seen with others.

The closing session on 5 December 2021 will mark the end of the one-year congressional period. In phase one, the party's 400 grassroots groups elected 883 delegates to the congress. Half of these delegates were already present at the Solidarity Congress in 2015. This means that half of them were not there, and for them it is their first party congress. Welcome, comrades.

All the delegates received the first drafts of the texts prepared by the outgoing National Council. In phase two, these texts were discussed in 83 commissions throughout the country. This process involved all 883 delegates. In total, there were 564 pages of commission reports, to which 1,118 individual amendments were proposed. This adds up to a total of 1,368 pages of suggestions, criticisms and amendments, much more than at any previous congress.

This formed the basis for a thorough reworking of the texts. In phase three, the main differences of opinion and the most important discussion points were clarified in two plenary sessions. During these sessions, the richness of the delegates' interventions was striking, as was the quality and serenity of the substantive debate. A new National Council was elected, with more young people and more workers than ever before. In the final phase, at the closing session on 5 December, a new president and general secretary will be elected.

Passing the torch is not easy, in our party no less than elsewhere. The Unity Congress has elected a new National

Council, in which four out of ten comrades will be new. The collective is our strength. We don't elect a president who then puts together his own team. In our case, a collective leadership is elected first and, within that collective, a president is then elected. This is a very good system, which makes the party solid and strengthens its unity.

Of course, we know full well that the new party leadership will not be infallible. And it's a good thing that we know it. The new leadership you elected at this congress will still make mistakes. Infallibility does not exist, and never has. Making mistakes is not a big deal. Not recognizing mistakes and refusing to correct them, that would be a serious problem.

Those who want to change the world need to know the world. Those who want to develop their strength need to organize. Those who want to be liberated need comrades. Those who want a free and humane life must fight for it. This is what Che Guevara taught us.

To better understand the world, to better organize and to be better able to fight for a free and humane life: this is the goal of our Unity Congress. During our congress, we have translated this into four key concepts: party of unity, party of youth, party of the working class, party of socialism.

With this second plenary session, the work of the outgoing National Council, the work of the comrades who built the party between 2015 and now, also comes to an end. On behalf of this team, I would like to thank all the delegates, the group members, all the members for their cooperation and trust over the past years. Long live socialism! Long live the PTB!

Peter Mertens.



Unity  
Congress  
2021

# Part I

# Our choices

Eighteen theses  
on unity,  
antifascism,  
peace,  
climate,  
the crisis and  
socialism

# We choose unity

## Theses:

- ▶ 2024 will be a tipping point for our country
- ▶ Splitting our country is anti-social, costly, absurd and brutal
- ▶ More unity in our country is social, less costly, logical and humane

## 2024 will be a tipping point for our country

- 1 2024 is a tipping point. After the elections scheduled for that year, the separatist parties want to split our country into two or three parts. A growing section of the VOKA, the employers' organisation in the north of the country, is encouraging them to do so. Divide and rule would weaken the working class and benefit the establishment.
- 2 Our country has undergone six state reforms<sup>1</sup>, or, rather, deformations of the state, because their record is disastrous. These state reforms have been detrimental to the people of our country. The institutions have become more complex and there is considerable waste. The Flemish, Walloon and Brussels governments do not function any better than the federal state. They just take more time and cost more money.
- 3 Our country has three regions, defined by their territory (the Walloon, Brussels Capital and Flemish regions), and three communities, defined by their language (Flemish, French and German). Dozens of consultation committees and interdepartmental conferences are often needed before a decision can be made. Our country has six governments<sup>2</sup>, with more than fifty ministers and secretaries of state. We have four ministers in charge of mobility, all stuck in traffic jams. We have four ministers responsible for poverty reduction, but child poverty is increasing year by year. And during the Covid-19 global pandemic, nine health min-

1 | State reform = change in the structure and organization of the state. Belgium evolved through six reforms (1970, 1980, 1989, 1993, 2001 and 2011) from a unitary state to a federal state, with several entities (Regions and Communities).

2 | The federal government. The Flemish government (the Flemish Region merged into the Flemish Community). The government of the Walloon Region. The government of the Brussels Capital Region. The government of the French Community (said Federation Wallonia-Brussels). The government of the German-speaking Community.



isters were stepping on each other's toes instead of pursuing an effective, centralized policy. This same inefficiency was again seen during the major floods of the summer of 2021. It's crazy, isn't it?

- 4 The state reforms have led to a federalism of competition where one region is pitted against another. This does not work. The status quo is not viable. The situation could go in two opposite directions.
- 5 One direction is a splitting of the country as of 2024, either abruptly or in stages. This is what the right-wing nationalists and separatists want. For fifty years they have been pushing the country towards more and more division. For 2024, they are keeping two options at hand.
- 6 –The first would be a direct split led by the separatists, with a unilateral declaration of independence by Flanders. To be able to carry out such an operation, the NVA will most likely need the support of the far-right Vlaams Belang party.
- 7 –The second option would be the establishment of so-called confederalism, as the final step before the split. Under this divisive confederalism, all that remains of the federal state is an empty shell, only left with authority over national debt, pensions, the army, foreign affairs, the railways and a few other public companies. The nationalist NVA party hopes to draw support for this scenario from the Socialist Party, which is adopting an increasingly regionalist stance, as well as Vooruit, the CD&V and other parties. Confederalism is the final step towards a complete split of the country, and it has been designed as such by the separatists.
- 8 A combination of both scenarios is also possible. The NVA could, by threatening the first scenario, force the other traditional parties to accept the second: “Either you accept



our confederalism, or we and Vlaams Belang unilaterally proclaim Flanders' independence." Bart De Wever, the president of the NVA, said that "the constitution should not be an obstacle to a necessary change" (sic). This is nothing less than a threat of an unconstitutional declaration of independence. If this independence does not come, then the far right would cry "stolen elections" and incite civil unrest, such as that witnessed in January 2021 when Trump cheered his supporters to storm the Capitol.

- 9 But another direction is also possible. And the good news is that there is great willingness to move in that direction. Despite years of separatist agitation, most of the population in all three regions of the country continues to oppose a split of the country.<sup>3</sup> The PTB, together with many others, wants to build and lead a broad movement to move the country in the opposite direction: towards more cooperation and unity, instead of more competition and division. In this way, we can put an end to the confrontation, the waste of time and money, and the divide and rule policy. We are in favour of a federalism of unity, a federalism that is social, efficient, humane and less costly for our country. Because it is in the interest of the working class, the youth and all citizens of our country. A united Belgium would also be much better positioned to fight for a more social and democratic society than two or three separate entities.

## Splitting our country is anti-social, costly, absurd and brutal

- 10 The driving force and sponsor of the idea to split the country is the aggressive Flemish employers' organisation Voka and the KBC bank. They want to put an end to our strong federal social security system and divide it up, so that they

3 | A poll published in *Le Vif* and *Knack* in June 2021 shows that only 15.4% of Dutch-speakers and 4.5% of French-speakers want an "independent Flanders and Wallonia". A survey by the VRT and *De Standaard* showed that two-thirds of the people in Flanders want "more Belgium" and only a quarter want "more Flanders".

can build their own Flemish social protection, which would be limited, conditional and much less extensive than our current national social security. They want to split up the labour law and collective agreements, to strengthen the position of big business. They want their own social policy that is totally subservient to the competitive position of the new economic elite. They also want to split up the trade unions and mutual insurance funds, to considerably weaken their power to protect workers' rights. And also because these organizations currently sit on the boards that manage the federal social security system, where they are blocking its dismantling. They are willing to tolerate them around the table, but only if they are toothless and no longer able to bite. It is very clear: this separatist project is designed to divide the working class. The split is not only about the economy – more deregulation, privatisation and exploitation – but also about ideology, politics and culture: it seeks a submissive working class that aligns itself with the world view of the ruling class. An independent or confederal Flanders should, in their eyes, become a reactionary region where big finance would be given carte blanche to do whatever it wants.

## An anti-social split

- 11 All employers' organizations are increasingly lobbying for a further reduction in employers' social security contributions, which means less money available to pay pensions or sickness and disability benefits. The result is that everyone is pushed into taking out individual private insurance. And that the big insurance companies make more money at the expense of pensioners, the sick and the elderly.
- 12 As long as social security is federal, the big employers face national resistance to its dismantling. Voka wants to split up social security to break this resistance and partially privatize social security. This would be very costly for the working class. Voka is fighting for a complete separation of

health care and employment policy (along with unemployment benefits). It knows that once these cornerstones are removed, the whole building is likely to collapse.

- 13 A single social security system prevents inequalities in treatment and rights based on the region in which one lives. A split would also shatter the solidarity between the different parts of the country.
- 14 What happened with the transfer of competences to the regions and communities (family allowances, rest and care homes, disability policy, etc.) is a clear illustration of this. It was not the desire to have a policy that is structurally more social that was the driving force behind these splits. On the contrary. You only have to look at the long waiting lists affecting people with disabilities or for social housing. The split is a magnificent vehicle for systematically introducing austerity measures. Accordingly, the devolution of education to the communities has led to the introduction of closed budgets that rule out any prospect of funding that is capable of meeting our children's needs.
- 15 The solution proposed by the social democratic parties during the government negotiations with the nationalists in 2020 – splitting up health care and employment policy, but keeping social security funding at the federal level – is dangerous. Because with different policies in the regions, the pressure to also split up funding will soon become unmanageable. No, this is no solution. It only paves the way for divisive confederalism, a precursor to the split of the country.

## A costly split

- 16 A split will create a new state apparatus, with its army of politicians and civil servants, laws and regulations. And all this for a very small territory, barely larger than a pea on the world map. Equally costly is divisive confederalism,



which will lead to massive transfers of competences and thus to double or triple administrative structures.

- 17 The sixth state reform has been in place for ten years, but it still hasn't been digested. For example, for years to come, there will still be a difference between children who receive family allowances dating from before regionalization and those who were born after. Both a direct split and divisive confederalism are dead-end processes that will take at least two generations.

## An absurd and brutal split

- 18 It is absurd to split the justice system and the police force at a time when crime is becoming more complex and international and coordination between security services is already difficult. It is absurd to divide health care in order to combat diseases and pandemics that cross linguistic boundaries without any problem. Equally absurd is dividing up river management, climate and energy policy when climate events do not stop at the language border.
- 19 Splitting the country is as unrealistic an option as divisive confederalism. Indeed, neither of the two offers anything like a viable solution for Brussels, where French-speakers, Dutch-speakers and speakers of many other languages live together, and where a quarter of a million people from Flanders and 140,000 from Wallonia come to work every day. Brussels cannot be divided or co-managed from the outside, except maybe if an apartheid is established. This would lead to endless conflict, tension and, ultimately, violence, as we saw in Bosnia in the 1990s.
- 20 After the split, the separatists in the north of the country want to impose a narrow identity on the separated regions. An identity that rejects all those who do not fit into the Flemish "canon": the migrant, the Walloon, but also the passive sick person, the unemployed or the pensioner, the critical artist, the committed activist, the combative trade

unionist, the internationalist – a brutally imposed identity that leads to censorship and a form of authoritarianism. On the French-speaking side, the calls of some regionalist politicians to form a “French-speaking front” or to “unite the forces of Wallonia” create a rift between “them” (the “Flemings”) and “us” (the “French speakers”). This rift plays into the hands of the Flemish nationalists.

## More unity in our country is social, less costly, logical and humane

- 21 Our country is a crossroads at the heart of Europe: industrial, technological and logistical; a country of emigration and immigration, the land of fries and beer, but also of spaghetti and dürüms. Our country is the region where Romans, Germans, Burgundians, Spaniards, Austrians, the French and Dutch have passed through, and all have left their mark. You can't confine it to one community identity or one national identity. This is precisely what makes our country unique. Just think of Jacques Brel or Stromae, Sandra Kim or René Magritte, Eddy Merckx or Nafissatou Thiam.
- 22 Every culture is divided between those who want everything to stay the same and those who advocate emancipation and progress. There is no such thing as a single culture or a single tradition. We do not belong to “daddy's Belgium”, the Belgium that made children work in the mines, the Belgium of Leopold II and colonization, of the Société Générale, of collaboration and discrimination, of political scheming and economic corruption.
- 23 We stand up for our own history, we already said so when we first organized ManiFiesta<sup>4</sup> in 2010 in Bredene. Our history is a common history of the working class of Flanders,

4 | ManiFiesta, now moved to Ostend, is the annual solidarity festival co-organized by the PTB's network of people's clinics Medicine for the People and its magazine *Solidaire*.



Wallonia and Brussels. Who founded the first trade unions? Not the Flemish nationalists, but the textile workers of Ghent and Kortrijk. Who brought the spirit of struggle into the labour movement? Not the separatists, but the miners of the Borinage. Who formulated the first demands of the working class? Not the regionalists, but the workers and artisans of Brussels. And together – those of Ghent, the Borinage and Brussels – they created the workers' movement that made the emancipation of the working class a reality and created our identity. It was the labour movement that enforced the ban on child labour and the ban on 12-hour workdays. It introduced paid holidays. It built the social security system, brick by brick. After the war, it welcomed workers from elsewhere to contribute to the creation of wealth. Our grandparents achieved results because they were united and because they dared to lead the struggle.

- 24 Today, those who stoke the fire say there are too many problems between the regions and communities of the country and it would be better to separate us. But that statement comes from people who have done nothing at all for social security. Why should we let them tear down this social security now?
- 25 By the year 2024, we need more unity. Faced with multinationals that cross all national borders, it is important for the working class to be internationalist and, therefore, anti-nationalist.
- 26 By strengthening unity in Belgium, we are building the unity of the working class beyond national borders. This is the perspective from which we fight both separatism and regionalism. The establishment has an interest in dividing the working class. On a smaller territory, the labour movement is weaker. On a smaller territory, it is more difficult for workers in Liège, Antwerp and Brussels to learn from each other and to give each other strength. They will then try to pit people against each other, to stir up prejudice so

that they turn inward. History shows that those who are divided cannot win.

- 27 We can only win if we succeed in uniting the workers, even if they come from different backgrounds, even if they grew up in different places, even if they have different cultural and social traditions. The language we speak is not the language of money and cold selfishness. It is the language of work and solidarity.

## Let's restore the federal state as the centre of gravity

- 28 We want to prevent nationalists and regionalists on both sides of the language border from taking decisive steps towards a split. We want to go in the opposite direction, with measures that run counter to the divisive logic of previous state reforms.
- 29 In Belgium, today, the federal state, the communities and the regions decide alongside each other. Federal laws are on the same level as the decrees and ordinances of the regions or communities. There is no hierarchy between them. As a result, in the event of a crisis, the federal state cannot intervene without the agreement of the regions. As the Covid-19 crisis has shown, this invariably leads to obstacles and blockages.
- 30 Not all federalism automatically leads to increasing division, as is the case in Belgium today. On the contrary, the vast majority of federal states, while giving important powers to the regions and local authorities, tend, over time, to centralize more legislative power at the federal level. These states establish a hierarchy between the federal state and the regions, with a common set of standards. In Germany, for example, the federal government sets the framework for the different Länder (regions) and is the judge in case of disputes between regions. Following this



scheme, it set the rules with regard to Covid-19 for the whole country.

- 31 This is more efficient, less wasteful and, above all, less conflictual. The federal government must guarantee equality for all inhabitants. It must be empowered to enact laws that guarantee equal living conditions throughout the country, with equal rights for all.
- 32 The federal government provides the framework and sets the guidelines and standards in key areas. This is essential to ensure the coherence of the major public investment plans needed to meet social and climate challenges and to combat the inequalities in development between the regions.
- 33 We want to re-federalise and not only bring the policies on health, climate, mobility and energy back to the national level, but also the policies on the economy, employment, digitalisation and public investment. We want a fully-fledged federal social security system. And a more solidarity-based financing law.
- 34 Compared to the current situation in our country, this means a fundamental shift. The centre of gravity of political decision-making must return to the federal level. The implementation of these decisions and the concrete applications, adapted to the realities on the ground, will be left to the regions. For example, the management of land-use planning, based on common federal standards and rules, can be taken over by the regions. In this scenario, the regions would take on more of an executive administrative federalism role, as in Germany, where they enact some laws of their own, but are primarily responsible for applying federal laws in line with the realities on the ground.
- 35 From this point of view, the laws of the federal state prevail over those of the regions, as in Germany. When regions threaten to block the country in order to put their own



interests first, there has to be an arbitrator who can cut the knot. The federal government can take on this task.

- 36 This must go hand in hand with a simplification of structures. We want to demarcate the regions on the basis of the following criteria: economic relations, social relations and linguistic composition. Inhabitants derive their rights from the fact that they live in a particular region, not from the fact that they belong to a particular linguistic community.
- 37 In our country, we lack unifying political mechanisms. For example, we need a federal constituency for national elections so that members of parliament are elected by the whole population, not just by the inhabitants of a region. The ministers of the federal state act for the whole country and are accountable for their policies to all the voters of the country.
- 38 We defend a unity federalism that is social, efficient, humane and less costly.

## More unity is social

- 39 It is at the federal level that we are best able to organize the redistribution of wealth, a fair tax system, a strong social security and strong public services.
- 40 In the world of insurance, we know that the larger the group of contributors, the better the risks are covered. The same is true of social security, with pensions, unemployment, sickness, disability and work accident benefits. In addition, the unity of the social security system at the federal level, with a single administration, offers the best value for money and guarantees the public character of this system and its financing.
- 41 The biggest share of taxes must be collected at the federal level. But these revenues must be redistributed according



to the different levels of power in line with a distribution system that meets people's needs. As in other federal countries, redistribution mechanisms must reduce the gap between the richest and poorest regions and ensure that all citizens have access to comparable public services.

## More unity is less costly and more efficient

- 42 Belgium's surface area is smaller than that of most German Länder. London has more inhabitants than Belgium and has only one city council and one mayor. So things could be much simpler and less costly than they are today.
- 43 We want to re-federalise those competences where regionalisation has proven to be a failure. Bringing them back to the federal level would eliminate a lot of consultation meetings and pool the technical and intellectual capacities at the federal level. We can reduce the number of ministers and secretaries of state by more than a third. The establishment of common federal laws and standards for the environment, housing, common statutes for public servants, etc., would allow for faster implementation and for simplification.
- 44 Brussels, the capital, is at the crossroads of the country. The city is a bilingual region in itself. Brussels is part of the solution. Much more than elsewhere, it is in Brussels that the current structure of Belgium is shown to be complex and a source of monstrous waste. The overlapping institutions at the level of Brussels need to be simplified. The role of the Brussels Capital Region should thus take precedence over the community competences that separate people in Brussels according to their language for sports, culture and care. Bilingualism must be guaranteed everywhere. For challenges that go beyond the Brussels Capital Region but are linked to Brussels' role as a federal capital, it is the federal state that should provide the overall guidelines. The federal government will ensure the protection of the

Dutch- and French-speaking minorities in the capital and the surrounding area.

## More unity is humane

- 45 Why lock people into a narrow Flemish or Walloon identity? The multilingual character of our country, formed by Latin and Germanic influences and enriched by the many workers from elsewhere, is an asset in today's Europe. It is an integral part of our Belgian identity. This identity cannot be amputated without impoverishing it. An amputation is brutal.
- 46 Developing a multilingual and multicultural country is an asset in a world that has become a village and on a continent where exchanges are intensifying. Developing bilingualism in education and exchanges across language barriers would be a great step forward, as seen in other multilingual countries such as Finland (Finnish and Swedish) or Luxembourg (German, French and Luxembourgish). The training of bilingual teachers and exchanges taking Dutch-speaking teachers to Wallonia and French-speaking teachers to Flanders should be encouraged, as should common bilingual programmes on public television channels. Common educational standards (length of compulsory education, minimum requirements for school diplomas, the setting of teachers' salaries and pensions, etc.) can greatly facilitate such exchanges.
- 47 We therefore defend a united, multilingual Belgium with a unity federalism that could serve as an example for a multilingual Europe.





# We choose antifascism

## Theses:

- ▶ Fascism has an economic basis
- ▶ A climate that shifts to the right can lead to fascism
- ▶ We want to develop a broad antifascist approach

## Fascism has an economic basis

- 48 All over the world, we are witnessing the strengthening of far-right forces. This is also the case in our country, where the far right has set itself the goal of taking power at both the local and regional levels in 2024. This threat is real.
- 49 The emergence of a new fascism on a global level has an economic basis. Capital constantly needs more capital. It needs to maintain its profit rate relative to that of its competitors. This is an economic necessity, not a moral issue. In the 1990s, capitalism was in trouble and needed new markets. It found them thanks to privatization and globalization. This allowed it to start increasing its profits again. This strategy led to the unravelling of social protection and social security and the dismantling of public services. Labour relations were disrupted, job insecurity became commonplace again, the unions came under pressure and social democracy capitulated to this offensive with its “third way”<sup>5</sup>. Socialism as an alternative to capitalism came under attack. In fact, many fashionable thinkers claimed there is simply no alternative. In the working class areas of the cities, many working class families were left to fend for themselves.
- 50 Since then, capital has tirelessly pursued its brutal offensive. After the banking crisis of 2008 and during the pandemic of 2020-21, the largest private monopolies only got stronger. And it’s not just about economic power. They also demand more and more political power in order to secure their monopoly position. Monopoly capital does not aspire to freedom, but to domination. This desire stems from the objective compulsion of achieving not only “normal” average profits, but extra monopoly profits. There is no democratic equality, power is concentrated in the hands of a

5 | Social democracy chooses a “third way” that would stand between capitalism and socialism. The “third way” embraces the market mechanism and neoliberalism, and pretends to give it a social face.

small group of capitalists who hold a monopoly on power. This is what characterizes the imperialism of our time.

51 In their bid to expand their economic monopoly with political power, monopolies use a range of approaches. In response to the various crises – political (with the terrorist attacks), economic (the banking crisis, the current social crisis), environmental (floods, forest fires, tornadoes) and sanitary (Covid-19) – calls are made for the strengthening of executive power (the government) at the expense of legislative power (the parliament). These demands are met, with the implementation of special powers, emergency laws, states of exception or pandemic laws. This transfer of power to the government is intended to shift the balance of power even more firmly in favour of capital. Social consultation is reduced, the democratic space shrinks, the position of the unions is placed under pressure, and even more so the right to strike.

52 Since the French Revolution, the separation of powers has been a fundamental principle of the rule of law. The judiciary is there to provide a bulwark against arbitrary rule and to act as a counterweight to the executive. And yet, today, we see various traditional political formations questioning this fundamental principle. They demand the power to deploy the army, ban public gatherings, place people under house arrest, carry out administrative searches, make preventive arrests, etc. The political world, the police and the intelligence services are seeing their room for manoeuvre ever widened at the expense of the judiciary.

53 As the various crises have unfolded, a large military-industrial security complex has developed, the media has become concentrated in the hands of a few large tycoons, and the right-wing law and order lobby has been given an ever louder voice. Since the 2016 terrorist attacks, our country is also moving ever more towards being a securitarian state, with the installation of “smart” cameras in working class neighbourhoods and large-scale data collec-

tion on the population. Meanwhile, the privatization of security tasks is proceeding apace and there is a growing tendency for police services to resort to excessive use of force in everyday incidents.

- 54 Society is divided into full-blown citizens, second-class citizens and non-citizens. Racism, sexism and homophobia are prevalent. People who are “different” are excluded. Refugees are dehumanized. And, everywhere, we are seeing the resurgence of a discourse calling for human rights to be made conditional. After the barbarism of fascism and the Second World War, human rights became “universal”, to free them from the vagaries of power relations, political regimes, environmental or health situations or the spirit of the times. Human rights are inalienable, no one can be deprived of them. These rights are applicable to everyone, unconditionally. And yet, today, this is all being called into question.
- 55 The same applies to the Geneva Convention. This convention on the status of refugees was intended to avoid a repeat of what happened in the 1930s, when many countries refused to accept Jewish and other refugees from Nazi Germany. The convention stipulates that recognized refugees should enjoy the same social rights as the citizens in their host country. No more, no less.
- 56 The centre of gravity of economic development is no longer in the United States or Europe, but is increasingly shifting eastward, particularly to China. The United States is in danger of losing its status as “the greatest nation on earth”. Some big business interests are pushing for protectionist measures and stirring up chauvinism. The cold war against China is reviving virulent anticommunist sentiment. And anticommunism has always been an essential pillar of rightism and fascism.
- 57 Military budgets are on the rise again, NATO is getting stronger and, since the terrorist attacks, society is being

militarized, step by step. The ideal of peace is fading and the idea of humanity is being overtaken by the purported ideal of a strong and powerful security state.

- 58 These political phenomena are not unrelated. They have an economic basis: the need of the big monopolies to accumulate ever more capital. Under such pressure, our societies are not moving towards more democracy and emancipation, but in the direction of political oppression and reaction across the board. "It is impossible to define the essence of fascism if one does not know imperialism," said the Italian communist and antifascist Palmiro Togliatti. This is more true now than ever before.

## **A climate that shifts to the right can lead to fascism**

- 59 The concept of "fascization" dates back to the 1920s. German jurist Franz Neumann defined it as a process of authoritarian measures, repressive laws and racist ideas that poisoned the political climate in Germany and prepared the state for a right-wing takeover. During this process, there is a constant interplay between the shift towards right-wing politics and authoritarianism and the strengthening of an openly far-right party.
- 60 Although history does not repeat itself exactly, it is nonetheless essential that we learn from it, so as to develop a better understanding of the current political processes. Today, too, we are witnessing a twofold process: the democratic space is shrinking, while far-right ideas are gradually gaining ground in public opinion.
- 61 In many countries, traditional political parties are being severely punished. The traditional political caste is in crisis and, in various parts of the world, new and old far-right parties are stepping into the breach, presenting themselves as "the alternative". In France, we see this with the Rassemblement National (formerly Front National) led by



Marine Le Pen. In our country, the Vlaams Belang, in Flanders, has long been the main driving force for the spread of the far-right ideology.

- 62 Most of the proposals of the 70-point plan of the Vlaams Blok in 1992, which the press rightly called a “horror programme”, have been implemented by the traditional parties or are no longer taboo. The “our own people first” ideology was still marginal in the early 1990s. In the meantime, racism and xenophobia have become ever-present in our society. This development coincides with thirty years of fiscal austerity in social and public services. It has not only created a shortage of social housing and affordable nursing homes for the elderly, but also a shortage of care in general, making it easier to point the finger at a scapegoat at the bottom of the social ladder. This racism is a boon to the establishment, which is delighted to see people fighting each other rather than to see those at the top having to assume responsibility. It’s the good old divide and rule tactic, in this case, dividing the working class to prioritise the needs of big capital. This is one of the essential functions of the far right.
- 63 The attacks on the labour movement and the capitulation of social democracy to neoliberalism have also pushed socio-economic and structural analyses into the background. We no longer ask what is the economic basis of society, which economic and class interests are at stake, or who benefits from which policy. The notion of “class” is stripped of its economic content and reduced to a concept of “domination”. Instead of a straightforward class analysis, all sorts of “identity” or “cultural” differences are put forward. There is no longer any talk of economic interests, structural inequalities or systemic problems inherent to capitalism. This change in discourse and language is no accident. It is the result of a strategy developed for years in many New Right circles, to percolate their ideas and concepts across the traditional parties, the mainstream media and society as a whole.

- 64 In the meantime, the far right has developed a division of tasks. There are the official far-right parties that are doing everything they can to become acceptable and respectable, having beautified their image and adopted a new language that seems harmless but is not. The goal is to first break the “cordon sanitaire” that still stands as a bulwark against the far right in Flanders and then come to power there, in 2024, both at the local and regional level. They leave the most violent fascist rhetoric to satellite organizations such as Schild en Vrienden or Voorpost, or to far-right blogs such as Breitbart News. In so doing, the far right shows two faces: a socially acceptable one and another, much more brutal one.
- 65 Everywhere, elements of the far right are trying to conquer the public space. This goes hand in hand with the exclusion of scapegoats, trade unionists, Marxists and other political opponents from public space. Paramilitary organizations are organizing training camps for right-wing extremist youth throughout Europe. On the Hungarian and Greek borders, fascist militias hunt down refugees, and not always unbeknownst to the official police. This is called collusion.
- 66 The far right recuperates, in the interest of the most reactionary circles of the establishment, those disenchanted with the traditional parties. It does not direct this anger upwards, but downwards. This all happens with great subtlety. The wolf puts on sheep’s clothes: across Europe, the far right is masquerading as an anti-establishment movement. Everywhere, it steals elements of social programmes from the real left. Historically, it’s also déjà vu. Fundamentally, fascism aims to create a mass movement through social, nationalist and racist demagogy. The far right speculates on the people’s deep disappointment with the traditional parties and institutions. However, there is a huge contradiction between the discourse of the far right and its practices: it eats out of the hand of the most wealthy and actively defends the policies that work in their favour. The

far-right parties are alternative parties of the establishment and are simply waiting for the right moment to rise to power.

## We want to develop a broad antifascist approach

- 67 It is time to take the far right out of the normality in which it has settled, to unmask it and to fight it. Fascism has always led to the worst crimes against humanity, to the imprisonment in concentration camps of trade unionists, Marxists, socialists, Roma, lesbians, gays, transgender people and dissidents. It was responsible for the genocide of six million Jews, the murder of more than 20 million people in Eastern Europe and a criminal war that cost 60 million lives.
- 68 It is time to rehabilitate antifascism. One cannot equate an executioner of the Breendonk camp with an antifascist who was tortured and executed there. Where can we still talk about communists such as Julien Lahaut? In 1941, this communist from Liège led 100,000 people in a strike against the Nazi occupiers, before being deported to the Neuengamme concentration camp, where he also rekindled the flame of resistance, earning in the process the nickname of “the man who carried the sun in his pocket”. Who remembers Piet Akkerman? A native of Antwerp and also a communist, he organized strikes in the diamond sector and lost his life fighting as an antifascist in the International Brigades in Spain. And who remembers Gilberte Borgers who, during the occupation, organized women’s strikes, before being beheaded by the Nazis? Resistance and protest must be given their rightful place in history.
- 69 Antifascism today must return to the economic analysis of structural inequalities and systemic problems. Capital is becoming ever more concentrated, the monopolies are becoming ever more insistent in claiming their hegemony. The democratic space is shrinking and 0.1% of the world

population now holds as much wealth as the poorest 90%. Given the extent of class antagonisms, we must ensure that we bring economic analyses back to the forefront. The Left must once again fight for social security, justice and the right of millions of workers to have a voice. It must start from a policy of the working class in the broad sense, the class that produces the wealth of society.

- 70 Workers have a hard life, they see their certainties disappearing, they lack emancipating and ideological benchmarks and are looking for a way out. Instead of looking down on them and lecturing them on the so-called values of capitalist democracy, bourgeois cosmopolitanism or citizenship, the Left must hear their just concerns, politicize them, link them together and transform them into resistance, in a radical democratic sense. The fight against the far right cannot be led by a political caste that has lost all credibility nor by attempts to preserve an old world that is dying. The fight against the far right is part of a larger movement that aspires to another world, based on equality, respect and solidarity.
- 71 Equality, respect, living together in peace, solidarity, internationalism and rationality are the fundamental values of our socialist world view. The far right has a world view that advocates the exact opposite on all the essential points, namely racism, chauvinism, elitism, sexism, inequality and irrationality. The battle is between these two world views.
- 72 Socialist consciousness is developed through action and mobilization. It is developed through a strong labour movement, which is the main force against the far right. Through young people in action, making their voices heard to defend the ideals of solidarity and equality. Through the anti-racist movement that stands up against all discrimination and fights against racist poison. Through the combative women's and LGBT+ movement, which challenges the sexist, macho, patriarchal and homophobic ideas of the far right. Through the climate movement that opposes the climate

scepticism of the far right. And through the peace movement, which fights nationalism, militarism and war-mongering. All these movements are fighting against the far right. It is important to link these movements into a broader antifascist whole that itself proposes a societal alternative: socialism.

# We choose peace

## Theses:

- ▶ The United States is a superpower in decline
- ▶ China's rise is causing growing concern in the West
- ▶ We oppose a new cold war and opt for peace

## The United States is a superpower in decline

- 73 After the Second World War, the United States of America established itself as the undisputed Western superpower and, since the demise of the Soviet Union, it has become the only world power. This supremacy was manifested economically, in the development of US trade and foreign investment, which gave rise to the global network of US monopolies. It has also manifested itself in the hegemony of the dollar as an international currency. There was a temporary counterbalance with the Soviet Union and the decolonization movements and the liberation struggle in the Third World. But from a military point of view, the United States remained in control. It has intervened everywhere to nip in the bud or suppress any inclination towards independence or revolution, within or outside the framework of NATO, the military alliance of which Belgium is a prominent member.
- 74 Today, the global economy's centre of gravity is shifting to Asia, where China continues to advance. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, China is the first country that has the potential to threaten the hegemony of Western capitalism. According to the World Bank, China has been catching up with and overtaking the European Union and the United States economically for several years. Between 2008 and 2018, the country doubled its GDP per capita, while that of the United States and the European Union increased by only one-tenth over the same period. The Covid-19 crisis has further accentuated this trend: Western economies contracted sharply in 2020, while China continued to experience economic growth.
- 75 It is not only the scale of Chinese development that threatens US supremacy, but also China's technological might. Until now, Western high technology, particularly that of Silicon Valley, has been determining the standards, procedures and security systems in the field of information and

communication technologies. China's rapid scientific and technological progress is breaking this monopoly.

## A cold war can turn hot

76 The pressure on the global hegemony of the United States is causing a great deal of worry among the ruling circles in Washington. The White House considers China, along with Russia, to be the greatest threat. Russia still has great military potential and is rich in raw materials. Any potential partnership between Moscow and Beijing is of particular concern to the United States.

77 From Bush to Biden, every US president has been and remains determined not to relinquish the country's global leadership position.<sup>6</sup> The United States is therefore responding to China's rise in power with increasing aggressiveness. The declining superpower uses a wide array of means to achieve its ends. Economically, it was already waging a trade war, imposing tariffs and quotas on the import of Chinese products. Added to that, now, is the growing strategic struggle for leadership in the development and production of high technology. The US military presence at China's borders has increased: warships, reconnaissance aircraft, spy drones, military manoeuvres and bases, not to mention the anti-China actions at the politico-diplomatic level and the ideological war that is raging.

78 All means are good to stir up this new cold war, starting with painting the opponent as the devil. The United States has an impressive record of grey and black propaganda against countries and regimes it dislikes. The lies about weapons of mass destruction preceded the war against Iraq in 2003. Lies about massacres and mass rapes were to

6 | This was enshrined under President Bush Jr. in the Project for a New American Century. Under President Obama came the Pivot to Asia: the US focused its attention on Asia to counter China. Under Trump, the trade war and the technology war with China gained further momentum.



justify the war against Libya in 2011. Facts are always distorted, amplified or exaggerated to justify sanctions and interventions.

- 79 By definition, a cold war heightens the tensions between the different sides. A cold war can, sooner or later, flare up and turn into open military conflict, in the form of direct engagement between the superpowers involved or indirect engagement through local or regional wars between their allies, or what is known as a “proxy war”. It is a dangerous game.
- 80 The military expansion of the United States and NATO does not bode well. The name NATO suggests that the scope of this military alliance would be limited to the North Atlantic. But today, NATO is unambiguously naming China, even though it is on the other side of the globe, as the new common enemy. Washington has also dusted off Quad, a military partnership between the United States, Australia, Japan and India. The Quad is now being presented as a “new NATO”, directed against China, for the Asia-Pacific region.
- 81 The United States has the most powerful military in the world. Its military spending is greater than that of the next ten countries combined. In 2019, its military spending (\$720 billion) was three times larger than China’s. The United States has troops, weapons, fighter jets, nuclear bombs and war fleets stationed all over the world. Currently, some 250,000 US military personnel are stationed in 160 countries on every continent. The military interventions and wars in which the United States has been involved since September 11, 2001, have resulted in the deaths of approximately 800,000 people. Against these wars and militarization, there is also a strong protest movement in the United States.
- 82 The tendency towards imperialism and war is rooted in the logic of capitalism. At the outbreak of World War I, a century ago, Lenin saw five fundamental characteristics of imperial-





ism that remain strikingly relevant today: (1) production and capital are so concentrated in ever fewer hands that large monopolies are created; (2) banking and industrial capital merge into ever more powerful “finance capital”; (3) instead of the simple export of goods, the export of capital (foreign investments and loans) dominates; (4) the major capitalist monopolies share the world among themselves; and (5) the world has been completely divided up among the major capitalist powers.

- 83 Capitalist development is not balanced, but uneven. Giant multinationals are frantically searching for raw materials, new markets and labour forces. They want to turn their dominance into a monopoly and pay even more dividends to their shareholders. In this fierce competition, gigantic private companies are supported by the capitalist states concerned. This results in trade disputes, economic wars and, ultimately, military confrontations. “Capitalism carries within it the seeds of war, like a cloud carries a storm,” said the French socialist Jean Jaurès, who was assassinated on the eve of the First World War.

## **China’s rise is causing growing concern in the West**

- 84 China is not hiding its ambition to be more present on the world stage. It proposes cooperation with countries that so desire, according to the principles of peaceful coexistence and mutual benefit. This should lead to a “multipolar world” in which countries join together in different forms of cooperation and prevent the domination of a superpower – i.e. the United States – across the globe.
- 85 An important initiative in this direction is the BRICS cooperation, between five emerging economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. In the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, cooperation with Russia is the core. Since 2013, Beijing has been rolling out its New Silk Road strategic initiative on land and sea. Through it, China intends to

boost its investment and trade with Central Asia, Europe and Africa.<sup>7</sup>

86 China appears to be an attractive partner for many countries, especially in the South. It has concluded cooperation agreements with 46 African countries and has become the largest new trade and investment partner in Africa. Chinese loans and investments are mainly for infrastructure works: roads, railroads, ports, energy and water distribution networks. China generally provides soft loans with very low and long-term interest rates, in stark contrast to the loans and harsh conditions “granted” by capitalist countries. Chinese loans are not, moreover, subject to neoliberal reform requirements, such as the infamous structural adjustment programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a condition of lending. Under these adjustment programmes, the IMF requires countries in the South to privatize public services, such as health care, or public infrastructure, such as airports. This is not the case with Chinese loans. In 2020 and 2021, China granted debt relief of €6.5 billion to 23 countries, including 16 African countries.

87 When a new global player emerges and breaks the mould, tensions invariably arise. As long as the African economy does not generate sufficient added value and especially as long as it remains mainly dependent on the export of raw materials and the import of consumer goods, it will have difficulty taking off. Nevertheless, the Chinese option is, overall, an advantageous alternative for Africa, compared to European and American multinationals. The new economic actor is breaking the monopoly position of the West; it offers more room for favourable negotiations and more chances for autonomous development. It remains to be seen whether this will actually happen. Ultimately, Africa’s

7 | China calls this the Belt and Road Initiative: a belt of land routes through Central Asia, Russia and the Middle East to Europe and a sea route along the Indian Ocean to Djibouti in Africa and then through the Suez Canal to Europe.



political and economic development will have to come first and foremost from African countries and peoples themselves.

- 88 The integration of the Chinese economy into the global capitalist economic system raises questions. In their acquisitions and investments abroad, including in Europe, China's large private enterprises are asserting themselves as ordinary capitalist enterprises, motivated by self-interest and the thirst for profit. However, China is neither imperialist nor a colonizer. This is a fundamental difference with the European Union and the United States of America. The latter's power is founded on colonization, oppression, the plundering of raw materials and military interventions, with catastrophic social, economic and political consequences for the countries of the South. Poverty, inequality, underdevelopment and the almost permanent humanitarian crisis in large parts of the Southern continents are largely due to Western imperialism. This situation is still minimized or denied in the West today.
- 89 In four decades, China has lifted 800 million people out of poverty through large-scale public investment, development and social programmes. UN Secretary General António Guterres calls it "the greatest anti-poverty achievement in history".
- 90 China, like other Asian countries, has contained the Covid-19 pandemic through an integrated health system, a firm approach and mobilization at all levels. When the pandemic broke out, it was able to orient its economy to respond to the health emergency in a short period of time.
- 91 China's industrial development was late in coming, so much so that, for some time now, it has been the world's biggest polluter in absolute terms, with high coal and oil consumption. Today, it has become a global leader in solar, wind and other green energy sources and is implementing an ambitious plan to become carbon neutral by 2060.



- 92 On the domestic front, China has a hybrid system that has achieved a great deal, but also has serious problems. “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” is not without ambiguity. The development of a “high-level market system” is an official goal of Chinese policy. Within this framework, even essential sectors are open to private commercial competition, such as health care. China is facing real estate bubbles and banking problems, although the government is trying to regulate them. This “socialist market economy” has given rise to a layer of extremely rich private capitalist entrepreneurs.
- 93 The spectacular progress made in recent decades, thanks to which the country has managed to emerge from feudalism and underdevelopment, has only been possible thanks to the active social participation of its people. We have also seen neighbourhood committees and outreach teams at work during the Covid-19 crisis. However, in terms of democratic rights, there are also serious issues. To combat terrorism, violent separatism and extremism, drastic repressive measures have been taken. Finally, the intensive use of high technologies in the field of information and communication threatens the right to privacy, as elsewhere in the world.

## **We oppose a new cold war and opt for peace**

- 94 China is therefore not our model of socialism and many questions arise as to its future development. But the cold war waged by the United States against China cannot leave us indifferent. The new cold war is a threat to peace throughout the world. It leads to the militarization of entire societies, which will also happen at the expense of democratic space for combative trade unions and action movements. Moreover, a cold war swallows up masses of money and what goes into military spending does not go into social spending. In short, it is the working class that pays for the interests of the ruling class. That is why we are con-



cerned about the position of our country and the European Union on this issue.

95 The European Union prides itself on its ambition to become a strong global power. An imperialist power, to be clear, which implies the conquest of raw materials and outlets for its own multinationals. The European establishment still treats Africa as “Europe’s backyard”, where European countries have the right to undertake joint military intervention. European elites are divided on how to achieve this. Some want to stick with the United States at all costs, even if it means following them down the road of a new cold war. Others want to take a more independent course. But they all aspire to a policy that above all supports the economic and geostrategic interests of the large European multinationals – a neoimperialist policy.

96 Washington is demanding that NATO allies increase their military spending. For Belgium, NATO’s target of spending 2% of its GDP on military expenditure is equivalent to an increase of five billion euros a year. Through NATO and the European treaties, the European wagon is tied to the American engine.

97 The United States is pressuring EU member states to adopt a hostile attitude toward China and Chinese investment in Europe. The late-2020 investment agreement between China and the European Union immediately met with the ire of the United States. Washington has dragged along European political forces, which are adding to the inflammatory rhetoric and cold war measures. But why should Europe meekly follow Washington in its new cold war, its militarization and its aggressive alliances? The European Union and European countries can choose to break the unilateral alliance with the United States and turn their back on NATO.

98 International relations are one of the areas that illustrate the extent of the stress the capitalist world system is



under. A lasting peace can only be guaranteed in a society that is not based on competition and profit, but on cooperation and solidarity, on political and economic democracy, on meeting social and ecological needs.

- 99 From this perspective, we are committed to international relations and initiatives that prevent and avoid conflicts, interventions, militarization and threats of war. It is crucial that the working class and the youth commit to the struggle against imperialism and war. They can help shape a broad peace movement, as they did in the 1980s, when hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets against nuclear missiles, the arms race, and the cold war of the time.
- 100 We oppose the dangerous policy of polarization that the United States wants to impose on the world. We choose international cooperation on an equal footing, peaceful coexistence, non-interference and respect for the United Nations Charter. It is the choice of a preventive approach to conflicts, based on international law, diplomacy and dialogue. This choice offers the best prospects for social progress, the climate revolution, democracy, international solidarity and peace.



We choose peace

# We choose the climate

## Theses:

- ▶ Green capitalism will not save the climate
- ▶ Climate scepticism and climate elitism stand in the way of a solution
- ▶ Saving the climate implies leaving behind the market logic

4

We choose the climate



- 101 Since the discovery of the steam engine and the development of capitalism, fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas have been extracted and burned at a rapid pace. The race for ever more profits has led to astronomical quantities of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Even today, these emissions continue to increase.
- 102 These greenhouse gas emissions are rapidly changing our climate. In the summer of 2021, Belgium experienced unprecedented flooding that would not have occurred without climate change. Similarly, heat waves and droughts are becoming more frequent and more intense. Rising temperatures are melting the polar ice caps and glaciers, raising sea levels. Water and food shortages are increasing around the world as a result of climate change. There are already millions of climate refugees. If we do not take drastic measures now, humanity is heading for global catastrophes that will primarily affect the working class and the most vulnerable.
- 103 Any serious climate policy not only begins with an awareness of the seriousness and urgency of the situation but also of the magnitude of the efforts required. The United Nations has called the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report a “code red for humanity”. Even if we manage to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees, the consequences are irreversible. The next few years are crucial for taking steps to keep some control over the natural disasters that threaten us. There is no time to waste.

## **Green capitalism will not save the climate**

- 104 The solutions to fight global warming exist. We need massive investment in a transition that is sustainable for people and for nature. But capitalism is a barrier to the radical break this requires.

# 4

## We choose the climate

- 105 The large private monopolies determine where and when to invest and how to produce, based primarily on their profit-making potential, not on the survival of humanity. The big boss of oil giant Total, Mr. Patrick Pouyanné, puts it clearly: “What shareholders want to be sure of, first and foremost, is the sustainability of our dividends.” Their main concern is the sustainability of profit, not the sustainability of the planet.
- 106 For the fossil fuel giants, the oil, gas and coal empires with colossal private financial interests, the underground reserves represent trillions of euros in potential profit. No wonder they don't want to leave these resources in the ground. More and more capitalists have understood the opportunities offered by sustainable technologies, but only if they open the door to even more lucrative “green” markets and massive public subsidies. The entire climate policy of the traditional political families, including the green parties, is aimed at developing these new “green markets”. Trusting the market is the climate policy our governments have been following for years. The liberalization of the energy market, the emissions trading system (ETS) and the constant insistence on individual responsibility have all come to nothing. We have wasted precious years and, meanwhile, global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have kept on climbing.
- 107 There is no time to lose and yet the solution proposed remains the same. Whether it is the European Commission's Green Deal or national climate plans, our governments are pouring massive amounts of money into the coffers of the big private monopolies. Instead of investing in renewable energy or public transport themselves, they are allocating the resources available to the private sector so that it can gain market share and make profits in the “green economy.” Large companies are counting on this financial support to become the “European champions” of the ecological transition and to conquer new markets.

- 108 Not only is the “green capitalism” pathway costly, it is also anything but effective in the fight against global warming, because sustainable technologies are only applied when they generate a profit for shareholders. There is no central steering of the massive investments needed for insulation, public transport or sustainable agriculture. As long as oil and gas continue to create value added, the fundamental changes that would leave these fossil fuels in the ground are being postponed.
- 109 The costs of green capitalism are passed on to households, the self-employed and small businesses via green taxes, carbon taxes and price increases. In the absence of real social alternatives, green taxes and carbon taxes restrict the rights of the working class to mobility, housing and heating, as well as undermine support for an ambitious climate policy.

## **Climate scepticism and climate elitism stand in the way of a solution**

- 110 Only an ambitious plan will enable us to solve the climate problem. It will not come about without the social struggle of the working class. Two trends stand in the way of a social and effective solution: Climate scepticism and climate elitism.
- 111 Many people are trying to reduce their own impact on the climate by moving, eating and housing themselves sustainably. That’s a good thing, although these are choices that many people are not able to make. But, above all, this individual approach alone will not be enough to turn things around. After all, how can more people give up their cars when the public transport system is being dismantled bit by bit? How can households switch to renewable energy when they are being fleeced by Engie or others who sell



them cheap guarantees of origin<sup>8</sup> purchased abroad? A collective framework is needed for individual efforts to bear fruit.

**112** Climate elitism is the political expression of green capitalism. It seriously undermines the fight for the climate. “My colleagues are particularly opposed to this elitism,” says a worker at a large company. “The taxes, the petty regulations, that little accusing finger saying they should do better... For my colleagues, being for the climate is the same as being for more taxes. And so, for them, it’s a no.” Climate elitism is the political arm of green capitalism, which imposes its elitist and sanctimonious policies on the working class, while distributing millions to the big polluters. It literally throws the working class into the arms of the right and the extreme right who, even now, continue to deny the reality of climate change.

**113** Far-right groups all around the world are promoting climate scepticism. They benefit from the politics of the traditional parties, which are quick to pass on the costs of the climate crisis to the working class. They scare people by telling them that an ambitious climate policy will make them lose their jobs. They try to win over a part of the population with this strategy and to turn the social movement against the activists and young climate strikers. But the reality is that they’re protecting the big polluters while climate change is becoming more and more violent.

**114** Climate elitism and climate scepticism are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary. A part of the right wing recognizes that the climate is changing, but denies the seriousness of the situation by reducing the young climate strikers to bringers of ill omen or by insisting that the influence of human activity on the climate is debatable. They also flatly refuse to take appropriate measures so as to avoid jeopard-

<sup>8</sup> Guarantees of origin = a proof of origin of renewable energy, which can be traded to sell non-renewable energy as renewable.

izing the profits of big business. They combine this with a blind faith in big business greenspeak, mileage taxes and the low-emission zones promoted by climate elitism.

- 115 The only response to the climate crisis likely to stir enthusiasm and mobilize support for a liveable planet among the working class is a radically social climate policy. The transition to a sustainable society must, from the outset, go hand in hand with a policy of redistribution and social progress, public investments in affordable insulation and renewable energy, strong public services and research and development of climate-friendly technologies. This means investing heavily in sustainable jobs. This is the essence of the five elements of our Red Five plan. (See next chapter.)

## **Saving the climate implies leaving behind the market logic**

- 116 The climate marches that mobilized millions of young people around the world put the issue of climate and climate justice on the agenda. From India to Portugal, there have been mobilizations against the consequences of global warming. To truly meet the climate challenge, we must take a completely different path. And this path is not compatible with capitalism.
- 117 To prevent a climate catastrophe, society must limit the use of natural resources by distributing them better, in a more social and rational way. But capitalism demands limitless accumulation, which depletes natural resources and exploits labour. The solutions to the climate challenge do not lie within the boundaries of the market. On the contrary, it is the market that has brought us to where we are today.
- 118 Another way is possible: with binding regulations on greenhouse gas emissions; with ecological planning capable of investing rationally, for the whole of society, in energy,



transport, housing, land use, agriculture, water..., with a different, truly sustainable economic system outside the market framework.

- 119 Climate change can be a driver for profound social and democratic change. The transition, if it is social, can create jobs. Our entire energy infrastructure must be transformed. Society as a whole must take the lead in this area.
  
- 120 Today, under capitalism, we can already impose investments in energy savings, through the development of heating networks and the insulation of housing, as we propose in the Red Five plan. We can already invest in public transport, in urban planning and in the development of climate-neutral mobility. We need investment in solar and wind power as sustainable energy sources. To achieve this, a broad movement is needed that dares to question the omnipotence of the market. All of this will benefit the community through better housing and better public transport. Putting the supply of resources such as energy and water into public hands also makes them truly affordable. This way, we will also be able to improve the conditions of our sick agricultural and food sector.





# We choose the Red Five plan

## Theses:

- ▶ Our economic system was already sick before it was hit by Covid
- ▶ Massive state intervention is being used to save the big monopolies
- ▶ The Red Five plan is based on an alternative public investment policy

5

We choose the Red Five plan



## Our economic system was already sick before it was hit by Covid

- 121 When the Covid-19 crisis erupted, the global economy went on life support: once again, a massive injection of public money had to save it from the worst.
- 122 The patient was already ill before contracting Covid-19. We have explained this in the book *They Have Forgotten Us*<sup>9</sup>. The global economy never really recovered from the 2008 crisis. The global financial elite shifted the burden of the economic recession onto the toiling masses. The crisis of 2008 turned into a major hold-up on the purchasing power, working conditions, social security and public services of the working class. Job insecurity, “uberization” and low wages have become widespread throughout Europe.
- 123 For twelve years, the system was teetering on the verge of collapse, because all the reserves needed for the economy to bounce back were depleted. Workers’ real purchasing power has decreased and the government has been left with less money and more debt, and private investment has been conspicuous by its absence. The central banks of the capitalist world have injected trillions of new money into the system, but most of it has gone into the coffers of large corporations, helping to inflate the level of debt and speculation.
- 124 By mid-2019, another recession was looming. Demand was stagnating in the automotive industry, and the construction and steel industries were experiencing downward shocks. The overabundant supply in the aviation industry was continuing to rise. The trade war between the US and China had started to take its toll. Germany, the driving force of the European Union, was the first country to take a dive, with a decline in growth. There was not yet any sign of a

9 | Peter Mertens, *They have forgotten us: The working class, care and the looming crisis* (2021, 1804 Books, New York and LeftWord Books, New Delhi).



Covid-19 crisis, and all the economic indicators were already in the red.

- 125 In a context of persistent crisis, growing inequalities and heightened contradictions, the dissatisfaction among the working class and a growing mistrust of the dominant political class were giving rise to revolt all over the world. The protests may develop in different directions, depending on the forces leading them. In 2019 alone, nearly a quarter of the world's countries saw major social protest movements. They were often led by workers and young people, and stretched from Chile to Lebanon, Greece to Ecuador, France and Belgium. And this was even before the pandemic and the lockdowns.

## **Massive state intervention is being used to save the big monopolies**

- 126 Covid-19 has impacted the health of millions of people and has heightened all the contradictions of global capitalism. The pandemic has brought unprecedented successes for the richest and great misery for a great many others. The number of people living in extreme poverty has increased by 150 million, whilst the wealth of billionaires has increased by 3.9 trillion euro. Never, since we started measuring it, has global inequality increased as much as it has during the pandemic. "There must be something rotten in the very core of a social system which increases its wealth without diminishing its misery," wrote Karl Marx.
- 127 Governments in Europe and North America have taken a different approach to the one used during the 2008 crisis. At that time, they bailed out the private banks that were in danger of collapsing, and then passed the cost directly on to the people through austerity measures. In 2020, they intervened on a much more massive scale. The capitalist states have unhesitatingly taken on huge debt, temporarily abandoned the dogma of austerity and invested hundreds of billions in bailouts and direct aid.

5

We choose the Red Five plan

- 128 The economy was put on life support, primarily to save the system from collapse. The goal was primarily to save the biggest players from drowning. Monopolies, airlines, car manufacturers and other giants have benefited from deferred payments, guarantees and mountains of subsidies. Small businesses, the hotel and event sector, artists, self-employed workers and students received some support, but not enough to make up for their losses. Billions have fallen from the sky, but not everywhere nor for everyone.
- 129 The pandemic has been a boon for monopolies already well established in certain sectors. The tech giants have seen their profits go through the roof and are now among the world's most profitable businesses. Distance selling has sent the profits and stock market value of giant distribution companies skyrocketing. Many large companies in various sectors have also benefited from central banks' massive distribution of fresh money. This money has ended up in the hands of speculators, as it did after 2008. Some groups have used this money to take over and liquidate their competitors. Others have used it to buy their own shares and increase their stock value. After a big drop in early 2020, the stock markets recovered quickly and went on to reach higher levels than before the pandemic. Every crisis is a boon for the strongest. Until the next downturn hits.
- 130 Unlike the post-2008 period, Europe and the United States have launched large-scale public investment plans such as Next Generation EU or Build Back Better in the United States. This major shift can only be explained by the very particular circumstances that the capitalist world is experiencing.
- 131 Without massive investments, we would not be able to escape the quagmire of economic crisis, nor would we be able to meet the ecological challenges facing us. These investments carry risks that private capital is not willing to



bear. This is why the state intervenes, to guarantee the common interest of the capitalists. They need massive public subsidies and state guarantees to ensure sufficient profitability. The public money invested is designed to make investments attractive. This is particularly the case in two sectors of the future: green technology and digital technology - two areas in which China is very strong. For the United States and the European Union, it is above all about arming their own industrial “champions” to confront their Chinese rivals. Developing new infrastructure for green energy and digitalization is very costly. Private monopolies want the public authorities to bear these costs, so that they can then reap the profits on the rest.

**132** There is no control by the authorities over all these investments of public money that benefit the private sector. The government takes the risks and acts as the “insurer of last resort” so that multinationals can develop their activities almost risk-free. Investment, research and development are often public, while final production and profits are left to the private sector. This is what is happening with the production of Covid-19 vaccines by the big pharmaceutical companies.

**133** This “public service” to private capital and market mechanisms are at the heart of the European and American recovery strategy. Private energy conglomerates, tech giants and other multinationals are taking the lion’s share.

**134** Various social democratic and environmental parties are heralding better times, a new era of a “social”, “dynamic” and “green” capitalism. States do not, however, intervene in the interests of humanity and the planet on which humanity lives, breathes and works. Capitalist states intervene in the interest of private monopoly capital. This has been the case in past crises, and it is no different today.



## The Red Five plan is based on an alternative public investment policy

- 135 History teaches us that change is only possible when the working class mobilizes, organizes itself, becomes conscious of its position, shakes off fatalism and puts forward ambitious goals that can also bring on board other segments of society. We know that people only mobilise for demands they can identify with and for goals they believe they can achieve collectively. Our perspective is socialism, and it is in this spirit that we are mobilizing for an ambitious public investment plan that opposes the will of the large private monopolies.
- 136 We call our plan the “Red Five Plan” because it consists of five red priority areas and is based on an alternative public investment policy. We demand that public money be used for public investments, that these investments be under public control and that they be based on the big social and environmental needs of our time. The Red Five plan is based on collective ownership of strategic sectors, such as energy and transportation, as well as guaranteeing collective social interests, such as access to housing, health care and digital development.
- 137 We see the Red Five plan as a step towards the development of a counter-power. It responds to the concrete needs of the working class and goes beyond the beaten track of capitalist logic. Accordingly, the Red Five plan goes against the European rules that impose competition and liberalization. It is an anti-monopoly plan, which breaks with the infernal logic of pouring trillions of euros in public money into the private coffers of monopolist companies. This is why our Red Five plan is not just another public-private project, but a truly public-public project, on a national scale, in Belgium. And on a continental scale, in Europe.
- 138 The big, ambitious goals we need are not of the kind that let the private giants continue to cash in, but that serve



humanity and the planet. It is time to turn things round, it is time to take public initiative in the organization and production of energy, transportation, new digital technologies, housing, health and credit. Our Red Five plan rests on five key pillars:

- 139 ① The first is energy. We need to move from an economy based on fossil fuel to an economy based on renewable energy. But as long as we rely on the traditional energy supply of large gas and nuclear power plants, a new energy model will not be able to break through. With a public consortium, we can deploy a fossil-free model that is driven by a smart grid and storage capacity to deal with peaks and troughs. Given the amount of public money involved, it is better to entrust this mission to public companies.
- 140 ② The second is transport. Our Red Five plan seeks to invest in the expansion of an environment-friendly public transport and rail system, as well as additional rail infrastructure, trains, trams and environment-friendly buses, minibuses and shared cars. In so doing, we are able to democratize mobility and ensure that everyone can move around easily and sustainably, regardless of their income. This second pillar is also capable of creating tens of thousands of sustainable jobs. It can tap into the know-how, techniques and skills of the hard-hit automotive workers.
- 141 ③ The third pillar is the digital revolution. Society's digital transformation is a real industrial revolution, driven by artificial intelligence, the cloud and, above all, big data. Public companies, not only in our country but also a European digital consortium, could implement this change, guarantee access to the Internet for all, through free wifi, and protect data by keeping it in public hands. The best European specialists are working together to put this digital revolution at the service of common public interests. New technologies, which offer solutions for mobility, logistics, communication, health, environment and humane working



conditions, constitute a mobilizing project capable of attracting tens of thousands of young people.

- 142 ④ The fourth pillar is health care. In the broadest sense of the term: care for people. Much has been destroyed in terms of care for people on our continent over the last thirty years. We need to rebuild it differently, with a preventive health approach, free from any form of commodification. A transformation of this kind puts us in a position to prevent epidemics, with the help of prevention workers on the ground. Its development is local, the vision is global. It is also about lifting patents on the most essential medicines, so that production and access are guaranteed. And we also want a European public consortium for drug research and development.
- 143 ⑤ The fifth pillar is housing. Speculators and an overheated market are making housing virtually unaffordable for a growing number of people. At the same time, many homes need to be renovated and insulated to make them more comfortable and energy efficient. Our Red Five plan intends to create a large-scale, 100% sustainable, environment-friendly and affordable housing project. With modern social housing and an ambitious plan for insulation through a third-party payment system. So that housing is no longer a source of financial hardship, but a fundamental right.
- 144 The five pillars of our Red Five plan can create new economic activities with their own dynamics: companies specializing in renewable energy, insulation and public transport, a flourishing construction and renovation sector, niche companies for social assistance and care, etc. And it concerns activities that cannot be relocated.
- 145 These are purely public initiatives that will operate as far as possible beyond the bounds of the market, competition and the pursuit of profit. Democratic participation and control by the public, workers, unions and users is funda-



mental. This is the key to countering the hold of large private monopolies, to fighting corruption and to limiting privileges and arrangements between friends.

146 Achieving the Red Five plan nationally requires a democratic, social and humane unity federalism that combats all monopolistic and authoritarian tendencies. The outlook of such an ambitious plan must be continental, European in its scale. We need this kind of perspective, ambitious and passionate.

147 Of course, the Red Five plan will not solve the systemic problems inherent in capitalism. For this, socialism is needed. There is a link between the two. Our plan is a push in the direction of public productive enterprise in key sectors, it opens up prospects in the struggle for new jobs and gives rise to new opportunities for the struggle. The struggle for the five red pillars of the plan is capable of liberating, enthusing and mobilizing new forces, of creating a new democratic space, bringing a breath of fresh air and enabling many people to gather the experiences also needed to achieve socialism. For us, the Red Five plan is not an end point but a starting point in the movement for Socialism 2.0.







# We choose Socialism 2.0

## Theses:

- ▶ We build a counter-power against the omnipotence of the big monopolies
- ▶ Capitalism is sick and incurable
- ▶ We need Socialism 2.0 to root change in a sustainable way

## We build a counter-power against the omnipotence of the big monopolies

- 148 Never in history has such a small group had control over society and the direction it is taking. This dominant class extends its tentacles to the highest circles of the administration, justice and police, and even to the heart of the ministerial cabinets. Through the “revolving door” of politics, prominent individuals from business and lobbying circles are given crucial political positions before returning to the world of business.
- 149 “I have won the government, but not power,” socialist François Mitterrand said when he was elected president of the French Republic in 1981. Under capitalism, real power is in the hands of the big monopolies and their lobbies. The Greek reformist left, Syriza<sup>10</sup>, learned this the hard way when it was crushed by the omnipotence of the European financial and industrial elite in 2015.
- 150 We need to build a counter-power to be able to develop the prospect of another society, Socialism 2.0.
- 151 The working class is the cornerstone of this counter-power. In our society, wealth is created through the labour of the working class: workers are the true creators of wealth in society, as we also saw during the dark times of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was not the financial markets that made the world go round, it was not the stock market that made society work, it was not the caste of smooth talking managers and consultants that were on the front lines. It was the ordinary workers, men and women. Those who sell their labour create the wealth in our society. It is thanks to their work that well-being, knowledge and wealth grow

10 | Syriza won a major electoral victory in Greece in 2015. Thereafter, it formed a government that, under blackmail from the European Commission, the IMF and the European Central Bank, imposed a new austerity policy on the population.

every year. But the fruit of this labour returns less and less to those who created it, and disappears more and more into the coffers of the big monopolies. This economic contradiction is a fundamental contradiction of capitalism. Liberating the working class from this contradiction can only be achieved by the working class itself.

152 This process is far from automatic. It is important for people to build confidence in their own strength. And to know that they are essential to the functioning of society. That together with all the other workers they form a class in society: the working class. That they can emancipate themselves as a class. That by the strength of their numbers, they can change the course of history when they come together as a movement. And they can run society. If the working class rebuilds a collective consciousness and develops self-confidence, many things become possible. The balance of power that has forced workers to be on the defensive for forty years can be reversed.

153 Unity is a key element in this story. Anything that divides us weakens us. Everything that unites us strengthens us. This must be the motto of the working class, because it is confronted with a ruling class that wants to divide it and break its identity. It pits permanent, temporary, posted and unemployed workers against each other. It creates conflict between young and old, private sector workers and public service employees. It seeks to divide people on the basis of their origin, their skin colour, their religion or their sex. It spreads the virus of racism and nationalism. Our class is the working class. Our language is one of work and solidarity. Our strength lies in our unity.

154 The political world is getting more and more bogged down and is tailoring policies to suit the big private monopolies. The economic grip of Big Pharma, tech giants, private energy conglomerates and big banks is growing stronger with each passing crisis, as we have witnessed again recently. And yet they are demanding ever more political



power, to be able to shape policies to their wishes. It is a democracy for the big private monopolies, not for the working class, not for the youth, not for small traders or self-employed workers, not for the farmers nor for the different peoples of this planet.

155 The counter-power can only win if it looks to the future. There is no room for nostalgia, for the “in the past it was better” mindset. There is a world to be won and it lies in the future. Anyone who wants to win the future must be able to rally enthusiasm among young people, to set them in motion. Young people are hard hit by capitalism and the omnipotence of monopolies. When the virus spread across the planet, young people were forgotten, ignored or simply repressed. Stay home and obey, these were their instructions. At the same time, Amazon and Bol.com were raking in huge profits, exploiting hundreds of thousands of young people, delivery people, and restockers, working for mini wages and with next to no protection. The younger generation will also be the generation that suffers the most from the consequences of global warming. It is also held back when it comes to democracy, with the young generation made invisible, inaudible, and sidelined.

156 Many young workers, pupils and students do, of course, long for a radical change in society. Young people question all current certainties, because the present offers no future. To divert this potential revolt, radical right-wing youth movements, religious fundamentalists and conspiracy theorists try to lure young people into their backward and retrograde societal projects.

157 It is up to the emancipating counter-power to rally the energy, creativity and hope of our youth for a positive and exciting cause: the construction of another society, a socialist society, based on solidarity and democracy. The world aspires to such a society. In the United States of America, in the heart of capitalism, there are currently as many young people who believe in a socialist future as in a

capitalist future. The extremely fast means of communication, the internationalization of workplaces (especially in low-wage sectors) and the diversity of the population in large urban centres have allowed some of the younger generation to grow up in a more international environment than previous ones. This can help young people to internationalize the whole counter-power. International solidarity is a solidarity of youth. We've seen it in movements against sexism and racism, in global climate strikes demanding a social and just climate transition, in minimum wage movements at McDonald's, and in the fight against precarious work at Amazon and Deliveroo.

- 158 We want to build a counter-power in which the working class is the driver. It is essential for the working class to reach out to young people and give them a key role in the process of change. But there are still many other segments of society in today's capitalism that are stifled by the economic and political omnipotence of the large private monopolies. Small traders and self-employed workers are drowning because of policies tailored to suit monopolies. This is also the case for creators, artists and cultural workers. A working class that wants to build a counter-power reaches out to the self-employed middle class. It reaches out to farmers, who are suffocated by the omnipotence of agricultural monopolies. As well as all the other sections of the population that have a world to gain, such as students and intellectuals. A counter-power is built by establishing a progressive convergence with all these sections of society, to counter the hegemony of the big monopolies.

## **Capitalism is sick and incurable**

- 159 When the engine of a system is structurally broken, a lasting solution can only be found in a change of system. You can, of course, make repairs here and there, add extra fuel or replace some parts. But we know that the system will run out of steam again if capital continues to accumulate in the hands of a few, and we know that this will lead to new



crises, with enormous consequences for people and the planet.

- 160 Under capitalism, private interests always control capital and determine where and how much is invested. To protect these large and powerful private interests, the state plays a central role: oiling the wheels of the profit machine and ensuring the order and authority of the profit system. It is delusional to think that capitalism can be underpinned by the needs of the people or the sustainability of the planet. On the contrary, the laws of economics mean that it is guided by blind competition and unbridled capital accumulation.
- 161 There is an incurable disease in this system: the falling rate of profit. The logic of competition forces the owners of capital to replace manual labour with machines as much as possible – mainly robots and artificial intelligence today. And yet, the only source of new value is living labour. The system then tries to compensate for the loss of income by prolonging the working day through ultra-flexibility, or by reducing wages or taking refuge in the fast profits of the financial world and speculation. These remedies do not solve the problem. On the contrary, they carry within them the seeds of new crises.
- 162 In the short term, the large capitalist groups can, of course, be persuaded to invest in the sectors of the future by the attractive subsidies of investment plans. But that won't solve much. Most traditional sectors are likely to continue to suffer from the effects of the Covid-19 crisis, starting from a position that was already worrisome in 2019. Meanwhile, private corporate debt is at record levels in almost all countries. If states decide to end their emergency aid, companies risk bankruptcy or major restructuring. And sooner or later, governments will return to austerity, to alleviate public debt.

163 Are we heading for a short recovery before a new, deeper crisis? Or a brief recovery before long stagnation? Or a big economic crash in the short term? It can go in different directions. It is clear that this system is fatally ill, that it offers no future, neither for those who produce wealth nor for the planet and nature.

164 The words of the Internationale, which is now proudly 150 years old, ring out: "We'll change henceforth the old tradition." Our society cannot continue to be based on competition, capital accumulation and cold selfishness. This dogma is well past its expiry date. The time for socialism has come.

## **We need Socialism 2.0 to root change in a sustainable way**

165 Progress does not come on its own. Progress must be won, inch by inch. The working class has had to win every crumb, every loaf of bread, every rose through struggle. And each step forward is important, because it gives more oxygen to the working class, more space to organize better, with more strength, against the powers that be, and to weave a progressive convergence with all the anti-monopolist forces.

166 We are constantly looking for actions that can awaken as many people as possible, mobilize them, inspire them and set them in motion. Because we know that understanding and awareness grow through struggle and perspective. And that at these moments, history can accelerate and many people are able to overcome old prejudices. In the struggle, unity grows. This is the challenge of our Red Five plan.

167 We also know that, under capitalism, every reform, every step forward is only temporary and will be subjected to constant pressure. Every crumb, every loaf of bread and every rose must be defended, again and again. This struggle is played out on different terrains: that of social progress, democratic rights, climate, international solidarity,





peace, anti-fascism, anti-racism and gender equality. In all of these areas, emancipation movements run up against the limits set by the system. The stronger the will of the different movements to realize their dreams of social progress and justice, the more they come up against these limits of the capitalist system. If we want to achieve deep and sustainable social and democratic development in all these areas, socialism is indispensable. To achieve socialism, the counter-power will have to become the power, which implies a complete upending of the current situation. Socialism is needed to root change in a sustainable way, to make the problems of people and the environment the priority, to put those who create wealth in control of society.

**168** At our 2015 Solidarity Congress, we laid out our vision for Socialism 2.0. Socialism is: a society that leads to emancipation, without exploitation of man by man. Socialism implies the abolition of wars, the end of the destruction of our environment and natural resources, the end of oppression. Socialism is: putting the essential pillars of society back in the hands of the community and eradicating poverty and unemployment. Socialism is: making the planet's natural wealth and human knowledge a common good. It means planning production according to the needs of the population and the limited capacities of the planet. It means using technology for the well-being of workers, not for their exploitation. Socialism is: giving people the right to decide their own fate. It is organizing the real participation of workers in the essential matters of the organization of society, at all levels: in the neighbourhood, in the workplace, in the region and in the country. It is the freedom to think, to write, to express oneself, to create, to be visible. Socialism is: guaranteeing material well-being and access to education and culture for all. It is a society that banishes racism, sexism and all forms of discrimination. Socialism is: providing a happy life for children and a dignified life for the elderly.

**169** Socialism 2.0 is our alternative for a world where people come first, not profit, a world that is tailored to people.





Unity  
Congress  
2021

# Part II

# BACKBONE

Eight theses on  
the party of  
the working class,  
the party of the youth,  
the party's organization  
and the party's  
communication

.170 The Unity Congress is situated within the framework of the orientations that we developed at the 2008 Renewal Congress: a party of principles, a flexible party, a party of the working class. Principles and flexibility at the same time: a relationship that has been worked on. “We don’t just want to be right, we want to convince,” say the texts of the Renewal Congress. The party is no longer only a cadre party, but has also become a mass party, with a dual membership approach. There is the organized core in the grassroots groups and then the wider circle of consultative members. The ageing core of the party has expanded and renewed itself. In the period following the Renewal Congress, new provincial leaderships, new departments and new youth organizations were built. Steps were also taken to professionalize our communication, the administration of our membership and our organization.

171 This approach has been successful.

	members	grassroots groups	election results <sup>11</sup>	members of parliament <sup>12</sup>	local councilors <sup>13</sup>
2003	800	80	20,825	-	5
2008	2,800	120	56,157	-	15
2015	8,500	280	271,276	8	52
2021	24,000	400	584,621	43	169

172 In the meantime, new challenges are arising. A revolutionary party that moves, evolves and grows ends up in the crosshairs of the system. This is a constant in the history of the workers’ movement. In the battle for hearts and minds, communist parties are fired at from all directions. We are hit with slander campaigns, half-truths, outright lies,

11 | National results PTB–PVDA in the 2003, 2007, 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections.

12 | In 2019: European Parliament: 1; House of Representatives: 12; Senate: 5; Flemish Parliament: 4; Walloon Parliament: 10; Brussels Capital Parliament: 11; Parliament of the French Community: 13.

13 | In 2018: 43 members in 21 municipal and district councils in Flanders, 36 members in 7 municipal councils in Brussels, and 78 members in 16 municipal councils in Wallonia. In addition: 12 provincial council members.

media boycotts and threats to cut off our access to social media.

173 Parties such as ours are expected to fit into the system, like all the others. A carrot is dangled, small deals are sought, benefits are promised here and access to VIP lounges there. This is how the Belgian Workingmen's Party (POB), the ancestor of the Socialist Party (PS), was brought into line: it went from being an autonomous workers' party with socialist leanings to being a party that has been taking part, for a century, in the management of capitalism, colonialism and imperialism. If the carrot method doesn't work, then there is the stick. They do everything possible to sully the party's reputation. They try to isolate it from the working class, to asphyxiate it, like a fish out of water. More often than not, the two tactics are used together, the carrot and the stick. That is precisely what we're seeing today. On the one hand, the pressure is on for our party to march in step and to vote with the others for special powers and pandemic laws, for war resolutions and NATO adventures, and for the condemnation of all those who resist capitalist domination. They want the party to take part in government without regard for its principles and become a new Syriza. And if that doesn't work, they use smear tactics against the party.

174 A strong Marxist backbone is needed to stay upright. We do have that, and we can be proud of it. Those who work for the emancipation and liberation of labour have to sail against the tide. It's something one has to learn and dare to do. Every navigator knows: to sail upwind you have to be able to tack back and forth without losing your way. In other words: tactics should never be given precedence over the politics. They always go hand in hand, politics and tactics, but the politics is the key element.



## Four main orientations for the coming years

- 175 Running a party with 400 grassroots groups and 24,000 members is different from running a small party. For the emancipation and liberation of labour, it is vital that the PTB remain true to its principles, with a solid Marxist backbone, as we affirmed at the Renewal Congress, and that we also truly become the party of the working class.
- 176 To meet this challenge, during the second part of the Unity Congress, we define four main orientations for the years ahead: to become the party of the working class, to become the party of youth, to be an organized party, to be a party that communicates. That may not say much, as it stands, but to make it clearer, we have formulated two clear theses for each theme, enabling everyone in the party, from top to bottom, to get to work.
- 177 The party of the working class:
- ▶ We want workers to play a central role in the party, from top to bottom.
  - ▶ We want to focus our work on building bastions of struggle in industry.
- The party of the youth:
- ▶ We consciously want to give young people a place in the party, from top to bottom.
  - ▶ We want, with the help of the whole party, to develop the three youth organizations.
- An organized party:
- ▶ We want to double the number of organized members.
  - ▶ We want to organize the group members in a sustainable way.
- A party that communicates:
- ▶ We want awareness raising to be the focus of our communication.
  - ▶ We want to be at the forefront of digital and social media.

178 These are eight clear theses around which we can organize the discussion within the party as a whole. They are theses that everyone can understand. Everyone can contribute to examining what this means for their grassroots group or activities.

# The party of the working class

## Theses:

- ▶ We want workers to take a central place in the party
- ▶ We want to focus our work on building bastions of struggle in industry



## From a party of labour to a party of workers

- 179 As a party, we have a class identity. The party wants to be the representative of the working class<sup>14</sup> and the motor driving the broad emancipation movement for Socialism 2.0. The PTB now plays a key role in mobilizing, organizing and raising the awareness of our country's working class. No one can ignore it.
- 180 We want to make the party a place where the working class feels at home. We want workers to take a central place in the party at all levels. We are talking, in particular, about people in blue collar work<sup>15</sup> as they represent 60% of the working class but are seriously underrepresented in the party leadership. These workers are particularly present in large production chains and key sectors, but also in sectors such as trade and commerce, cleaning, domestic services, logistics, etc. They are the first victims of unemployment and their healthy life expectancy is much lower than that of the rest of the class.
- 181 We are the party of the working class, but we do not succeed sufficiently in giving these workers a central place. There are far too few men and women in blue collar jobs, in the party leadership, for example. And the party is, moreover, still all too often dominated by a certain "intellectuals' culture". Similarly, we all too often tread water when it comes to building bastions of struggle in the world of work or developing the social struggle. We are also all too often

14 | By working class we mean here - broadly speaking - the whole of the population that works for a wage. In the texts of the Solidarity Congress we published a more precise "social structure of Belgian society". (Solidarity Congress 2015, pp. 223-238.)

15 | Any definition or determination is somehow arbitrary. But it concerns essentially the layer of wage earners within the working class who do not have a higher education degree. In this definition, it does therefore not only concern wage earners with the "status" of workers, but also wage earners with the status of employees, or civil servants, who do not have a higher education diploma.



reluctant to assert our class profile, when we should be proud of it.

- 182 The challenge of becoming the party of the working class is not new. The party was born from the student movement of May 68. It was founded mainly by young revolutionary intellectuals who devoted all their energy to building a new communist party in our country. While many other organizations of that time disappeared, the PTB managed to stand firm, and that makes it unique in Europe. We owe this to the solid foundation laid by the party's pioneers. But our student origins continue to weigh heavily on the party. At the 2008 Renewal Congress, we asked ourselves: "How do we ensure that we are not just the party of labour but that we also become the party of working men and women?" Progress has been made and the party knows how to rally and mobilize tens of thousands of workers. But the issue remains unresolved up to this day.
- 183 What factors give a revolutionary party a working class character? We are inspired by the experience and work of Álvaro Cunhal, the historic leader of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP). Cunhal was in prison under the Salazar dictatorship and led the PCP following the Carnation Revolution that freed Portugal from fascism in 1974. In the book *O Partido com Paredes de Vidro*<sup>16</sup> (the party with glass walls), Cunhal describes his experiences. For him, there are six essential points that give the party a working class character:
- 184 a the party's world view: Marxism;  
b the party's goal: socialism;  
c the party's social composition: ensuring that workers are in the majority at all levels;  
d the party's organizational structure: prioritizing grass-roots groups from the world of work;

16 | Álvaro Cunhal, *O Partido com Paredes de Vidro*, Lisbon: Edições Avante!, 1985.

- e the party's public actions: prioritizing the organization and the struggle of the working class;
- c spokespersons and party identity: working class spokespersons and the party's class profile.

185 Of course, the party's world view (Marxism) and the party's goal (socialism) are two essential pillars of our party's class character. Without the emancipatory ideology of Marxism and without the liberating objective of socialism, there can be no working class character. But some comrades think that it is enough to have these two elements. This is wrong, as our own history has taught us. The social composition of the party must also be working class, at all levels. Priority has to be given to action in the world of work; priority has to be given to large production chains and key sectors; the identity of the party has to be working class. The six elements form a whole, interact with each other and reinforce each other.

## A central place for workers in the entire party

186 Too few of our cadres are people in blue collar jobs. Far too few. We see it at all levels. The vast majority of our cadres, salaried staff, etc., are higher education graduates. Blue collar workers are the exception. Of course, as a party we need many intellectuals, but the party must be a fusion between workers and intellectuals. In this fusion, the workers' culture and style must become dominant in the party. And not the other way around.

## Changing the social composition of the leadership

187 It is crucial for the future of the party that we train and secure more workers as cadres. And that we elect the best of them to the leadership of the party. Starting with the National Council and the Provincial Councils. We set a quota for this: at least one in five members of the National Council and Provincial Councils must be blue collar workers.

188 We need worker cadres to lead and inspire the whole working class. We need their connections to the class. We need their class situation and class position<sup>17</sup>, their class pride, their combativeness, their revolt and their approach to politics and tactics in the workplace, in the union and in the class struggle. Without worker cadres, we will not be able to fight racist and nationalist ideas and push back the far right. We also need collectivism, solidarity, discipline and organizational skills. These are strengths that we need much more at all levels of the party, starting with the National Council, but also in the Provincial Councils and provinces, in the departmental leadership teams and departments.

189 “When I teach at the school for worker cadres, the participants tell me that it reinforces their confidence that they too can become cadres,” says a woman worker cadre. “‘If you can do it, then so can I’, the comrades tell me.” That’s true.

190 “Without the intervention of the only blue collar cadre in our provincial day-to-day leadership team, we would not have taken the struggle against the elitist mileage tax seriously. He has connections to the workers and it was his class position that made us react. The rest of the leadership thought mainly in terms of the more intellectual segments of the working class,” explains a comrade in the Brussels party leadership.

191 Participating in the leadership bodies of the party also means that we want to give worker cadres the opportunity to become party officials, part-time or full-time. Workers must feel at home in our structures. Our party’s workings

17 | There is a difference between class origin, class position and class viewpoint:  
– Class origin: from which class one comes, in which family and environment one grows up in.  
– Class position (or “material position”): objective: occupation, what one does, ones objective place in class society.  
– Class viewpoint: subjective: what standpoint one takes, what position one takes in the class struggle.

and culture must be adjusted to the class, and not the other way around.

## Fighting the 101 mechanisms

- 192 Whoever comes from a working class family grows up in a class-based society that discriminates against, undervalues and shows contempt for workers and their children. “In this society, you don’t learn to be a cadre, you are taught to be subservient,” says a woman worker cadre. “From elementary school on, you are clearly made to feel that you are a lower class kid, a loser, that you better go to work as soon as possible. For us, there is no freedom of choice.” “It’s a class society and it’s something you feel physically,” says another worker cadre. “We’re taught to work and keep our mouths shut, to the point where we internalize that and end up feeling inferior ourselves.” The party cannot be a true party of the working class if it does not see these types of discrimination, if it does not point them out and actively fight them.
- 193 There are a hundred and one mechanisms by which workers are underrepresented in the party leadership and intellectuals are overrepresented. These mechanisms need to be tackled decisively, at all levels, throughout the party. “I am now a cadre of the Workers’ Party, but not yet of a party of the workers,” says a worker cadre.
- 194 First, there are the mechanisms related to the workings of the party. There is a persistent tendency for intellectuals to form a closed inner circle. This is expressed in many small everyday things. The hiring of new employees, the overvaluation of academic qualifications, the presentation of a New Year’s reception or a meeting, the groups of friends (parties, vacations...) that are formed, the place of the workers on the poster of ManiFiesta, the representation of the party at an activity and many other things.
- 195 Sometimes we also see a certain elitist attitude, an attitude that systematically underestimates and underutilizes

workers' qualities and potential. "The qualities of intellectuals are more easily recognized than those of workers. Our blue collar unionists, however, do a lot of politics and strategizing in the factory and in the union, to unify the class and lead it. Without these specific qualities, it is impossible to build a bastion of resistance in the factory. Our workers have a lot of interesting and important things to say for the party, even if they write much shorter notes than the intellectuals."

- 196 Another comrade adds: "On the one hand, there is a tendency to be harder on workers than intellectuals. They are judged on the basis of intellectual criteria, such as how good their written notes are, for example. We don't judge them on their own strengths, on what they do and what they bring. On the other hand, worker comrades are not asked to do certain tasks and are not taught to do them, as it's easier to leave it to the intellectuals, who would be 'directly operational'. This is an elitist attitude among intellectuals towards the workers."
- 197 There is also a certain "workerism". And this is just as harmful. Workerism flatters the workers, telling them what they want to hear. Its approach toward the workers is superficial, being afraid of discussion and struggle. It refuses to train workers to become communists: "When a worker has ideological problems, excuses are easily accepted. One does not intervene and avoids the discussion which could help the comrade progress. This is a double standard. Intellectuals are treated differently than workers." Workerism means not offering any criticism. But reasoning such as "what this comrade is doing is already fantastic" does not help anyone. A young worker comrade testifies how harmful workerism is: "When I joined the party, I sensed the workerism of some of the intellectuals in the party and that didn't help me. I remember a few times when I was really getting smart with some intellectual comrades because I was a worker. But it didn't make me progress in any way, it just made me big headed."

198 The elitist attitude towards workers and “workerism” are two sides of the same coin. They both express the inability or lack of ambition to let the workers progress within the party. Some cadres back away from efforts to train worker cadres, forgetting all the efforts that they received themselves from the party in training them to become cadres.

## The Jan Cap School and other measures

199 The party is crucial for training, transformation, instruction and coaching. “In capitalism, they don’t teach you to be a cadre. You learn to keep your mouth shut. It was in the party that I learned how to become a cadre,” says a worker cadre. “Everything I learned, I learned in the party: keeping a diary, using a computer, drafting an agenda, running a meeting, identifying different positions in a discussion, summarizing and writing up minutes on them, writing a press release, distinguishing what is left or right in the class struggle, speaking at a union congress, and many other things.”

200 The party is a school for all its members, in many aspects of life. The party is also the home of the best forces of the working class, who recognize themselves in the party and help to shape it according to their class. In the book *Gaby Colebunders: Het verzet van een vakbondsman* (Gaby Colebunders: The resistance of a trade unionist), our comrade Gaby Colebunders tells his story. Each of our worker cadres has a unique background. All of these backgrounds are an integral part of the party’s identity. They can serve as an inspiration for the training of worker cadres.

201 We founded the Jan Cap School, a school for worker cadres, which we named after the great worker and trade union leader of the Boel shipyards in Temse (East Flanders). The Jan Cap School is there to stimulate progress. “I got to know other workers in training. It made me feel more comfortable. This gives you confidence. It strengthened my ideological commitment,” says a worker cadre. “I learned to analyze things better and to distinguish between strategy and tac-

tics. It has given me a greater sense of self-confidence and an awareness that I can improve my sense of responsibility. Since attending the school, I can handle criticism and self-criticism better. In this learning process, coaching was very important,” reports another worker cadre.

- 202 We want to continue to expand and develop the Jan Cap School. We want the school to be relevant to the reality and practice of the participants. We want mobilization for the school to be at the centre of all provincial planning and for Provincial Council members to take the coaching seriously. The Jan Cap School is our central training school. It has to become the culmination of a chain of training: identifying the vanguard workers, prioritising the younger ones, a training course for commitment and Marx Workshops for workers, training the chairs of workers' groups, cadre training courses with five to ten workers in the provinces and, finally, the national Jan Cap School. That's where we want to get to. A complete chain that includes political and ideological training as well as skills development (computer skills, keeping a diary, writing, summarizing...).

## Intellectual cadres at the service of the working class

- 7
- 203 The social composition of the party's structures obliges us to make deliberate efforts to ensure that our cadres and salaried staff are effectively linked to the working class and in particular to blue collar workers. First, this social composition has to change. Whether it's new party officials or the staff working for the party apparatus, its departments or secretariat, we want to make sure that workers form the core. Because we need them.
- 204 Around this core, we want to gather the whole class and establish a progressive convergence with other layers of society against the absolute power of the big private monopolies. Establishing this convergence with young people and students, with small traders and self-employed



workers, with farmers, cultural workers and intellectuals, requires many capacities. It is up to the working class to lead this process. But we also, of course, need intellectual members and cadres to participate in the overall social struggle; to master and apply knowledge and science in the service of the emancipation movement; to help us understand and try to meet the overall strategic challenges and in the struggle for Socialism 2.0. We need high-level studies, revelations about all areas of life, and professional specializations in many fields.

- 205 For communist intellectuals, it is crucial that they be able to adapt to the working class character of the party and learn to see the world through the struggles, difficulties, aspirations and emotions of the working class.
- 206 We want all the cadres – worker cadres and intellectual cadres – to establish good relations with the vanguard workers and trade unionists in and around the party. To learn from them but also to help them progress. Every member of the Party Bureau, every member of the National Council and every member of the Provincial Councils should do this. One cannot be a communist cadre without personal ties to the working class. And it is the responsibility of each cadre to take this challenge in hand. In the service of the working class and socialism is the motto for all of us.

## Prioritizing the construction of bastions of struggle

- 207 The increase of our impact on the class struggle is undeniable, to the despair of employers' organizations like the FEB<sup>18</sup> or the UWE<sup>19</sup>. The party has a large number of determined workers and excellent union delegates. In politics, we take the ball and run with it. We offer political ammuni-

18 | FEB = Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique, the Belgian employers' association.

19 | UWE = Union wallonne des Entreprises, the Walloon employers' association

tion and answers. Broad layers of the working class recognize us as an important political force and we have class-based spokespersons. These are undeniable advances. However, the number of organized members in our company sections has only increased slightly since 2015. This is too modest an improvement, especially when compared to the growth of the rest of the party in the same period.

208 “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?”, we stated at our Solidarity Congress (2015). Why did we say that? Because they are the economic heart of the capitalist system, where wealth is produced. And because “history teaches us that it is often in the 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 often a tradition of struggle.”

209 These reasons are truer than ever. We need to improve on our growth, it’s a strategic issue. In some of the larger companies where we have been active for years, we are moving backwards. In other places, however, we are managing to make progress or to successfully launch a new section.

209 This building work is not easy, which makes it all the more crucial. If we only think in the short term, we are quick to give up the fight. We must understand that we need bastions of resistance and social struggle. The list of obstacles is long: pressure at work, job insecurity, staff turnover, employer repression, geographical dispersion of workers, the difficulties of union work, etc. These are all specific problems in building company sections. And yet it can be done, with ups and downs, just as the labour movement has pushed for every inch of progress with ups and downs.

Instead of lamenting where it doesn't work, or doesn't work well, we need to accelerate the spread of our best experiences. We need workers and union delegates to talk about how they manage it in their companies; let's learn from the companies and sectors where we are making progress.

## The essential role of leadership

- 211 “The provincial party president must be the driving force behind the expansion of bastions of resistance in large production chains and key sectors. This is not something that can be left to the person in charge of the world of work. The entire provincial leadership team and the wider group of militants must participate,” said a provincial president. It's not just a matter of “quantity” or “how much more” attention has to be given. It is also, and above all, a question of “quality” and “better attention”. Developing our work in the big production chains and key sectors is a task requiring the best of our forces and, as Álvaro Cunhal says, it must be central to our work as a party. The experiences gathered in these sectors should be at the top of the agenda, to spread the best results. We want to target production workers and workers in key areas first, to help them progress and to bring the most seasoned and promising ones into the provincial leadership teams.

## A clear plan

- 212 We need national and provincial implementation plans. Plans that are well defined, not a catalogue of vague intentions, but clear objectives, breakthroughs that we want to achieve. Just as we have designated priority cities and towns for the elections, we also want to set national and provincial priorities in the world of work. This is a task for all our party structures. We measure our progress by the concrete realization of these plans. It is not acceptable that we set goals for company sections and then put them on ice for years and prioritize the expansion of communal sections instead. We must continually analyze and spread good results. We put



action at the centre. Action is the criterion for distinguishing between those who talk about bastions of resistance and social struggle and those who actually build them.

## The training of workers as party group chairs

- 213 Powerful bastions of resistance cannot be built without party group chairs who come directly from these key sectors. To start up company sections, we often call on (intellectual) militants from outside the company. The goal cannot be for them to establish themselves as group chairs in the long term. A company section that is run for years by an outsider cannot develop in a healthy way. Our goal is to train a chair from the company itself for each grassroots party group involved. The longer we fall behind on this, the bigger the problem becomes, because the more ingrained a way of work becomes, the harder it is to change.
- 214 But we cannot train and coach the chairs of our bastions if we're not familiar with their reality. A good worker group chair is most often also a union activist. Such a person is under multiple pressures: that of the employer and his thirst for profit; that of the union work and of the co-workers who expect a lot from their union delegate; that of the family; to which is added the task of chairing the grassroots group. Without a good understanding of the situation, it is impossible to properly accompany this comrade or to define the path to become a group chair.

## The struggle as a driving force

- 215 A worker cadre and former union representative developed a bastion of struggle in his company. He says, "It started with a struggle that lasted three weeks. The provincial party leadership helped us develop a vision that made victory possible. They offered us concrete help. We recruited dozens of consultative members and laid the foundation for a fully-fledged grassroots group." Struggle plays a key

role in the development of strongholds. All too often, we leave this to a few “specialists”, when the class struggle should be at the centre of the whole life of the party. The struggle is our DNA. We cannot consider it as something that “disrupts the normal schedule”. Putting the social struggle at the centre is not just about organizing a solidarity visit, putting a few photos and posts on social media, or writing an opinion piece in the press. Doing all this is of course important. But our ambition is to take the struggle in hand and not to “accompany” it as a simple spectator. This means continually anticipating the tactics of employers and the government. In companies, we are constantly keeping our finger on the pulse. We analyze the situation and plan the fight. This is a fundamental attitude: which class to defeat? It is with this attitude that we organize the struggle.

## Supporting combative trade unionism

- 216 Without unions, big changes or major struggles are not possible. Strengthening the unions and developing combative unionism are essential to any progress.
- 217 Some comrades underestimate the importance of union work. “I am involved in building sections in the world of work and in finding new group chairs. As to the unions, we’ll see about them later. Because they don’t do this or that,” says a comrade. Our impatience then seeks a justification for the lack of union work. This approach is wrong. It encourages anti-unionism and neglects the support of combative union activists.
- 218 Of course, the opposite reasoning also exists: that of no longer daring to take a critical view and to automatically embrace any union position. This is also wrong. Trade unionists who want to improve the situation of the working class appreciate our critical look at the way the struggle is being waged. When we offer our vision, we always do so

with respect for union democracy and we oppose adventures that divide workers.

- 219 The labour movement in our country was built with its ups and downs, during long years of combative trade unionism. We want to play our part in strongly supporting this combative unionism. We defend a unionism that does not allow itself to be locked into the laws of the market and that believes in the mobilizing power of workers. It is a unionism that is completely opposed to what the right-wing parties defend. We fight against the attempts to lock the unions into the straitjacket of competitiveness, resignation and class conciliation.
- 220 We want to systematize and exchange the best trade union experiences, in the country and abroad. This can be done through physical meetings or webinars. Social history is also an inspiration for this. Many of the principles of combative unionism are summarized in the book *Jan Cap: In naam van mijn klasse* (Jan Cap: In the Name of My Class). It is about the life of the labour leader and trade unionist Jan Cap, who worked from the 1950s to the 1980s at the Boel shipyards in Temse. The book is a unique foundation for a school of combative unionism.

## Leading broad political action

- 221 Powerful strongholds carry out broad political action. Our section at Volvo Trucks mobilizes every year for International Women's Day on 8 March; other sections mobilize for anti-fascism day on 8 May in Breendonk or for the commemoration of the communist leader and trade unionist Julien Lahaut on 18 August in Seraing. Many of our company groups mobilized their members and supporters for the SolidariTeams providing practical help for the flood victims in the summer of 2021 and have also participated in our annual "Winter of Solidarity" campaign. This is how they put into practice the slogan "working class solidarity with the working class". Getting involved in election cam-

paigns, mobilizing for class unity and against racism, leading climate actions, selling Easter eggs in solidarity with Cuba every year: all these are good examples of broad political action.

- 222 We cannot develop bastions of social struggle if we limit the activity of our company sections to purely “economic” struggles like wages, pensions or working conditions. Nor do you build a stronghold by keeping economic struggles within narrow limits. Each struggle is a lever for a broad debate on society in which many other groups (youth, artists, intellectuals...) can be involved. This also applies to political discussions. There is a permanent political struggle for hegemony in the labour movement. Traditionally, social democrats have had a strong hold on labour, with the goal of keeping the working class within the system. This was also the role of Christian democracy, but it has since seen a strong decline. In the meantime, Vlaams Belang is gaining ground in workplaces in the north of the country, and this is a worry for all of us.

## Uniting the class in all its diversity

- 223 We live and work in a class-based society in which contradictory opinions circulate about almost everything, except for class contradictions themselves. The contradictions between the different socio-economic classes in our society are the least discussed contradictions, preventing the emergence of any idea or feeling of class identity and class pride. It is crucial that the working class reclaim its own identity and move from being a “class in itself” to being a “class for itself”.
- 224 The working class of today is very diverse. In the large production chains and key sectors, we find employees of different origins, there are people of different genders, with different sexual orientations, with different religions and other convictions, etc. There are the staff of the “parent company” but also those of subcontractors; there are

open-ended contracts but also fixed-term contracts; there are temporary workers, freelancers, fake freelancers, the self-employed and false self-employed, etc. It is in the interest of the ruling class to emphasize the differences and also to establish different categories of wages and status, so that all these different groups do not identify with one and the same working class. It is the old “divide and rule” strategy.

- 225 In the social history of class-based societies, uniting the dominated class has always been a crucial point. This is still the case today. We strive to unify the working class, in all its diversity. We are not all the same. There are differences between people. This does not change the fact that our strength lies in collective action, in the connection with all the others who sell their labour or their labour power, that our strength lies in the unity of the working class. Together we are stronger. And whenever there is a battle that unites the entire class, it has an impact. Just think of the struggle for pensions or the struggle for wages.
- 226 Unity does not fall from the sky. We need to work on it. It is impossible to build bastions of struggle without consciously working towards this unity. We work for unity with positive demands that unite the whole class and we work day after day for concrete unity in the workplace. But we must also consciously oppose the specific forms of oppression and discrimination that exist against certain parts of the working class: including racism, sexism and other types of discrimination. We address these issues on a class basis, integrating them into the broader working class struggle for emancipation.
- 227 For example, it is delusional to think that issues such as racism can be ignored. Racism is used to justify discrimination against a segment of the class. It is used as a justification for giving fewer rights to one part of the class. These types of discrimination against a specific layer of the class and racist ideology divide and weaken the whole class.



## The importance of our class profile

- 228 “Without workers, there is no wealth.” This is the slogan we launched about ten years ago on May Day. It is the working class that creates wealth, and the Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated this once again. It was ordinary workers who kept things going, not shareholders, speculators or the caste of smooth talkers. Yet our society does everything to make the working class invisible. We don’t talk about it or we deny its existence. And when it appears, it is often as a suffering and miserable class, rather than as a wealth-producing class, as a class essential to the functioning of society, as a proud vanguard class.
- 229 We want to highlight the working class. Not as superheroes, but as real people. Workers who make society work, who are strong when united and weak when divided. We have consciously revived the term “working class” as the unity of all those who sell their labour power. We want to teach the history of those who created the wealth of our country, those of the Borinage, those of Verviers, those of Ghent, those of Antwerp, those of Brussels, how they built the prestige of the labour movement. In school, we are presented with an endless list of nobles, ministers and kings as history, while there is no mention of the working people. This is still the case today. Who highlights the day labourers and peasants of India when they lead the largest strike in history? Who gives Amazon warehouse workers and couriers a voice when they are struggling to form a union? Who makes the voice of the German steelworkers and the French railway workers heard? Let’s put workers front and centre, and at the front and centre of our party’s identity too.
- 230 We want worker spokespersons to be put at the front and centre of the party in a much more systematic way. No one can say better, based on their own experience, how impossible it is to work until 67. No one can better inspire and rally the working class.

# The party of the youth

## Theses:

- ▶ We consciously want to give young people a place in the party, from top to bottom
- ▶ We want, with the help of the whole party, to develop the three youth organizations



## The battle for the youth

- 231** The youth carries the future within it. The youth is not held back by the force of habit, by routine or by the weight of the past. The enthusiasm of the youth is liberating, a source of commitment and protest. Young people are not yet settled in a specific family situation. They have the courage to challenge what seems unchangeable. It is no coincidence that young people played an important role in the great mass movements of the twentieth century. Think of the Cuban revolution, the anti-fascist resistance, the struggle against colonialism, the movement against the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, May 68, the Indignados in Spain, the anti-globalization and Occupy Wall Street movements, the Arab Spring, the anti-racist movement and Black Lives Matter, the international climate strikes, etc.
- 232** Without the youth, there is no social change. Those who capitulate in the battle for the youth cannot change society. We need young people, to learn from them. We need to learn from their energy, enthusiasm, and organizational and communication skills. Young people have mastered the rapidly developing technology and, as Marxists, we support the most advanced methods of production. Young people are organizing online, making videos and memes, setting things in motion. We also need young people to attract young people.
- 233** Young people, for their part, need the party to direct and deepen their revolutionary energy, and to link it to the vast movement for the emancipation of the working class. Our youth also need the party to ensure that movements do not evaporate, become deadlocked or be played off against each other. They need the party to be able to lead the fight together against the extreme right, which is gaining more and more ground among young people.
- 234** Becoming the party of the working class and becoming the party of the youth go hand in hand. We want one to rein-



force the other. This is why we give priority to working-class youth, both in our grassroots groups and in our youth organizations. Young working-class people have enormous skills and energy that are largely undervalued and wasted in today's capitalist society. It is up to us to develop this potential in the whole social emancipation movement.

- 235 There is not enough unity in the party on all this. Other forces, of the elite and the extreme right-wing parties, are fully waging the battle. It is important to clearly state this problem and to take strong measures to solve it. This is the only way to rejuvenate the party and develop our youth organizations. All the polls indicate that we have huge potential among young people. But for a long time now, we have not managed to realize this potential. The average age in the party is 48 and just one in ten organized members is under 30. This must change.

## Rejuvenating the party

- 236 All living beings grow older. This is one of the laws of nature. But the party cannot grow old. It must work actively to rejuvenate itself. This is a vital issue for the entire party. The party's rejuvenation is not the task of our youth organizations, although they obviously play an important role in it. The rejuvenation of the party is the task of the party, the whole party, from top to bottom, starting with each grassroots group. Each branch should look in the mirror from time to time and consider its average age. Do we reach workers between the ages of 18 and 30? Do they feel at home in the grassroots group, in the branch? What about the provincial and national leadership?

## Focusing on the youth

- 237 As in society as a whole, there are also class differences among young people. Depending on the circumstances, the family, the neighbourhood or the environment in which

you grow up, life is different. And so, our youth is diverse. At the same time, young people form a specific segment of society, a segment defined by its age, that changes and evolves rapidly, because young people do not stay young after all. Each generation has its own codes, habits, language, social interactions and cultural references. If we don't really engage with youth culture, which is constantly reinventing and renewing itself, we will not succeed in rejuvenating the party. Rejuvenation is not a one-off action, but a conscious and continuous process.

**238** Young people have grown up with social media and the latest technologies. Young people are, more so than the rest of the population, busy discovering their bodies and their sexuality, busy working on being themselves, busy with sports, culture or gaming, and as a party, we pay far too little attention to these matters. But many young people are looking for meaning, coherence, and an empowering story in which they can actively take part. There is a world to be won.

**239** If we want to win over young workers, we need to understand their specific situation. Many of them have difficulty finding their place in the job market. They are confronted with precarious contracts, flexibility and temporary work. Often, this is synonymous with instability, especially financial instability, at a time when young people want to become independent and stand on their own two feet. As many of our comrades point out, their young colleagues at work would like to strike with them but they can't because of their job contracts, which they risk losing, or the loans they have to repay for their house or their car. Then there are the young people who are not yet settled and who have more free time. They often have their own pace and interests, to which the party is not always well suited. This is not sufficiently taken on board at the different levels in the party.

**240** It is somehow "natural" for a generation to speak primarily to people of its own generation. A party composed primar-

ily of members between the ages of 35 and 65 will automatically attract new members in this age group. This is reflected in the issues we deal with, in the spokespersons we put forward, in the language and the images we use, in the way we work and the actions we undertake. We need to be aware of this and not let ourselves be guided by the spontaneous course of things. Otherwise, we will grow old as a party, and then die. Human beings may die, but the party must live on.

- 241 Where is our interest in young people? Where do we centralize what is happening in the lives of young people, as we do for the world of work? Let's give them a voice, speak their language and also take action on issues affecting them. Rejuvenating the party is not only an opportunity to take up the challenge of becoming the party of the workers, but also to feminize it and to make room for diversity. This is what we see in our youth organizations, at the Red-Fox, Comac and Pioneers camps, for example.

## Winning the youth over politically

- 242 In the darkest moments of the Covid-19 crisis, we saw that our youth were left to fend for themselves. It was made increasingly difficult to be young, because young people are social beings and need others to develop. To be young is to be social, to be together, to ask questions. Young people need each other, young people need a sense of perspective.
- 243 We can offer this perspective, starting from what is happening in young people's lives. Many are affected by mental health issues, precarity, temporary employment and disposable jobs, of the Deliveroo or Uber Eats type. The youth of today is more diverse than in the past and often more sensitive to injustice and discrimination, whether related to origin, gender or sexual orientation. Thanks to the internet, an international dimension of movement and struggle is opening up. Youth For Climate or Fridays For Future cli-

mate strikes have taken place all over the world, from Australia to Canada. The anti-racist movement against the police violence after the murder of George Floyd has inspired large demonstrations for equality, against discrimination and repression around the world. We see the same phenomenon with the actions against violence against women and in the various Protest with Pride demonstrations. And action and movement also mean debate and discussion on the direction of the struggle. Of course young people are interested in social and political debate, and to not see that is a mistake. It is up to us to get involved in the debate, to give arguments and to offer a perspective. If we don't, we are abandoning them to the various pro-system or reactionary forces.

244 We see that young people often think outside the box, they are rebellious, eager to learn and to go in search of causes. This is where the word “radical” comes from: going in search of the root (“radix” in Latin) of a problem. There is radicalism within our youth, confronted as they are with the degradation of the human being and the environment by capitalism. Our task is to offer a counterview, an emancipating and liberating perspective, a socialist perspective. Otherwise, young people risk falling into the trap of extreme right-wing movements that sow hatred and racism, or those of the conspiracy theorists who turn minds upside down.

245 Young people are often searching for their own identity and their place in the world. This is part of the development process. It is important to enable everyone to be themselves. In an endless stream of advertising, capitalism puts forward its own business models: everybody consumer, everybody competitor, everybody selfish. We have a different vision, an emancipatory vision, in which collective rights and services are guaranteed so that all young people can truly be themselves and can deploy all their talents. We oppose all discrimination, whether it be racism, sexism, homophobia or any other form. We are all different, but we are not isolated atoms. There is also a “we”, a unifying “we”,



a “we” of the creators of wealth, a “we” of the working class. We need this “we” of the working class to free us from all forms of discrimination and to put an end to the system in which inequality and division are inherent. Our struggle against discrimination is part of the wider struggle for the liberation of the working class and is not at odds with it.

246 If we do not engage in dialogue, we cannot have a discussion. If we don't reach out to the youth, we cannot bring them on board. If we don't take a sincere interest in the issues that affect young people, we won't make any progress at all. It is a task that falls to all of us, because we are, first and foremost, all young at heart. There are older comrades who have always remained young and know how to rally young people's enthusiasm, and involve them in solidarity with refugees or other projects. Similarly, there are younger comrades who age very quickly and lose their youthful enthusiasm far too soon. We all have a duty to take on this task. But it is also, of course, helpful to have young spokespeople who have grown up in today's youth culture, who are present where young people are, physically and on social media, and who master the codes and language needed to address their peers.

247 To orient the whole party towards young people, to get a hand on youth issues, as a party, and to rejuvenate the party, we are setting up a Youth Commission of the National Council, like the Women's Commission that we founded at the Solidarity Congress.

## Giving the youth a place in the party

248 You can't work with young people if you don't have confidence in them. Some comrades say: “Young people have no experience.” Excuse me? Those with fewer years on the job have, by definition, had less time to gain experience. There is, of course, no such thing as a young woman or a young man of 22 with 25 years of experience. It's up to us to give



young people the chance to gain experience, rather than leaving them stuck in the waiting room.

249 Others say that “young people do not know enough.” That’s a rather arrogant statement, because society is complex and many young people are completely aware of this complexity and are eager to learn more. The party is a treasure chest full of experiences and of knowledge, human and scientific, at the service of the struggle for emancipation. We can offer this to young people, so that they can learn. At the same time, older generations can also learn from the younger ones, about developments in technology and communication, new forms of organization and struggle, creativity and means of struggle that we have never thought of ourselves. We are communists; we are all constantly learning new things and we can do this within one and the same party. That’s what’s so beautiful.

250 Other comrades say, “It was better in our day.” Nostalgia is an enemy of progress. Nostalgia is a conservative force that pulls us toward the past (usually a fairly idealized past), rather than the future. We want an end to the exploitation of man by man, to end humanity’s depletion of the planet’s resources. This is something that young people will achieve. We have a wealth of experience in the party, which is unique as such, and we must recognize it and know how to use it optimally. We must harness the power of history as a source of inspiration, as a school of learning, but always with the aim of strengthening the struggles of today to achieve the socialism of tomorrow. And never lecturing with a pretentious or nostalgic attitude.

251 If we want to win over young people, we need to have confidence in them and give them a place at every level in our party. This is the only way to attract more young people. It starts at the top. To rejuvenate the leadership of the party, we are introducing a quota of at least 10% of under 30s on the National Council and Provincial Councils. A quota of at least one in ten young people at the helm is needed to force





change. Of course, young people have to meet the eligibility requirements like any other candidate. But we reject the “occupied seat” policy, whereby once someone is in charge of a work area, he or she must stay there eternally. Young comrades cannot advance if we do not give them final responsibilities and new ground to conquer. This means that other comrades will have to hand over the reins and take on a new role, a new task, in line with the needs of the whole.

## Generational change

- 252 The party leadership works on implementing the orientations adopted by the Congress; it is ambitious and gives direction; it must think strategically and be forward-looking; it must lead and train; it has to be a generalist, to oversee the whole as well as having specialists to carry out the crucial tasks. The National Council has to lead the party and must be composed of revolutionary comrades who also truly lead the party at the national level. Leading is a complex task. Leading is not the same as giving orders or commanding. It means listening, centralizing, synthesizing, deciding, helping, convincing, injecting dynamism.
- 253 To ensure this work, the leadership must constantly rejuvenate itself. In other words, the leadership must fight the tendency to always remain at the helm and to build stability based on routine or immobility. We must constantly make room for young forces, to make the different generations work together in the leadership of the party. Several generations spent four years preparing together for the 2008 Renewal Congress, after the party had fallen into a deadlock. The party’s renewal has been carried by the whole party and we have deliberately involved different generations in this process. It is best to ensure that generational change is not abrupt, but a process that we work on together. Some parties have good experience in passing the torch to new generations. Other parties struggle with it. It is often a complex and delicate but nonetheless crucial task.

- 254 “In a leadership that has acquired great stability, the greatest danger is to hinder the rise of young cadres. Calling on young cadres is a natural law in the life and development of the party,” said Álvaro Cunhal. “A human being grows older, this is the law of nature. But the party cannot grow old.”
- 255 It is not age that determines the distribution of tasks and responsibilities in our party, but the actual qualities of the activists. In the construction and development of our party, we do not have a so-called “generational conflict”. Through the orientations of the various congresses, all generations work together to develop the party. Younger comrades with little experience learn from older comrades, and older comrades who do not immediately master the latest developments learn from younger comrades. This is done on the basis of respect and a shared commitment to the working class and socialism.
- 256 Many comrades who have already been active for decades have crucial tasks in our work today: building grassroots groups, leading departments, provinces or mass organizations, etc. Such commitment is a choice that must be renewed at every age. At the same time, we must continually work to rejuvenate the leadership at all levels. This means making sure that positions are freed and that younger comrades can take on final responsibilities. It is not always easy. Young comrades are sometimes impatient, that’s the nature of young people. And older comrades sometimes cling too rigidly to what they know, that’s a trait of older people.
- 257 We must ensure that young comrades are aware of the value of the experience, knowledge, perseverance and steadfastness of the older cadres who built the party as pioneers or who later contributed to its development, against all odds. The new generations must have respect for the generations that preceded them, for the pioneers of the party and for those who have taken up their torch. Young comrades should not be pretentious or haughty, nor should they think that they have to start from scratch. A



young communist is a curious, modest communist who does not become big-headed and who learns from others. Learning to lead the party is a complex task and it takes time. It takes a lot of effort to get there.

258 At the same time, we want older comrades to be aware that life inexorably takes its course, that there are skills one acquires over the years, but that one also loses skills over time, that the current events and context of today are different from those of our youth, that one must learn to understand new phenomena, and that one can learn from the young talent in the party by giving them the opportunity to assume leadership responsibilities. The older generations must respect, learn from and understand the new generations. They should not be pretentious or haughty either. They should not think they know everything better and that they have the right to intervene in everything.

259 What binds the different generations is the actual work of the party of today. The experiences of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s can and should be taken into account and used, but the starting point and the challenge must be the work and the realities of today.

260 Some experience is lost and new experience is gained. The young learn from the old and the old from the young. Making the ideological choice is valid for everyone, whether he or she is 16 or 106 years old. We value the efforts and years of commitment of experienced comrades. But we also understand that mileage, experience and commitment are not necessarily the key to solving the new problems we face today. The world changes, the party changes, the productive forces change. To be a communist is not a certificate that one acquires and that's valid for a lifetime. Becoming a communist is a lifelong process. Including when you reach retirement age. One can be a communist for a very long time and, at the end of one's life, become or return to being a reformist, an anarchist or a petit bourgeois. Everyone must continue to make choices for social-

ism and for the party of socialism. It may be more revolutionary to give up one's seat to a worker or a young person than to insist on holding on to one's seat on the National Council or a Provincial Council.

**261** Passing the torch is not easy. Some comrades have difficulty finding a new place, have difficulty connecting with new generations in the party, do not recognize themselves in new forms of revolutionary practice, or have lost interest in the rapid digital evolution of society. In the end, most comrades find a new place in their commitment within the party. Only in a handful of cases does this process lead to bitterness or distance, but fortunately this is the exception. The vast majority of comrades who were previously members of the National Council or Provincial Councils are now continuing with their commitment on the ground. And that makes sense. We commit to the party and to socialism, regardless of the position in which we take on this commitment. Some comrades continue to hold leadership positions in departments or mass organizations, while other comrades take on the tasks of building a grassroots group on the ground. Regardless of one's position in the party, one can use one's experience and revolutionary commitment to advance the party, to recruit and to train new comrades. It is up to each comrade to continue to be involved in the practice and work of the party, and to grasp each stage in our revolutionary commitment with both hands. It is up to the collective to help the comrades on this path and to give each one a place corresponding to his or her commitment.

## Young people attract young people

- 262** Wherever young people get involved, they easily attract other young people. This makes sense. That is why it is so important to give them a place in our grassroots groups and at all levels of the party.
- 263** We are building grassroots groups in the world of work and in neighbourhoods, with all the diversity of the working class in



terms of gender, origin, age, etc. This is very important, because we aspire to the unity of the whole class. But for young people, it is not always easy to find their place in a grassroots group. They are often the only ones under the age of thirty. "I sometimes feel like I'm treated like a child in the party, that everyone is willing to give good advice, but no one really asks me for my opinion," said one young comrade.

264 We do not normally organize grassroots groups on the basis of age, origin or gender. We all work together in our grassroots groups to achieve the same goals and are organized according to our working area (sector, neighbourhood, theme). With this Congress, we want to allow a temporary exception to this rule for the coming period: the possibility of creating youth grassroots groups. We have had some pilot experiences with good results. The young people feel more comfortable, they dare to discuss and they progress quickly. This should allow them to start a journey, to build up confidence. In Verviers and Borgerhout, for example, such youth groups have helped attract members and increase their commitment. Members of these groups have taken on more responsibility and have gone on to join or even become chair of a classical grassroots group.

265 We should emphasize that this is a temporary measure, which can be taken in some cases to correct the current imbalance. It is up to the National Council to determine the extent and the duration of the measure. The final goal is to have intergenerational groups that reflect the diversity of the working class, including in terms of age. What we are proposing is not, therefore, a measure that is intended to last, nor a separate organization with its own structure for young people.

266 The Youth Commission of the National Council or the national, provincial or local leaderships may also bring young people together to discuss certain themes or issues. These are ad hoc meetings that can in no way replace the party structures and, by definition, have no decision-making power.

## Actively support our three youth organizations

- 267 In addition to the task of constantly rejuvenating the party itself and orienting it towards young people, we also have three youth organizations. They are RedFox, the Pioneers and Comac. They are “mass organizations” that are linked to the party but have their own dynamics, their own structure and their own campaigns. RedFox, the Pioneers and Comac are not mini parties, they are youth organizations:
- Youth organizations have a distinct organization and structure.
  - They have their own political platform.
  - They have customized and minimal organizational principles.
  - They focus on action, education and youth dynamics (youth movement).
- 268 Membership is easy. It is not at all necessary to be a member of the party to join. The youth organizations are linked to the party, but they are not party organizations. They provide a place for young people to engage, learn and act collectively. It is a mistake to consider youth organizations as party organizations, where party rules, conditions and discipline apply.
- 269 It is true that youth organizations are linked to the party. The leadership of the mass organization is the responsibility of the party. They are not independent organizations, but broad mass organizations that educate their members in emancipation, the struggle and socialism. On several occasions in the past, we have seen how outside forces have tried to turn youth organizations against the party. This is a historically proven recipe. We remain vigilant in this regard.
- 270 Our youth organizations play an essential role in raising awareness, organizing and mobilizing young people. Everything we learn when we are young, we learn for life.





RedFox, the Pioneers and Comac have the ambition to reach hundreds of thousands of young people and organize thousands of young people. It is our duty as a party to help them; we have, moreover, established this in our statutes.

## The three youth organizations of the PTB

- 271** RedFox is the broad education and action movement for secondary-school pupils. Comac is our student movement on campuses across the country. Within the Pioneers, children from 6 to 16 years old can flourish.
- 272 a** RedFox. On 1 May 2015, RedFox was born as a renewed youth movement of the PTB. It is a youth movement for all young people who want to meet other young people and who want to understand the world and to change it. The movement started with active local branches in Brussels, Antwerp and Liège, but has since spread to several other cities. In Antwerp, RedFox organizes the annual DiverCity festival, which brings together thousands of young people to make a stand against racism. RedFox was also active in the historic secondary school pupils climate mobilization in the spring of 2019. At the height of the movement, on Thursday 24 January 2019, 35,000 young people marched through the streets of Brussels. Many RedFox youth have organized the fight in their school or town and have helped push the movement forward. During the Covid-19 crisis, RedFox set up the “Youth and Solidarity” initiative to inspire hundreds of young people to take concrete solidarity actions. RedFox’s popularity is also growing online. In the meantime, more than 10,000 young people have ordered RedFox stickers and other promotional material against sexism, against racism or in solidarity with Palestine. Videos from RedFox spokespeople on TikTok reach up to a million views.
- 273** These are all very positive experiences, proving that RedFox has tremendous potential and can move forward quickly if we take our youth organizations seriously and invest in them. Our ambitions with RedFox are high and



there is still a lot to do. RedFox can only attract activists and young people who want to take action by taking initiative and implementing actions. Our goal is to create chapters in every city and corner of the country, and to organize camps that bring together hundreds of young people. We want to pay special attention to the young people of the working class, to the issues that concern them, to the presence in working-class neighbourhoods and in technical and vocational schools. Our youth movement has the potential for continuous and large-scale growth among young people.

**274 b** Comac is the student movement of the PTB. The students form a specific segment of the young population with a great potential for resistance. By definition, there is a lot of debate and struggle of ideas among students. It is in universities and higher education institutions that the intellectuals who will go on to wage the political, ideological and cultural debate in society are being trained today. The stakes are therefore high, as all political forces know. On campuses, a battle rages to win over intellectuals with different visions of society. With Comac, we propose a liberating Marxist vision of the world that connects the great questions of society, that connects the struggle of the students to that of the working class and that gives a perspective of change in society. We want to convince young intellectuals to put science, knowledge and commitment at the service of the big social and ecological needs of the planet. Comac's YouTube channel Les Bonnes Questions has often reached 50,000+ views with educational videos on climate, war, the unity of Belgium, etc. There is also a lot of potential among students, as we have seen in recent years in the mobilization against the far right, in the anti-racist and feminist struggles, in the climate protests and Students For Climate actions and with the mobilization against elitism and for the right to quality education. Comac members have often played an important role in the development of these movements.





275 Today, Comac is mainly active in universities, but the aim is for it to re-establish itself in other higher education institutions. Many working-class children tend to find themselves in non-university higher education because of the more elitist nature of universities and the selection process in our society. And in higher education, we often find more practical or technical fields of study, with a stronger link to social reality. We need these skills, now and in the future.

276 **c** The Pioneers is a broad and open movement where children can enjoy themselves, play, meet, learn, have fun and relax. At a time when, from the youngest age, everything in our society pushes us towards the development of individualism, competitive spirit, intolerance and violence, the Pioneers put children and young people in contact with essential values such as solidarity, diversity and commitment. By offering a healthy and balanced living environment, which also includes proper food and sports activities, the Pioneers meet a need that remains very substantial in our society. Children and young people from all over the country participate in bilingual camps during the school holidays and at PioFiesta (part of the ManiFiesta solidarity festival). We are still far from the ambitions we have for the Pioneers. We want to offer many more young people the opportunity to participate and also develop regular activities at the local level. The importance of the Pioneers remains underestimated in the party. The challenge is to help them develop and become professional.

## The party has a duty to support its youth organizations

277 If we want to strengthen our youth organizations, we need to pay attention to them, in the provinces and at the national level. We need to discuss the work of youth organizations as part of our day-to-day leadership, as well as at the level of the Party Bureau and the National Council. We have to ensure that the national leadership of the youth organizations is strengthened. We have to respect the

specificity and character of the youth organizations. We must take care to prevent young comrades in local or national youth organization leaderships from being co-opted by the party for other tasks, without the explicit agreement of the youth organization's national leadership.

**278** At the Solidarity Congress, we drew up a list of concrete measures to support the youth organizations, but they have scarcely been implemented. This rectification process requires further discussion and even more concrete and ambitious measures.

- A comrade in the Party Bureau is responsible for the final oversight and support of our youth organizations.
- We appoint a person in charge of the youth sections in each of our provincial day-to-day leadership teams. Each province is looking at how it can help the local branches of RedFox, Comac and the Pioneers.
- The Party Bureau, the National Council and the provincial leadership bodies regularly discuss the rejuvenation of the party and support for our youth organizations.
- We help RedFox and the Pioneers find animators: fellow students who enjoy working with young people and have the skills to do so.
- Our youth movements need strength of their own. We take care to ensure that their leaders are not absorbed into the party too quickly.
- Our goal is to have RedFox branches in every major city.
- Marxist education is essential for young people. The Education department contributes to the training of young people, both in terms of content and pedagogy. A training school for young people is to be set up.
- In collaboration with the Communication department, we support the communication activities of our youth organizations.
- We promote our youth organizations and their activities through our party channels.
- We support initiatives such as tutoring (Boost Days) and collective study groups.
- We think about the place and visibility of young people in all the party's activities.



# An organized party

## Theses:

- ▶ We want to double the number of organized members
- ▶ We want to organize group members in a sustainable way

- 279 The PTB has experienced strong growth over the past fifteen years. In 2008, at the Renewal Congress, the party had 2,800 members. At the 2015 Solidarity Congress, we had 8,500. And at the Unity Congress, we had 24,000. More and more people want to join us in building a counter-power. “The Workers’ Party of Belgium is the fastest-growing force on the European Left,” writes the leading Marxist magazine in the United States, *Jacobin*.
- 280 But our growth is one-sided: the number of consultative members has tripled in the last five years, while the number of organized members has barely increased by half. We want to correct this, it is a strategic issue. The organized members are the active and conscious core of the party, the foundation on which we continue to build. Building strong grassroots groups means building a house out of bricks, like in the tale of the “three little pigs”. Building a brick house requires more work than a straw or a wooden house, but a brick house will weather the storm. We are facing a turbulent period, with a lot of shock waves and storms. That’s why we want to build a solid house, to take up our tasks and to obtain a change of society against all odds.
- 281 The most important weapon of people selling their labour on the job market is their number. This is why the working class has organized itself into resistance groups and unions, encountering defeats and victories along the way. You can break a finger, but when they are joined together to form a fist they cannot be broken. Organizing means organizing the class into unions, into democratic organizations, into organizations of struggle, into numerous initiatives for anti-fascism, feminism, climate, anti-racism, decolonization, democratic rights, peace, anti-imperialism... Organizing means emancipating oneself, making people work together, defending their rights and standing in solidarity with others who defend their rights. We also do this through our own mass organizations like RedFox, Comac, the Pioneers or Marianne or through our own mass initia-



tives like Medicine for the People and ManiFiesta. For us, the party itself is the highest form of organization, where the most active and conscious people work together in the struggle for socialism.

**282** A strong party starts with a strong core. The core is formed by the organized members. They make their commitment consciously, working collectively to sensitize, organize and mobilize the working class. Increasing the number of organized members is our first challenge. We are setting an ambitious goal here: double their numbers by the next congress, or count with a PTB with 6,000 organized members in five years. With a focus on grassroots groups in the workplace, that we want to make the core of the party's life. It is their questions and the problems they face that we address as a priority. It is their good experiences that we popularize first. And their talented group members and activists are the first to be given more responsibility.

**283** The second major challenge is to organize group members in a sustainable way. The turnover rate in our grassroots groups is far too high right now. For every five members who join the grassroots groups, four leave. This points to a deep problem in our methods of work. It indicates that there are contradictions about the character of the party, the conditions of membership, and the place and workings of grassroots groups.

## **Doubling the number of organized members**

**284** Our organized members are group members and activists. They are organized into grassroots groups linked to the world of work, to the municipality, and on specific issues. The grassroots groups are the heart and soul of our party. They lead the class struggle in their company, their sector or their commune. For example, the Michel government wanted to introduce a points-based pension, according to which everyone would have had to work longer for a

smaller pension. The PTB launched the campaign “My pension is a right, not a raffle”. Thousands of group members informed and mobilized the people around them. Together with the unions, after three days of demonstrations and national strikes, they forced the Michel government to back down. You can’t do that with a group of consultative members or with a loosely structured movement. This requires organized cores in companies and neighbourhoods that meet monthly and educate, mobilize and organize their colleagues, relatives, neighbours and friends.

**285** There is still a persistent habit in our party of working on the sidelines of the grassroots groups. “The cadres did most of the work themselves, rather than relying on the grassroots groups,” writes one provincial president. “As a result, we received far fewer pledges than other provinces and the party did not emerge stronger from the election campaign.” During the Covid-19 crisis, a grassroots group from the world of work organized a caravan of cars. It was a wonderful and very creative action, which rallied many participants. The action was a success, but the group members’ participation was like that of visitors on a tour of their own workplace. We did not try hard enough to involve the grassroots group, despite it being stable and solid. Almost all of those called on to take in hand the concrete tasks were cadres and activists from the province. This was a mistake.

**286** Football legend Johan Cruyff had his own way with words. He said, for example: “You will only see it once you really get sto it.” We have to want to understand, to achieve this mind shift, to get to the bottom of it.

**287** We have to put the grassroots group at the centre, we have to rely on group members, actively seek out tasks they can take on, develop simple tools. In a large city, 80 names were on a list of potential group members, people who have expressed an interest in becoming a group member through social media or events. But nothing was done with



this list. It was set aside, for a whole year, until we started discussing the importance of having more group members. This is when the hesitations came in: “We’d better contact them after the health crisis, because people aren’t open to such engagement now” and “people still have to have been consultative members for a while before they can become group members”. We discussed these barriers and began contacting people on the list. And what did we see? That there was great enthusiasm for the party, for our solidarity actions, for Medicine for the People and for our proposals about how to get out of the Covid-19 crisis. People’s consciousness evolves by leaps and bounds. As the systemic crisis worsens, the contradictions sharpen. Many people want to get involved, right now. We contacted the group member candidates one by one. In the first year of the Covid-19 crisis, we registered over a thousand new group members, a record. The next challenge is to organize these group members in a sustainable way.

- 288** The “organization rate” is the ratio of the number of organized members to the total number of members. At the Solidarity Congress, we decided on an organization rate of 27%: we aimed to have more than one in four members organized. We wrote, at the time: “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.” We have not achieved this rate. The number of consultative members has grown much faster than expected and the number of organized members has grown far too little. We are not setting a new organization rate for the next five years. We are setting a specific goal in terms of the number of organized members: a doubling to 6,000. We really want to achieve this goal. We are going to work on it from the top to the bottom of the party. We want to attract more group members, but also to keep them longer. We also want to attract many new consultative members. They are the first group from which we draw new organized members. They



are members because they identify in one way or another with the demands, goals and values of our party.

## Organizing group members in a sustainable way

289 For every five new group members, four leave during the year. Such turnover indicates that we are making mistakes. We can correct them. We want to make selection and entry into the grassroots groups a little stricter, to counter the tendency to admit just about everyone. And we want to ensure that group members feel at home in our party and that we can make solid communists of them. “Make it stricter” and “keep them” are the two tasks. And they go hand in hand.

## Make it stricter: the grassroots group is not a pigeon’s breeding nest

290 We want to continue to advocate with great enthusiasm for membership in our grassroots groups, while avoiding laxity. The goal is not for candidates to join the group half-heartedly. The grassroots group is not a pigeon’s breeding nest where everyone comes and goes. A high turnover of group members is demotivating for group members who really want to make a lasting commitment. Becoming a group member should be a conscious choice, a qualitative step towards greater commitment. The party’s constitution sets out three requirements for membership in a grassroots group: an interview to get to know each other, an approval and an introduction day. We have become too lax in enforcing these conditions.

291 “I know that in my grassroots groups, chairs often tend to suggest that members come and see how things are going in the group. But we have only bad experiences with this practice, both for continuity and for the motivation of the group members,” writes the coach of a large urban section. The interview to get to know each other is not a formality.



We need to take this seriously. In this interview we present ourselves as the party of the working class and as a communist party of our time. For this purpose we are producing a new brochure, adapted to the group chairs, in the style of Priority to the Left. During the interview, we really want to get to know the candidate. It is not a question of pouring out the whole litany of party positions on the group member candidate. Above all, we want to listen, ask questions about their work and family situation, talents and hobbies. We are the party of people first, so we want to get to know people, who they are, what their social skills are, what their interests are, how they think, how they are in society.

292 We talk with each group member candidate about participation in the grassroots group meetings, which is a regular commitment, once a month, as well as the place of each group member and the tasks he or she can assume. Good agreements make good comrades. A group chair testifies: "For a long time, we conducted the initial interview in a very formal way, without really taking an interest in the new group members. From now on, we will approach this stage with much more ambition: we really want to get to know the candidate group members better, their strengths, what makes them outraged. This will also help us organize them much better. We also want to get the message across from the beginning that we want them to join the group because we need them.

293 We are developing a standard template for this interview, with a part about who we are - what we say about the party - and a part with get-to-know-you questions. If the person does not yet feel ready to commit to a grassroots group and become involved in its work, we continue to involve them in the work of the party as a consultative member.

294 The grassroots group must approve the membership of each group member candidate. This should be done thor-

oughly, after a brief explanation of the content of the interview to get to know each other. The meeting of the group chairs must ratify this approval. The coach and the various group leaders in the section briefly review the names of new group members at each meeting. We do this collectively, at the group chairs' meeting, because together we know more than each of us does separately and because we don't want to have group members "shopping around" among the different grassroots groups.

- 295 After joining, the group member takes part in an introductory day. On this day, we address, in more depth, Marxism, the contemporary interpretation of our Socialism 2.0 emancipation project and democratic centralism as a basic organizational principle of our party. All group members must complete an introductory session. It is important that we implement this more strictly. And that it be held more frequently. Presently, we often don't know which group members have attended an introductory day. We can organize these introduction days on a larger scale, in a section for all new group members, for example, so that they do not have to wait too long.

## Keeping members: a strong grassroots group is built on four pillars

- 296 Once they join the group, members should be able to feel at home in the party and thrive in their grassroots group. When members leave, we want to understand exactly why. There are personal reasons that are not always within our control, such as illness, retirement or dismissal from a company (for company sections). But there are also reasons related to the workings of our grassroots groups, which we can change. These are groups in which there is no group dynamic or which function too much like theoretical discussion clubs without any action, or with disagreements which are not properly addressed. Where there's a good dynamic, the groups grow and their members stay. A strong grassroots group is built on four pillars: a project focused



on struggle, Marxist education, a good group dynamic and a constant commitment to recruiting new members. The group chair should actively engage the members in these four pillars.

**297 a** A good project involves action based on concrete problems in the workplace, in the sector or in the neighbourhood. It formulates clear demands, defines actions and develops the social struggle to fulfil these demands. A good project is creative and helps to raise awareness, organize and mobilize people in their workplace, region or target group. A good project can be part of a local, sectoral or national party campaign. National campaigns are important because they involve and unite the entire party around a common goal. In our party, there are no small clans that do as they please. We all pull in the same direction, whether it be to mobilize SolidariTeams during the floods, to campaign for the abolition of the Turtel tax<sup>20</sup> or the solidarity campaign with Cuba. This unity is an integral part of the party's character.

**298** "Our grassroots group members are actively involved in national campaigns," writes the chair of a large grassroots group in the world of work. "This campaign then becomes their campaign, they are the faces of it, they talk about it at work. Since the campaign on pensions and the one on wages, the PTB is talked about at work, which was not the case before." As the party grows, we are tackling more issues and are also able to have more influence on the class struggle at the national level. There are many campaigns to come. But we should not overload the grassroots groups. We want to make sure that they have enough space to deal with local issues, with their own projects.

**299 b** Education starts with current events, but goes deeper. Social action allows us to learn many things, but under-

20 | Turtel tax: a very unpopular tax on electricity to fund government subsidies for solar panels, named after then Energy Minister Turtelboom.

standing how society works, with its history and with its future, can only be acquired through education. Our education sessions provide Marxist frameworks for understanding the world, with the goal of changing it. We now work on a monthly basis, providing the same simple education for all grassroots groups. This is a step forward. We will also make the training even more interactive and stimulate education outside the grassroots group with education modules for all group members who want to participate. In addition, the group chair and other more experienced group members need to have informal one-on-one discussions with group members. This is very important. Education and transforming ourselves is about changing the way we see the world and what we do to change it. This is an ongoing process.

**300 c** Group dynamics has two components. There is the group component: let the group work as a group, give everyone a place, listen to each other, create sociability and dynamism so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. And there is also the individual component. A group is composed of individuals with different talents, expectations, experiences and backgrounds. The group chair must take an interest in the members of his or her group, invest in getting to know them, know where they work, what they like to do, and what they like and dislike about how the grassroots group works. In short, the group chair must establish a relationship with them. There is more work and time to devote to your group outside of meetings than during meetings, say experienced group chairs.

**301 d** The fourth pillar is the ongoing focus on member recruitment. We want the party to grow and also to expand the grassroots groups, while respecting our organizational principles. It is crucial that expansion be a grassroots group project, that all members of the group contribute to the expansion of the party, according to their possibilities.



302 It is also essential that anyone participating in a grassroots group does so within the framework of our organizational principles, as defined in Part 5 of our statutes. The party works on the basis of democratic centralism, the principles of which are well explained in this fifth part of our statutes. Without centralism, the party has no weight and cannot take the lead in the emancipation movement for a different society. But the basis of centralism is democracy. This requires space for all ideas to be expressed and for as many members as possible to participate in the analysis and decisions of the various party units. We therefore encourage initiative and the right to decide in each group, in accordance with the party's orientations, the decisions of the governing bodies and the statutory principles. In the group, the minority is subordinate to the majority. Once the majority has decided on something, we all pull together. Without these conditions, we cannot be a strong party.

303 The four pillars of a strong grassroots group are not independent of each other. They form a whole. With a good project, we discover other activists who can strengthen the grassroots group, we train our group members and we create a group dynamic. We want to create simple scenarios with concrete examples for each of the four pillars. Group chairs play a central role in the operation of a grassroots group. If we want to double the number of organized members, the number of group chairs must also increase significantly. We will give more space to the group chairs schools, with special emphasis on the chairs of groups in the world of work. And we will continue to mentor the group chairs as best we can. The party has grown too large to do this coaching work directly from the provincial leadership. As a result, we have introduced an intermediate level of coaches who offer practical help and discuss with group chairs on the workings of their group, on policy positions, training and transformation. If the number of group chairs increases, more coaches will be needed. Between each group chair meeting, coaches accompany one or more

group chairs and grassroots groups. Coaches are the responsibility of the Provincial Council.

## **A digital quantum leap in our organizing work**

**304** Marxists have always supported the development of technology and science. They have always advocated for this development to be used for the greater needs of our time and to be put at the service of the broad struggle for emancipation. It is no different with the digital revolution. We want to be ahead of the curve, but in too many areas, our organizational work has remained the same as it was twenty years ago. As the party grows, so does the need to increase efficiency, especially through digitalization and standardization. Today, we waste too much time and energy by still working in a traditional way.

**305** By developing a platform for members, we can improve the organizational work of group chairs and coaches. Agendas, education, best practices and good experiences can be collected on this platform where group chairs will have direct access. Group members who miss a meeting should be able to log in to their group's platform to catch up on video training. Organized members who want to learn about contemporary Marxism should have access to podcasts and videos tailored to their needs. Digital applications can also facilitate the work of our grassroots groups. Just think of the new CallHub system for contacting our consultative members. There was a lot of resistance against this project, but it turned out to be a huge step forward. Other digital apps that could enhance our work include apps to set routes for all letterbox distributions, door-to-door apps to show videos on neighbourhood tours, instant poster ordering, instant membership, a QR code to record participation in major party events.

**306** Digital organizing platforms and good community management allow us to connect personally with our thou-



sands of consultative members, to respond to their requests, involve them in campaigns and put them on the path to becoming a group member more quickly. Community management is like chatting in a café, on the street or in the market, but digitally. In most sections, there is now a divide between organized and consultative members. We have always said that we do not want to “park” consultative members in their consultative role. We want to involve them, help them become active and elevate them to the rank of group members as much as possible. Consultative members’ opinions are important and their input in our campaigns is often worth its weight in gold. Experience has also shown that most consultative members are eager to participate in a project that addresses their concerns. It’s not just a matter of communication, but also of organization. Several company group chairs have already taken the plunge and brought together a selection of consultative members in a WhatsApp group. These members are regularly involved and consulted and make suggestions on the work of the party in the company. Then there is the transition from virtual to real life. We want to develop these experiences: to highlight our large group of consultative members and help them become active through “digital organizers”.

- 307 Finally, the personalization enabled by digital technology also offers the opportunity to better communicate with people who are not members of our party and with our thousands of supporters. Currently, we have almost no diversified communication for these people. We send an email to everyone, every week. We do not take into account the various levels in the party, preferences or interests. And yet the technology exists to send personal messages on a large scale. This is not science fiction, but technology that multinationals use to make more profit. This technology is now used in political campaigns. The far right is also taking advantage of the new opportunities available to them around the world to spread their hate and poison and create an army of trolls. On the other side, Bernie Sanders’



team used it too during the 2016 presidential election. An instructive book has been written on the subject: *Rules for Revolutionaries: How Big Organizing Can Change Everything*<sup>21</sup>.

**308** Anyone who wants to change the world needs to be ahead of the digital revolution. Falling behind is not an option. Of course, digital technology does not replace human contact and work on the ground, which we are keeping up and we will continue to build on with our party of active members. Digital methods can take our organizing to the next level, allow us to engage in dialogue with hundreds of thousands of people, integrate tens of thousands of collaborators, make thousands of new members. They can give a place in and around the party to anyone who wishes to contribute to building a solid counter-power.

## Rebuilding the Organization department

**309** The party needs strong departments that can take up a particular task and specialize in it. In order to achieve all our organizational challenges, we need a strong Organization department. We need a department with a global vision of the organization that vigorously leads the continued growth of the party - especially in the world of work and among the youth. A department that sets annual goals and a clear plan to achieve them. A department that writes reports and develops documents adapted to the needs of the members.

**310** Within the general framework of the party and in synergy with the meeting of the provincial presidents, the Organization department is responsible for:

- a** the growth of the party at the various levels: consultative members, group members, militants and cadres;

<sup>21</sup> Becky Bond en Zack Exley, *Rules for Revolutionaries: How Big Organizing Can Change Everything*, Chelsea Green Publishing Co, 2016.



- b** the party's organization work: general membership meetings, grassroots groups, core groups of militants, group chair schools, getting-to-know-the-party events, introductory days, commitment cycles and national cadre schools;
- c** all related points: financial commitment of the organized members, work with the database of members and contacts, communication with members, community management, digitalization of organizing, monitoring of the structures, statutes and organizational chart of the party;
- d** organizational issues related to the relationship between the party and the party's mass organizations: Comac, Red-Fox, and Pioneer membership versus party membership and specific party organizational forms within mass organizations;
- e** and, finally, party staff policy as a lever to force change.

**311** The Organization department is a central axis, a pivot in all the work of the party. Without a strong department, there can be no good organizing and without good organizing, there can be no social change.



# A party that communicates

## Theses:

- ▶ We want to focus on raising awareness in our communication
- ▶ We want to be at the forefront of digital and social media

## Raising awareness

- 312 In the struggle for the emancipation of the working class, the party has three essential tasks to accomplish, which we summarize in the SOM model: raising awareness (“sensibilize”), organizing people (“organize”), and developing and steering the social struggle (“mobilize”).
- 313 To accomplish these three tasks, communication is crucial. Communication must be able to raise awareness, organize, develop and steer social struggles. Contrary to popular belief, communication is not just about reacting to the news or broadcasting our positions. It is much more than that. Communication is, in fact, one of the pillars of our party, along with politics and organization.
- 314 Since the Renewal Congress, we have made good progress in terms of mass communication, our response to news and current affairs and our campaigns. We have emphasized the importance of policy and strategy, of communicating to people in a clear and understandable way. And it is paying off. Today, we are reaching one million people through our website, e-newsletters, mailings and social media presence. Our strong communication campaigns played a major role in the 2014, 2019 and 2021 struggle movements, but also in the political battle that resulted in the party’s breakthrough, at the national level, in the 2019 elections.
- 315 But we must be strict with ourselves. At the Renewal Congress, we set ourselves the goal of really developing our awareness-raising work, of waging the battle of ideas in-depth and spreading our socialist vision of society. These objectives have not been sufficiently achieved. This is a fundamental issue that has dragged on for too long and which we want to make a top priority for the Unity Congress.

## Raising awareness is both agitation and education

- 316 “Most people learn mainly by accumulating their own experiences,” we wrote in the Renewal Congress document. “Experiences acquired through collective social action are the richest ones. But they are insufficient. Understanding of the functioning of society, of its history and its future do not emerge spontaneously.”
- 317 This is our task: to create a Marxist consciousness. To consider the social struggle from a Marxist point of view, to use current events as the basis for enabling people to become conscious of the world in which we live, to understand it better in order to change it and to conceive the society for which we are fighting. We do this in two ways: through agitation (“awakening conscience”) and education (“teaching, training”).
- 318 Agitation means using a current event to make the greatest number of people aware of a deeper social problem. Amazon, for example, with its soaring profits and underpaid workers, is used as a way of denouncing the increase in class contradictions on social media. In this way, we turn indignation into awareness.
- 319 It is a big mistake to think that agitation is only about relaying what is popular or repeating what people already know spontaneously. That is not the point. Our agitation is always aimed at increasing and broadening awareness, including on difficult issues and themes that not everyone has direct experience or an instinctive understanding of, such as climate, war, migration or repression. “If these images of a dead [Syrian] child washed up on a beach don’t change Europe’s attitude to refugees, what will?”, headlined *The Independent*<sup>22</sup>. The photo of the death of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi went around the world and said much more

22 | *The Independent*, 2 September 2015.

than the image itself. It also sparked a debate about migration and the injustice of asylum policy.

- 320 Besides agitation, there is also Marxist education, the dissemination of our ideas. In Marxist education, we do not take isolated examples but explain the connection between several cases. Agitation is directed at a very wide group of people, but with Marxist education we address the vanguard that seeks greater depth, a Marxist analysis of society and a coherent vision of the future. In practice, it can take the form of the book *They Have Forgotten Us*, the special report in Lava on combative trade unionism or the May Day speech, in video format, seen by hundreds of thousands of people during the Covid-19 crisis.
- 321 The financial and political elites are waging an ongoing cultural battle to impose their worldview, according to which there is no alternative to the free market, trade unions are outdated, a socialist society cannot work, and man is individualistic by nature. Every day, we are fed all these meta-ideas, through communication campaigns, culture, big commercial media, but also by the daily interviews of political figures and opinion makers in TV news or information programmes. The establishment fashions a “one-track mind” and tries to persuade the population that its view of the world is the only view possible or, at least, the only one that works.
- 322 To combat this dominant thinking, we want to spread our own narrative and lead the ideological struggle in an ambitious way based on our own vision of society and the world. At the Solidarity Congress (2015), we wrote: “It is crucial [...] to try and build 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, forwardlooking response to the single-mindedness of the Right.” Currently, we are not adequately fulfilling this mis-

sion. Our communication is mainly limited to reacting quickly, on an ad-hoc basis, to current events, to score points with our base, with popular messages. This is of course necessary. But, on each occasion, we should look more closely at how we can systematically raise people's awareness. This is not what we are currently doing. Not as part of our agitation or even our education work. There is a disconnect between our investment in rapid news communication and our investment in more in-depth education. *Solidaire* does not have a central place in the life of the party. We make do with the paper magazine *Solidaire*, which has 10,000 subscribers, 95% of whom are PTB members, and the *Solidaire* website, whose articles are only read a few hundred times on average. Digital video projects such as *De Keukenrevolutie*, *Les Bonnes Questions* and *Raoul Confiné* have been abandoned, although they offer many opportunities for Marxist education.

323 In practice, we remain rooted in a deep-seated pragmatism, as we already noted at the Renewal Congress (2008) and the Solidarity Congress (2015): "There is currently [...] 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."

324 If we allow pragmatism to prevail and systematically prioritize what is direct and at hand over long-term goals and societal vision, we will be unable to break the worldview and cultural hegemony of the establishment. "With such an attitude [...] we make small strokes but we do not win lasting positions" we wrote in the Solidarity Congress document. These observations are still valid today. We must fundamentally change course and learn to run on two legs: consolidate the progress made in mass communication and, at the same time, strengthen our work of raising awareness, both in terms of agitation and education. We want to reach 1.5 million people every day with our news communication and grassroots agitation messages. But we



also need to develop a deeper education for a large vanguard of one hundred thousand people. These two objectives must go hand in hand. This is essential to winning the battle of ideas and building a counter-hegemony.

## A strong triangle: raising awareness - organizing - mobilizing

325 Raising awareness, organizing and mobilizing are the three sides of a strong triangle. It is imperative that we link awareness to organization. Collective social action will have no effect if we do not deliberately organize people in and around the party. “Collective social action is an important venue for people to get together, to get organized and, often, to surpass themselves. In order to give a permanent character to such experiences, it is necessary to have permanent forms of organization, such as mass organizations. In order to further consolidate and advance the experience of the most active people, it is necessary to strengthen the party itself,” we wrote in the Renewal Congress document. Here again, our media and communication channels have a key role to play. Some people think that social media is only for broadcasting information. This is wrong. Social media gives us the opportunity to communicate on a large scale and in a personalized way with thousands of people. Each month, our teams respond to over 20,000 social media posts: by listening, discussing politics, encouraging people to get involved and to become party members. In so doing, we turn political discussions and online interactions into a living, organizing force.

326 Communication is therefore also a tool for organizing. It is a way to unite our party members around central themes and campaigns. A way to inspire and to provide activists, trade unionists and democrats with arguments and proposals. A way to mobilize people to join our SolidariTeams and take part in the campaign “A Winter of Solidarity”. Through petitions, through the numerous actions of our grassroots groups and mass organizations, and through

other initiatives of all kinds. It is a way to organize, through recruitment campaigns, our activists in the party, or in RedFox, Comac, the Pioneers, Marianne or Mix.

- 327 When we educate and organize people in the party and in our mass organizations, it is to mobilize them for the class struggle and the broad movement toward emancipation. Our party is a party of action. It is our task and our ambition to lead the class struggle. “It is in struggle that large groups of people learn most and fastest. The same is true for the most active organizers,” we wrote in the Renewal Congress document. Our communication can greatly enhance the social struggle and this learning process, for example by pointing to a political direction, giving voice to those who are taking action, or sharing good experiences. See the testimonies of trade unionists and workers about their lives and struggles during the presentation of the book *They Have Forgotten Us*; our videos of the strike at AB InBev in Liège and Leuven to demand more safety measures against Covid-19; our photo reports on the global climate strikes, on the fight for abortion rights and on the fight against violence against women. With our (social) media, we can blow on all the sparks of indignation and social struggle, to make a blazing fire.

## Conquering social media

- 328 In the spring of 2021, a study by the University of Antwerp revealed that, of all the political broadcasts on television in the north of the country, the government majority parties occupied 98% of the air time and the opposition parties only 2%. The share of the 2% given to the PTB is derisory. It can therefore be said, without exaggeration, that the PTB is the object of a virtual media blackout. Since we are not the type to resign ourselves to our fate, we take matters into our own hands and claim our rightful place. At the same time, we are, of course, developing our own media, whose content we can control. One thing is certain: if we want to reach the working class and the youth, and we do, we have

to turn decisively to online television and social media. We greatly underestimate the challenge we face. We are in the midst of a digital revolution, but we are lagging behind. This is what we are going to rectify.

## Winning over the working class and the youth

- 329 We have our own communication channels to reach one and a half million people directly. This is a strategic issue. Social media plays a fundamental role in this. Today, to reach the working class and the youth, who are our strategic priority target audiences, we can no longer rely on our usual communication methods such as the printed press or a classic website. Barely 1% of young people under 35 follow the news in printed magazines, 8% in the printed newspapers, 24% on TV, whilst 70% follow the news from their smartphone.
- 330 More and more people are turning to social media for information, making it a powerful alternative news channel. Facebook and YouTube now reach a wider audience than television. Belgians spend an average of one and a half hours a day on social media. We are lagging behind. We complain that we don't reach many young people. But we are mostly active on Facebook, which is almost exclusively for people over 30. Four million Belgians are on Instagram, including the young people we have such a hard time reaching. But our Instagram channels are not up to the task. TikTok also already has three million users, mainly young people but also more and more people from the world of work.
- 331 Some comrades think that we are "not communicating" if we don't hand out leaflets at the factory gate. They don't see that social media enables us to communicate with thousands of workers every day, to ask for their input, to involve them and to educate them. We have no intention of abandoning paper flyers and magazines, but we must pri-

oritize the enormous potential of social media and online video to reach our members and our most important target audiences. Think of the webinars on the wage fight or the personalised videos Raoul Hedebouw recorded for different sections of companies.

- 332 Some people consider social media to be “superficial” and see no value in it for us. This is not true. It is not technology that prevents us from raising awareness and leading the ideological fight on social media, but our own pragmatism, short-termism and fear of facing a headwind. Social and digital media offer us new opportunities that were previously unimaginable. Our Marxist education is limited to long articles on a little-viewed website, whilst a commercial media agency like Brut reaches hundreds of thousands of young progressives with videos on social media. We are not yet in a position to do the same, but that is our ambition.
- 333 Some say we should boycott Facebook instead of heavily sponsoring a multinational company, which is something we’d rather not do, but there is no equality in access to traditional media. And when it comes to social media sponsoring, parties like the NVA and Vlaams Belang spend five times more than we do. Given the context, we cannot be asked to withdraw from social media. Ending our social media presence would leave the field wide open to the right.
- 334 It is true that many social media platforms, like the traditional media, are owned by private capitalist groups. This is a major democratic and social problem. But this does not mean that we should do without such weapons. The digitalization of communication and media offers us enormous opportunities to develop the struggle against capitalism, to reach large target audiences, to spread our ideas, to raise awareness and to organize people on a large scale. If we want to win the hearts and minds of millions of people and lead the daily political struggle against the bourgeois par-

ties and the far right, we must fully engage in the digital revolution.

335 The far right understood the crucial impact of digital communication long before we did. Today, it influences millions of people around the world through social media. Breitbart, Steve Bannon's far-right website, reaches 45 million people every month with unfiltered hate speech and sensational fake news, which is massively disseminated by WhatsApp groups or organized communities on social media. Vlaams Belang invests at least one and a half million euros a year in Facebook ads. Through fake news about "criminal refugees" and anonymous accounts that actively post hate speech on social media, the right wing is creating a nauseating undercurrent in society and is shifting the frame of what is "normal". Are we going to leave social media and meme culture to the far right or are we going to make sure we create a left-wing countercurrent?

336 It would be naive, and an underestimation of the problem, to think that this phenomenon is confined to Flanders. The alt-right's lies and fake news factory is running at full speed internationally. Neither Wallonia nor Brussels are spared from its influence and a similar groundswell of racism, fake news and conspiracy theories is developing as much there as elsewhere. Just because the far right in the south is not organized does not mean that the effort to combat this growing trend is any less strategic.

337 Either we give up and leave social media to the far right, or we counterattack and develop powerful audiovisual channels ourselves, with our social vision, our political content and organizational strength, with a view to developing a counter-hegemony. The problem lies not in the nature of social media but in the fact that the far right uses it cleverly, to appeal to large segments of the population. When it comes to the use of digital technologies, social media and international cooperation in this area, we are far behind the alt-right, and we have every reason to be alarmed about it.

## The digital revolution

- 338 To develop and lead the social struggle, to involve and organize people, to make left-wing ideas mainstream, we need a powerful communication machine, focused on digital, social media and online TV.
- 339 There is enormous potential for mobilization, organization and awareness raising. To be at the forefront of the digital revolution, we will have to meet a number of challenges.
- 340 Online video. Video on social media is on the rise. In order to reach out to a broad layer of young people and the working class, we will put every effort into developing our own social media channels. We will ensure that parliamentary videos do not dominate and that we focus on social struggles from below. We will also put forward young people and workers as spokespersons. We are definitely taking it to the next level and starting to build our own media studio.
- 341 Conquering social media. We will continue to develop our presence on the various social media platforms. Alongside Facebook and Twitter, we will give priority to Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and WhatsApp. We will also explore the possibilities of Twitch, Clubhouse, Discord and other emerging social media. We will create communities where people can meet and build an army of digital activists, with locomotives in all the grassroots groups, to spread our content and campaigns. We will offer practical training on the use of social media.
- 342 Digital depth. In addition to the magazine, we will be developing a new digital platform dedicated to Marxist education. The aim is to realize our goals in the areas of Marxism, social debate and education. This platform will be aimed primarily at our members, workers and young people. It will focus on video productions, whilst also providing space

for longer podcasts and feature articles. We will also use this audiovisual wealth for education purposes.

**343** Digital organizing work. We also rely on digital technology to carry out our organizational tasks. This provides us with many opportunities to involve people more and to improve our organizational work. We're going to pay more attention to applications for grassroots groups, such as applications to facilitate door-to-door canvassing, leaflet distribution, call centres or the recruitment of new members, etc. These are not gimmicks, but technologies that can save us a great deal in terms of time and efficiency, enabling us to organize more people in the party more quickly. We will ensure that these digital applications are simple and accessible to organized members and group chairs.

**344** Our own PTB app. We are exploring the possibilities of a PTB app on which we could bring together current news, Marxist education and digital organizing work.

**345** Our members, our wealth. We will continue to develop communication with our consultative and organized members. For a growing party such as ours (we are now ten times larger than we were at the Renewal Congress), communicating with our members is essential. They are the heart of our party and should feel at home. Digital media is a good way for us to improve our recruitment procedures, to "take care" of our members and to better develop our grassroots groups. We will look into the possibilities of creating a separate section for members on our website.

**346** Internationalization. Digital media opens the door to collaboration opportunities on a global scale. Good examples are the No Profit On Pandemic campaign, developed, among others, with 13 other Marxist parties in the European Union, or the exchange of video reports.

