

# The Paradoxes of Success. Dutch Social Democracy and its Historiography

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Anniversaries of successful political parties, particularly if the birthdays are 'round' ones like centenaries, tend to call forth a barrage of self-congratulatory literature from political leaders, supplemented by scholarly analyses with varying degrees of sophistication explaining the reasons for the group's success. Remarkably, this scenario has not manifested itself in the case of the recent centennial celebrations of European Social Democracy, including that of the Dutch variant, the 'Partij van de Arbeid' (PvdA). Rather, the political leaders have written pieces full of self-doubt, while historians contributed what were sometimes bitter indictments of present-day European Social Democracy and its leaders<sup>1</sup>.

This is all the more surprising since, as Sir Ralf Dahrendorf and Klaus von Dohnanyi have recently reminded us<sup>2</sup>, European Social Democracy was an unabashed success story; the Social Democratic parties have dominated much of the political and social agenda in Europe during the twentieth century. The reasons for the unease, as Piet de Rooy has noted, for the PvdA<sup>3</sup>, lies in the ambivalence of the success story. Both the Socialists themselves and the scholarly community see the Social Democratic accomplishments tarnished by a nagging sense that the price for Social Democracy's political success was the loss of Socialism's ideological soul.

Paradoxically, this now very pervasive self-doubt is of rather recent origin. Until the last decade or so, most analysts (not to mention Social Democratic political leaders) celebrated the increasing conjunction of the Social Democrats political and social agenda and their electoral success with unabashed enthusiasm. Kurt Klotzbach entitled his history of the 'Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands' (SPD) after 1945 *Der Weg zur Staatspartei*<sup>4</sup>, and that proud boast would certainly hold even more true for the PvdA.

In fact, if there is a *Leitmotiv* to most of the literature on the 'Sociaal-democratische Arbeiders Partij' (SDAP) and the PvdA, it is a certain historicist tendency to read into the history of Dutch Democratic Socialism a straight-forward evolution toward full-scale acceptance of the pragmatic reformism that was to characterize all of West European Social Democracy after World War II<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, and not without some reason, the Dutch party is usually assigned a pioneering role in this story.

1 Contrast, for example, J. Perry, e. a., *Honderd jaar sociaal-democratie in Nederland, 1894-1994* (Amsterdam, 1994) with Klaus von Dohnanyi, 'Der Mythos der SPD', *Der Spiegel*, XLVIII (28 Nov. 1994) 50-52; and Daniel Singer, *Is Socialism doomed? The meaning of Mitterand* (New York, 1988).

2 Dohnanyi, 'Der Mythos' and Franz Kreuzer, ed., 'Die Zukunft der Sozialdemokratie. Ein Streitgespräch zwischen Franz Vranitzky und Ralf Dahrendorf', *Die Zukunft* (no. 8, 1990) 5-19.

3 P. de Rooy, *'Van uit een nieuwe wereld'. Over de periodieke somberheid en het utopisch verlangen in de Nederlandse sociaal-democratie* (Amsterdam, 1993).

4 Kurt Klotzbach, *Der Weg zur Staatspartei. Programmatik, praktische Politik und Organisation der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1945 bis 1965* (Bonn, 1982).

5 H. de Vos, *Geschiedenis van het socialisme in Nederland in het kader van zijn tijd* (Baam, 1976). *BMGN*, 110 (1995) afl. 1, 40-51

The literature on Dutch Social Democracy is, of course, vast and multi-faceted. A comprehensive review is clearly impossible in this short contribution<sup>6</sup>. Rather, I will restrict myself to some critical comments on relatively few works. These are grouped into what I believe continue to be the main areas of historiographic debate, ideology; voting patterns (the quest for the 'doorbraak'); and the party's coalition politics and legislative agenda (post-World War II Reformist Policies).

Before embarking on a more specific historiographic review of the history of Dutch Social Democracy, one, perhaps somewhat surprising, characteristic of the literature might be noted. The history of Socialism in The Netherlands has long attracted the attention of scholars outside of Holland, notably those in Germany (here Horst Lademacher at die University of Münster has played a pivotal role) and the Anglo-Saxon countries. The primary reason for this interest is the vanguard role which the SDAP and the PvdA played in what was to become the general evolutionary pattern of European Socialism. The remarkable language facilities of many Dutch scholars have also helped to generate interest in Dutch political history. A number of Dutch historians and political scientists, writing mostly in English or German, have enabled audiences unable to read Dutch to understand the intricacies of politics in The Netherlands<sup>7</sup>.

#### *Ideology. The Road from Revolution to Evolution*

At its founding in 1894<sup>8</sup> the SDAP did not seem destined for playing a unique role in the evolution of European Social Democracy. Borrowing the ideology and organizational patterns of the German SPD, the SDAP seemed destined, like its mentor, to find its political niche as the spokesman for the interests of the nascent industrial proletariat. However, most works on the early SDAP stress quite correctly that the party very rapidly developed a tendency toward pragmatism and the renunciation of violent revolutionary ambitions. A recent article<sup>9</sup> noted, for example, that even the party's founding program made no mention of the ultimate fall and crisis of capitalism. From the beginning, then, the SDAP's German model was the ideas of Eduard Bernstein rather than Karl Kautsky or Rosa Luxemburg. (Incidentally, this was equally true for the SPD, but as Susanne Miller has pointed out<sup>10</sup>, unlike their Dutch comrades, the

6 M. Brinkman, *Honderd jaar sociaal-democratie in boek en tijdschrift. Bibliografie ...* (Amsterdam, 1994).

7 A few examples are: Ken Gladdish, *Governing from the center. Politics and policy-making in The Netherlands* (Northern Illinois University Press, 1990); Horst Lademacher, *Zwei ungleiche Nachbarn* (Darmstadt, 1990); D. Bosscher, 'Die Rekonstruktion des Parteiensystems in den Niederlanden zwischen 1945 und 1952', in: H. Lademacher, J. Bosnians, ed., *Tradition und Neugestaltung. Zu Fragen des Wiederaufbaus in Deutschland und den Niederlanden in der frühen Nachkriegszeit* (Münster, 1991) 89-105; and H. W. von der Dunk, H. Lademacher, ed., *Auf dem Weg zum modernen Parteienstaat. Zur Entstehung, Organisation und Struktur politischer Parteien in Deutschland und den Niederlanden* (Melsungen, 1986).

8 A classic account is still D. J. Wansink, *Het socialisme op de tweesprong. De geboorte van de SDAP* (Haarlem, 1939).

9 E. Hansen, P. A. Prosper, 'Political economy and political action. The programmatic response of Dutch Social Democracy to the Depression crisis, 1929-39', *Journal of Contemporary History*, XXIX (1994) 135-136.

10 Susanne Miller, *Die SPD vor und nach Godesberg* (Bonn, 1974).

German party leaders refused to embrace 'Bernsteinianism' openly, and attempted to straddle the ideological fence between revolution and reformism.

The literature suggests at least two important reasons for this ideological development in Dutch Socialism. One was the succession of remarkably level-headed party leaders and ideologues. Two recent biographies of Wiardi Beekman and Henri Polak<sup>11</sup> demonstrate yet again the passionate commitment to political democracy of the early SDAP and labor union leaders. In this context it is not surprising that when the party's leader issued a half-hearted call for revolution in 1918, this was taken more seriously by the later Dutch fascists than by the SDAP's activists. A second factor was fortuitous rather than a virtue on the side of the SDAP. The Dutch Socialists had the good fortune of not confronting a serious Communist rival in The Netherlands<sup>12</sup>. Unlike especially their French comrades<sup>13</sup>, the Dutch Socialists did not have to constantly look over their left shoulders.

A number of scholarly analyses have been devoted to the SDAP's history in the 1930s. The literature reveals a remarkable consensus that the party's analysis of the Depression constituted a major turning point or at least acceleration of the SDAP's evolution toward reformism. With few exceptions<sup>14</sup> historians praise the SDAP's 1937 program as a clear break with the last vestiges of Marxist structural determinism, definitively setting the party on its path toward becoming a *volkspartij*<sup>15</sup>.

A second focal point of attention for the 1930s is the SDAP's role in developing the 1935 *Plan van de Arbeid*<sup>16</sup> as the party's (and the Socialist labor unions') answer to the Depression. With the benefit of hindsight it is clear that the *Plan* (and even more the campaign to popularize it!) was an emotional high point for many of the SDAP's activists at the time<sup>17</sup>.

The scholarly contributions tend to be rather historicist in tone, stressing the forward-looking aspects of the *Plan*. A variety of authors emphasize that the *Plan's* neo-corporatist elements reappeared in Dutch post-World War II economic thinking and

11 J. S. Wijne, *Stuuf Wiardi Beekman. Patriciër en sociaal-democraat* (Amsterdam, 1987); and S. Bloemgarten, *Henri Polak, sociaal democraat, 1868-1943* (The Hague, 1993).

12 Even the history of the Dutch Communist party by a long-time former party member, A. A. de Jonge, *Het communisme in Nederland* (The Hague, 1972) does not claim that the CPN was ever a decisive factor in Dutch politics.

13 Robert Verdier, *PS/PC. Une lutte pour l'entente* (Paris, 1976).

14 B.W. Schaper, e. a., *Het verbleekte ideaal. De linkse kritiek op de sociaal-democratie in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 1982).

15 See, for example, H. van Hulst, e. a., *Het roode vaandel volgen wij. Geschiedenis van de SDAP van 1880-1940* (The Hague, 1969); H. F. Cohen, *Om de vernieuwing van het socialisme. De politieke oriëntatie van de Nederlandse sociaal-democratie 1919-1930* (Leiden, 1974); P. J. Knegtman, *Socialisme en democratie. De SDAP tussen klasse en natie 1929-1939* (Amsterdam, 1989); and J. S. Wijne, 'Op weg naar de Partij van de Arbeid. Het beginsel van de SDAP van 1937 en het streven naar een democratisch-socialistische volkspartij', *Het vierde jaarboek voor het democratisch socialisme* (Amsterdam, 1983) 148-175.

16 For the official text see, NVV and SDAP, *Het Plan van de Arbeid. Rapport van de commissie uit NVV en SDAP* (Amsterdam, 1935).

17 J. Jansen van Galen, e. a., ed., *'Het moet, het kan! Op voor het Plan! Vijftig jaar Plan van de Arbeid* (Amsterdam, 1985); and G. Nederhorst, 'Het Plan van de Arbeid', *Het eerste jaarboek voor het democratisch socialisme* (Amsterdam, 1979) 109-136.

policies, that the *Plan* facilitated the later cooperation between Socialists and left-wing Catholics in the *rooms-rotte* coalitions, and that the proposal was instrumental in bringing the early post-war leaders of the PvdA, men like Willem Banning and Koos Vorrink, into the mainstream of Dutch Socialism<sup>18</sup>. With most scholars emphasizing the 1930's significance as preparing the way for the smooth road to post-war reformism, it is perhaps useful to note at least one collection of essays which is sharply critical of the Dutch Socialists' ideological evolution in the 1930s and beyond<sup>19</sup>.

World War II was a crucial period in the development of European Socialism. Precisely because the Social Democratic parties were out of power and persecuted by the Nazis and their collaborationist allies, they were forced to reexamine many of their ideological postulates, including the role of nationalism and fascism in modern European history. Emerging from the discussion of the Socialists' failure to understand the true nature and threat of fascism<sup>20</sup> were new proposals for the transformation of Democratic Socialism and the Socialist parties in post-war Europe<sup>21</sup>.

Never was Dutch Socialism's pioneering role more evident than in the years immediately following World War II. In retrospect, the party's self-transformation from class party to *volkspartij* set the pattern for what was to be the future of Democratic Socialism in Western Europe. The dissolution of the SDAP and its replacement by the new PvdA exemplified the straight-forward and consistent way in which the Dutch Socialists embraced the *volkspartij* concept.

It is also true that the historiography of these years comes closest to the danger of being characterized by what Peter Steinbach has called *Legitimationswissenschaft*<sup>22</sup>. Histories of the NVB and the founding of the PvdA<sup>23</sup>, as well as biographical and autobiographical studies of the PvdA's early leaders<sup>24</sup>, suggest forcefully that the transition from SDAP to PvdA was exceptionally smooth and successful. In order not to be overwhelmed by this retrospective picture of political bliss, it is useful to balance these accounts with reminiscences of those, like Sam de Wolff<sup>25</sup>, who bitterly opposed the de-Marxization of the party, and to recall that at least in the short-run the PvdA's

18 R. Abma, 'Het Plan van de Arbeid en de SDAP', *BMGN*, XCII (1977) 37-68; and Hansen, Prosper, 'Economy', 144.

19 Schaper, ed., *Ideaal*.

20 For contemporaneous developments in the German and French parties see, Erich Matthias, *Sozialdemokratie und Nation* (Stuttgart, 1952); and Marc Sadoun, *Les socialistes sous l'occupation. Résistance et collaboration* (Paris, 1982).

21 The most comprehensive and famous, albeit unsuccessful, example was undoubtedly, Léon Blum, *A l'échelle humaine* (Paris, 1945).

22 Peter Steinbach, 'Die SPD zwischen Tradition und Neubeginn. Programmatische Grundlinien im zeitgeschichtlichen Wandel', in: Winfried Becke, ed., *Die Kapitulation von 1945 und der Neubeginn in Deutschland* (Cologne, 1987) 300.

23 J. Bank, *Opkomst en ondergang van de Nederlandse Volksbeweging (NVB)* (Deventer, 1978); and H. M. Ruitenbeek, *Het ontstaan van de PvdA* (Amsterdam, 1955).

24 W. Drees, *Zestig jaar levenservaring* (Amsterdam, 1963); H. Daalder, N. Cramer, ed., *Willem Drees* (Houten, 1988); W. Drees, *Drees 90. Geschriften en gesprekken*, H. Daalder, ed. (Bussum, 1976); H. Zonneberg, *Willem Banning 1888-1971* (The Hague, 1988); and C. H. Wiedijk, *Koos Vorrink ... Een biografische studie (1891-1940)* (Amsterdam, 1986).

25 S. de Wolff, *Voor het land van belofte. Een terugblik op mijn leven* (Bussum, 1954 [reprint: Nijmegen, 1973]). But see also, M. van der Goes van Naters, *Met en tegen de tijd* (Amsterdam, 1980).

expectations of leading the way toward a complete restructuring of the Dutch political landscape were disappointed<sup>26</sup>.

Keeping the focus of attention on the advance of right-wing reformism has also meant that the remaining pockets of left-wing opposition in the PvdA tend to be rather neglected. This is less true for the 'Pacifistisch Socialistische Partij' (PSP), which split from the party in 1957<sup>27</sup>, than for the 'Sociaal Democratisch Centrum' (SDC), although the latter was for many years a thorn in the side of the PvdA's reformist leaders<sup>28</sup>.

The era of somewhat self-satisfied pragmatism turned sour as the 1950s drew to a close. Dissatisfaction with the policies of the bourgeois-PvdA coalition, which had governed The Netherlands throughout the 'long decade of the 1950s', had been growing for some years. The breakup of the coalition was a milestone of sorts; the Dutch Socialists were to spend more than a decade in the opposition. But the end of the decade brought more than a change of seats from the government to the opposition benches for the party. As in much of Europe and, for that matter, the rest of the world, youthful leftist elements challenged the seemingly undoubted verities of the post-war world.

The rise of *Nieuw Links* had some unique features. Like their counterparts in other countries, the Dutch leftists professed a vaguely populist, hyper-democratic, but not really Marxist ideology<sup>29</sup>, but only in The Netherlands did *Nieuw Links* decide on a *Marsch durch die Institutionen*, with the PvdA one of the primary, targeted *Institutionen*. In France the young 'revolutionaries' disregarded the sclerotic *Section Française de l'Ouvrière Internationale* (SFIO) as irrelevant for the political future of the country, and in Germany the specific nature of the grand coalition led the young *Erneuerer* to concentrate their efforts on the *Ausserparlamentarische Opposition*. In The Netherlands, however, for much of the decade of the 1960s *Nieuw Links* elements fought for control of the party with the 'old guard', and at least on paper by 1969 they had won.

The literature on the rise and integration of *Nieuw Links* also exhibits a strain of historicism. While it is perhaps not surprising that the theoretical contributions of

26 Horst Lademacher, 'Frühe Versuche zur Änderung der Parteienlandschaft nach 1945', in: Von der Dunk, e. a., ed., *Weg*, 303-318.

27 L. van der Land, *Her omslaan van de Pacifistisch Socialistische Partij* (Amsterdam, 1962); and J. Hofmann, P. den Kamp, e. a., *Ontwapenend. Geschiedenis van 25 jaar PSP, 1957-1982* (Amsterdam, 1982).

28 For the points of the controversy see, W. Schermerhom and N. A. Donkersloot, *De derde weg* (Amsterdam [1952]); and for a more recent sympathetic account of the SDC's views, Th. van Tijn, 'Koude oorlog in de PvdA. Het sociaal-democratisch centrum, 1955-1959', in: Schaper, ed., *Ideaal*, 69-77. Also of interest is S. W. Couwenberg, *Modern socialisme. Achtergrond, ontwikkeling, perspectief* (Alphen a/d Rhijn, 1972). Couwenberg was a leading figure in the SDC.

29 For this reason attempts by the orthodox Marxists in the now defunct SDC, such as S. W. Couwenberg, *Naar nieuwe politieke verhoudingen* (Bilthoven, 1967), to influence and steer *Nieuw Links* were rather unsuccessful.

30 H. van den Doel, e. a., *Tien over rood. Uitdaging van Nieuw Links aan de PvdA* (Amsterdam, 1966); J. Nagel, *Ha, die PvdA!* (Amsterdam, 1966); Th. van Tijn, *De macht van de rooie ruggen* (Amsterdam, 1967); and H. Leune, e. a., ed., *Mooi rood is niet lelijk* (Rotterdam, 1969). For a summary discussion of *Nieuw Links'* contribution to the programmatic debate within the PvdA see, B. Boivin, e. a., *Een*

*Nieuw Links* leaders<sup>30</sup> read as though their authors had just invented the wheel, it is rather more questionable that scholarly contributions favorable to *Nieuw Links* also insisted the history of the PvdA had just begun with the arrival of the newcomers. In these works the history of the PvdA tended to be treated as a sort of historical mistake until the arrival of *Nieuw Links* put the party on its correct path<sup>31</sup>. In this atmosphere of heightened emotionalism it is understandable that the critics of *Nieuw Links* repaid in the same coin. They treated the reformers as the vanguard of the apocalypse, ready to destroy all that was decent in Democratic Socialism<sup>32</sup>.

In retrospect it has become clear that *Nieuw Links* contributed more heat than light to the development of Dutch Social Democracy. The literature, too, has become less virulent. More recent publications have not only placed the significance of *Nieuw Links* into a larger historical and comparative context, but even some of the *Nieuw Links* activists themselves (many of whom now hold responsible positions in the PvdA) have mellowed over the years<sup>33</sup>.

The real significance of the 1960s and 1970s was not the arrival of *Nieuw Links* or the renewed discussion of a fundamental restructuring of the Dutch party system<sup>34</sup>, but the rise of Joop den Uyl. Here was a towering figure who not only managed to integrate the *Nieuw Links* elements peacefully, and, on the whole constructively, into the PvdA, but who also succeeded in giving the party a new agenda in the age of *Entideologisierung* and leading it back into governmental responsibility. A scholarly biography of Den Uyl remains a desideratum, but we are fortunate in having readily accessible a number of the seminal articles which Den Uyl published in these years, notably in the pages of *Socialisme en Democratie*<sup>35</sup>.

The scholarly literature, too, has long been fascinated by Den Uyl and the politics of the 1970s<sup>36</sup>. While most analysts accept the growing *Entideologisierung* and the loss

verjongingskuur voor de PvdA. *Opkomst, ontwikkeling en betekenis van Nieuw Links* (Deventer, 1978); and for a compendium of important *Nieuw Links* documents, J. van Dijk, ed., *Nieuw Links in de PvdA* (Amersfoort, 1969).

31 This is especially true for A. Bleich, *Een partij in de tijd. Veertig jaar Partij van de Arbeid, 1946-1986* (Amsterdam, 1986), but see also R. H. Kingma, *Nieuw Links in de PvdA. Voorspel, ontwikkeling en confrontatie (1946) 1966-1969* (Amsterdam, 1971); and B. Middel, *De nieuwe elite van de PvdA* (Groningen, 1976).

32 J.H. Scheeps, *Het progressieve als waardeloze pronk* (Apeldoorn, 1971); and J. de Kadt, e. a., *Afscheid van de PvdA? Van democratie naar volksdemocratie* (Amsterdam, 1969).

33 G. Puchinger, *Hergroepering der partijen?* (Delft, 1968); and J. H. Scheeps, *Twaalf over drie* (Apeldoorn, 1972).

34 R. Kroes, *New Left, Nieuw Links, New Left. Verzet, beweging, verandering in Amerika, Nederland, Engeland* (Alphen a/d Rijn, 1975); and Ph. van Praag, *Strategie en Illusie. Elf jaar intern debat in de PvdA (1966-1977)* (Amsterdam, 1990). See also, the retrospective collection of pieces originally written in the years 1975-1978 (mostly for the *Haagse Post*) by one of the leaders of *Nieuw Links*, H. van den Doel, *Het biefstuk socialisme en economie* (Utrecht, 1978).

35 See, J.M. den Uyl, e. a., *Een stem die telt. Vernieuwing van de parlementaire democratie* (Amsterdam, 1967); and the collection of essays, *Inzicht en uitzicht. Opstellen over economie en politiek* (Amsterdam, 1978).

36 A. Peper, e. a., ed., *Wetenschappelijk socialisme, over de plannen van SDAP en PvdA* (Amsterdam, 1982); H. Daalder, *Politiek en historie. Opstellen over Nederlandse politiek en vergelijkende politieke wetenschap*, J. Th. J. van den Berg, B. A. G. M. Tromp, ed. (Amsterdam, 1990); and C. P. Middendorp, *Ideology in Dutch Policies ... 1970-1985* (Assen, 1991).

of idealism as facts of political life in The Netherlands and elsewhere (in the discussion with Sir Ralf Dahrendorf cited earlier, the Austrian chancellor Kurt Vranitzky noted that people in Europe started to laugh as soon as politicians mentioned visionary idealism<sup>37</sup>), there are some critical voices as well. These complain that the absorption of *Nieuw Links* into mainstream politics and the homogenization of ideological positions has meant the loss of Social Democracy's unique vision of future-oriented idealism<sup>38</sup>.

### *The quest for the 'doorbraak'*

The PvdA's postulated (and sometimes lamented) ideological *Drang zur Mitte* was and is, of course, intimately related to the quest for votes in a political democracy. In any discussion of Dutch politics this topic involves the relationship of the Socialists' sought-for *doorbraak* and the concept of *verzuiling* which, according to most scholars, dominated the political landscape in The Netherlands until well into the 1960s<sup>39</sup>.

A number of scholarly contributions have analyzed the PvdA's attempts to achieve a *doorbraak* among voters and simultaneously break up the rigid contours of the *verzuiling* system<sup>40</sup>.

But there is also a good deal of persuasive literature explaining why the dreams of early post-war PvdA leaders for a complete restructuring of the party system in The Netherlands were illusions. *Herstel en vernieuwing* was the mood of the 'long decade' of the 1950s<sup>41</sup>.

A unique component of the PvdA's efforts to become fully accepted as a *volkspartij* was its attitude toward Dutch colonialism in general and more specifically the Indonesian independence movement. The party's leaders were convinced that only by following the lead of their Catholic coalition partner could they succeed in establishing the PvdA's position as a true mainstream Dutch political party. This decision was not without its contemporary political price, including a loss of members and some bitter

37 Kreuzer, 'Zukunft', 5-19.

38 C. J. M. Schuyt, S. Stuurman, ed., *Sociaal-democratie tussen zakelijkheid en moraal* (Amsterdam, 1991).

39 This is not the place to review the vast literature on the subject. The primary proponent of the concept is, of course, A. Lijphart, *Verzuiling, pacificatie en kentering in de Nederlandse politiek* (3rd. ed.; Amsterdam, 1979) (originally published as *The politics of accommodation* [2nd. ed.; Berkeley, 1975]). A more recent criticism of the thesis is provided by S. Stuurman, *Verzuiling, kapitalisme en patriarchaat* (Nijmegen, 1983).

40 J. C. H. Blom, W. ten Have, 'De sociaal-democratie tussen doorbraak en coalitie', *Socialisme en democratie*, XLIII (1986) 3-8; and J. Bank, 'De theorie van de vernieuwing en de praktijk van de wederopbouw. Het Nederlandse socialisme in de tweede helft van de jaren veertig', in: J. Bank, e. a., ed., *In dienst van het gehele volk. De Westeuropese sociaal-democratie tussen aanpassing en vernieuwing, 1945-1950* (Amsterdam, 1987) 98-121.

41 See the collection of articles from a special edition of the *BMGN*, J. C. H. Blom, G. N. van der Plaats, ed., *Wederopbouw, welvaart en onrust. Nederland in de jaren vijftig en zestig* (Houten, 1986); J. H. Scheps, 'Van arbeiderspartij tot volkspartij (1940-1945)', in: J. Bank, S. Temming, ed., *Van brede visie tot smalle marge. Acht prominente socialisten over de SDAP en de PvdA* (Alphen a/d Rijn, 1981) 59-87; J. C. H. Blom, 'De tweede wereldoorlog en de Nederlandse samenleving. Continuïteit en verandering', in: C. B. Wels, ed., *Vaderlands verleden in veelvoud* (The Hague, 1980) 336-357. See also, H. Deugd, *Tussen doorbraak en reclame. De PvdA verkiezingscampagnes van 1956 tot 1967* (Rotterdam, 1988).

personal animosities, notably between the prime minister Willem Drees and the party's parliamentary leader in the early years after the war, Van der Goes van Naters<sup>42</sup>. Some recent analyses are also sharply critical of the PvdA's position as essentially contrary to Socialist ideals of self-determination and human freedom<sup>43</sup>. Still, the controversies over colonialism in the PvdA were mild tensions compared to the upheavals which literally split the French Socialists. The question of Algerian independence led to vituperations of the Socialist leaders, notably Guy Mollet<sup>44</sup>, which have no equivalent in Dutch political literature.

### *Post World War II Reformist Policies*

The PvdA was a member of the governing coalition from 1945 to the end of the 1950s. These years saw the creation of the modern social welfare state in The Netherlands, and the PvdA played a major part in its construction. Indeed, both party leaders and scholars regard this time period as the most successful era in the party's history<sup>45</sup>, although, paradoxically, it is also the least well-studied one.

The assessment of the PvdA's reformist policies in terms of success or failure is intricately tied to the debate over the party's coalition decisions, and that in turn is part of the still on-going debate over the concept of the *uiterste noodzaak*. The history of Dutch cabinet formations, at least in its structural and institutional parameters, has been well-established<sup>46</sup>, and on the surface the PvdA became an integral part of the Dutch governing elite after World War II.

However, a series of publications by H. Daudt in the 1970s and 1980s<sup>47</sup> have called this facile conclusion into question. Daudt contends the Socialists were accepted into the cabinet only when the bourgeois partners felt the PvdA's constituency needed to be pacified by the illusion of sharing power. In effect, the PvdA became a fig leaf for policies that were often contrary to the interests of its core constituency. Whenever the danger of political instability had passed, the Socialists were unceremoniously kicked out of the cabinet. While provocative, Daudt's theory has not been without its critics.

42 M. van der Goes van Naters, 'Het nieuwe bestand en de grote conflicties (1945-1950)', in: Bank, ed., *Visie*, 119-140; A. Lijphart, *The trauma of decolonization. The Dutch and West New Guinea* (New Haven, 1966); and J. Bank, 'Drees en de Indonesische revolutie', in: *Drees*, Daalder, ed., 109-136.

43 F. van Baardewijk, 'De PvdA van het koninkrijk 1945-1947', *Het tweede jaarboek voor het democratisch socialisme* (Amsterdam, 1980) 164-212.

44 See, for example, André Philip, *Les socialistes* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1967); and Michel Winock, *La République se meurt* (Paris, 1978).

45 W. Rok, 'Het verleden van de sociaal-democratie en haar opdracht voor de toekomst', and B. Tromp, 'Gouden jaren voor het democratisch socialisme'?, in: Bank, *Dienst*, 147-157 and 13-20 resp.

46 F. J. F. M. Duynstee, *De kabinetformaties 1946-1965* (Deventer, 1966); and P. F. Maas, *Kabinetformaties 1959-1973* (The Hague, 1982). See also, Steven B. Wolinetz, *Party re-alignment in the Netherlands* (Ph. D diss. Yale University, 1973); and H. Daalder, 'Parties and politics in the Netherlands', *Political Studies*, III (1965) 1-16.

47 H. Daudt, 'Problemen bij de coalitievorming in de Nederlandse politiek', *Socialisme en democratie*, XXXIV (March, 1977) 99-105, 'De ontwikkeling van de politieke machtsverhoudingen in Nederland na 1945', in: G. A. Kooy, e. a., ed., *Nederland na 1945. Beschouwingen over ontwikkeling en beleid* (Deventer, 1980) 178-197, and *Coalitievorming in de na-oorlogse Nederlandse politiek* (Amsterdam, 1985).

They contend the bourgeois parties, notably the KVP, did not present nearly as united a front as Daudt claims. Rather, the changes in policy direction and coalition composition were in large part a function of shifts within the Catholic polity<sup>48</sup>.

An example of such a seismic shift within Dutch political Catholicism was the 1954 Catholic bishops' *Mandement*, a clear effort by the ecclesiastical hierarchy to discourage the left wing drift of the Catholic constituency. The *Mandement* is often cited as evidence for Daudt's thesis, and the PvdA's decision to appease rather than openly confront the Catholics' challenge as proof that the PvdA failed to recognize the concept of *uiterste noodzaak* 49. In a sense, the debate over the *uiterste noodzaak* is a little beside the point, because the PvdA leaders quite deliberately chose to follow a policy of appeasement in regard to the *Mandement* because they felt remaining in the coalition would bring political benefits to the party. In retrospect, remaining in the coalition for another five years brought a mixed bag of results: Diminishing legislative influence, but increasing success in attracting middle class swing votes to the PvdA.

Remarkably, with the exception of the weak left wing, the leaders' decision on remaining part of the coalition and not challenging directly the *Mandement* was met with relatively little critical comment from within the party or the scholarly community at the time. The flood of analysis and self-criticism did not come until the breakup of the coalition in 1959. Then a number of party leaders<sup>50</sup> contended that the party had stayed in the cabinet far too long. This line was continued by *Nieuw Links* and its allies, which argued there were very few *overeenkomsten* between the PvdA and any bourgeois partners, especially the KVP 51.

An assessment of the thesis (or perhaps better, accusation) that the PvdA was duped by its coalition partners is not possible without examining the PvdA's policy objectives in the 1950s and 1960s, and equally important, to place these goals in the context of the larger Dutch political landscape in these years. A number of scholars have noted that the post-war era in The Netherlands (and Western Europe in general) was not a time that favored radical socio-economic innovation. In fact, the climate for democratic social revolution was particularly unfavorable in Holland<sup>52</sup>. In contrast to France, in The Netherlands there was not even the *vague de nationalisation* 53 which provided that country with a verisimilitude of radical change. In this sense, then, the PvdA's expressed desire for a radical *maatschappelijke omvorming* was effectively blocked by the larger political environment. However, as a number of scholars have noted, the

48 A. Visser, *Alleen bij uiterste noodzaak? De rooms-rode samenwerking en het einde van de brede basis 1948-1958* (Amsterdam, 1986); and J. Bosnians, 'Historische twijfel aan de uiterste noodzaak'. *De onzin van Daudt*, *Ada Politica*, XXII (1987) 227-233 and 250-251.

49 W. Banning, *Ons socialisme ... Een verweer en appèl naar aanleiding van het Mandement 1954 ...* (1954).

50 E. A. Vermeer, *Balans per 31-12-59. Terugblik op een jaar oppositie* (Amsterdam, [1960]); and A. Vondeling, *Nasmaak en voorproef* (Amsterdam, 1968).

51 J. Th. J. van den Berg, 'Democratische hervormingen, politieke machtsverhoudingen en coalitievorming in Nederland', *Acta Politica*, XXI (1986) 265-290. See also, Daudt, 'Problemen'.

52 H. W. von der Dunk, 'Tussen welvaart en onrust: Nederland van 1955 tot 1973', *BMGN*, CI (1986) 2-20; and J. C. H. Blom, 'Jaren van tucht en ascese. Enige beschouwingen over de stemming in Herrijzend Nederland (1945-1950)', *BMGN*, XCVI (1981) 300-333.

53 Jacques Chapsal, *La vie politique en France depuis 1940* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1969) 98.

PvdA's own historical tradition also put brakes on the party's becoming a vehicle for radical change. Keeping in mind the SDAP's plans for solving the problems of the Great Depression, the PvdA's quiet abandonment of Hein Vos' proposals for full-scale *planisme* and the party's acceptance of neo-corporatism after World War II are not altogether surprising. It is perhaps symptomatic that the one nationalization scheme that was carried out after World War II, the nationalization of the 'Nederlandse Bank', was a demand that had already surfaced in the *Plan van de Arbeid*<sup>54</sup>.

Judgments of the PvdA's economic and social policies in the crucial post-war period can be divided along ideological and chronological lines: Scholars more sympathetic to what would become *Nieuw Links* positions tend to be critical of what they see as the abandonment of fundamental Socialist positions<sup>55</sup>, while others more favorable to 'pragmatism' see in the party's cooperation with its bourgeois partners evidence that the Dutch Socialists had abandoned chasing after unattainable goals and had achieved the status of a mainstream *volkspartij*<sup>56</sup>. (Incidentally, neo-corporatism rather than 'socialization' was the pattern established in other West European countries as well<sup>57</sup>. Fortunately, we do not need to rely exclusively on the scholarly battles. A perceptive collection of reminiscences by a number of contemporary party activists provides a useful first-hand account of the controversies<sup>58</sup>.

After the *Sturm und Drang* of the 1950s and 1960s the debate over the future of the party became rather muted in the 1970s and 1980s. The tone was set by Joop den Uyl's emphasis on the *smalle marge* as spelling success or failure in the tightly contested race for voters in the middle of the political spectrum. Like other West European Social Democratic parties, the PvdA became a vote-getting machine to achieve incremental reforms; Den Uyl specifically identified his vision for the PvdA with the Bad Godesberg program of the West German SPD<sup>59</sup>.

Finally, a few remarks on the PvdA's role in Dutch foreign relations. Aside from its continuous activism in the Socialist International, this is a field in which the party over the years has shown less interest and certainly less influence than in domestic affairs<sup>60</sup>;

54 Hansen, Prosper, 'Economy', 139-140.

55 L. de Wolff, 'Sociaal-democratie en neo-corporatisme', *Het eerste jaarboek voor het democratisch socialisme* (Amsterdam, 1979) 41-71; and F. J. ter Heide, 'Ordening en verdeling'. *Besluitvorming over sociaal-economisch beleid in Nederland 1949-1958* (Kampen, 1986).

56 J. G. Abert, *Economie policy and planning in The Netherlands, 1950-1965* (New Haven, 1969); and P. Fortuyn, *Sociaal-economische politiek in Nederland, 1945-49* (Alphen a/d Rijn, 1981).

57 Diethelm Prowe, 'Economie democracy in Post World War II Germany. Corporatist crisis response, 1945-1948', *Journal of Modern History*, LVII (Sept. 1985) 451-482.

58 Bank, Temming, ed., *Visie*, 59-87.

59 J. M. den Uyl, *Inzicht*; and *Om de kwaliteit van het bestaan* (Amsterdam, 1963). See also, B. Peper, 'The Netherlands. A permissive response', in: A. Cox, ed., *Politics, policy, and the European recession* (New York, 1982); and R. B. Andeweg, *Dutch voters adrift. On Explanations of electoral change (1963-1977)* (Leiden, 1982).

60 A good introduction is D. F. J. Bosscher, 'De Partij van de Arbeid en het buitenlands beleid (1945-1973)', *BMGN*, CI (1986) 38-51. See also, J. J. C. Voorhoeve, *Peace, profits, and principles. A study of Dutch foreign policy* (The Hague, 1979); and Samuel I. P. van Campen, *The quest for security. Some aspects of Netherlands foreign policy, 1945-1950* (The Hague, 1958).

Liberals and Christian Democrats, not Social Democrats, held the foreign relations portfolio in the post-war cabinets.

Interestingly, with the exception of a not very serious running controversy over the recognition of the former German Democratic Republic in the 1960s, there was (and is) little disagreement on the foreign policy issue in the PvdA. The Netherlands' integration into the Western alliance was accepted as virtually axiomatic, and the party's rank-and-file tended to be even more enthusiastic about European integration than some of the leaders. (Willem Drees, for example, was rather more pessimistic about European political unity than, for example, Sicco Mansholt or Marinus van der Goes van Naters<sup>61</sup>.) Still, the party as a whole accepted with little or no reservation each of the milestones on the road to the European Union from the Schuman Plan and the European Defense Community<sup>62</sup> to the Common Market. Some leaders even pushed early on for the creation of a supra-national European progressive party<sup>63</sup>.

### *The Future*

As a general rule, historians are well advised not to embark on future prognostications, but in the case of the Dutch Socialist party the past history seems to establish such a clear pattern of development, that there is at least a modicum of safety in looking forward. The PvdA and its predecessor played a pioneering role in the self-transformation of European Social Democracy from political groups that represented a single societal constituency to parties that have become genuine left-of-center progressive *volkspartijen*. This has become the established norm in Western Europe, and is unlikely to change in the future. Moreover, as a pragmatic *volkspartij* the PvdA has become and continues to be a genuine political success story. It is not insignificant that while the Social Democratic parties in neighboring countries are struggling to attain (or retain) governmental responsibility in the 1990s, the PvdA continues to be a member of the Dutch national coalition. Indeed, a Social Democrat is again the prime minister of The Netherlands.

It is precisely for its pioneering role that the PvdA's history has so long fascinated both Dutch and non-Dutch scholars. In a very real sense the history of Dutch Socialism is far more than the story of a single political party in a small country. Rather, the PvdA's history has achieved typological significance considerably beyond the borders of The Netherlands. True, this development also brought with it a rather historicist emphasis in many of the analyses, but perhaps this is a small price to pay for a particularly rich historiography.

61 W. Asbeek Brusse, 'The Dutch socialist party', in: Richard T. Griffith, ed., *Socialist parties and the question of Europe in the 1950s* (Leiden, 1993) 106-134.

62 A. E. Kersten, 'Niederländische Regierung, Bewaffnung Westdeutschlands und EVG', in: H. E. Volkman, W. Schwengler, ed., *Die Europäische Verteidigungsgemeinschaft. Stand und Probleme der Forschung* (Boppard a Rh., 1985).

63 A. Manning, 'Die Niederlande und Europa von 1945 bis zum Beginn der fünfziger Jahre', *Vierteljahrshäfte für Zeitgeschichte*, XXIX (1981) 1-20; W. J. Veenstra, 'De Partij van de Arbeid en Europa', *Internationale Spectator* (April 1977) 246-255; H. Vredeling, 'Naar een progressieve Europese partij', *Socialisme en democratie*, XXVII (1970) 144-151; and A. Mozer-Ebbinge, R. Cohen, ed., *Alfred Mozer. 'Gastarbeider' in Europa* (Zutphen, 1980).

While it is difficult to predict the PvdA's future history, the historian is on somewhat firmer ground in expressing some wishes as to where the future historiography of the party should go. It seems to me that there are three areas that have been rather neglected in recent writings. (Incidentally, these remarks are equally valid for other European Social Democratic parties.)

First of all, analyses of the evolution of ideological developments among Dutch Social Democrats have been rather neglected since the 1950s. After the rush of new ideas from *Nieuw Links* proved to be neither very new nor much of a set of ideas, all too many historians contented themselves with the notion that the absence of ideology was in fact the Social Democrats' ideology. This is, I think, an unwarranted oversimplification. Post-1970 ideas for the future of Dutch and European society coming from the Social Democrats are clearly not those that were enunciated in the 1930s and 1940s, but they do constitute a specific set of values which differs from those of their political rivals and which do need to be analyzed in more detail.

This needs to be done, I think, in the context of the emerging and by now virtually complete Dutch and West European tertiary industrial society. And this brings me to the second set of desiderata for future historiographic efforts. The traditional Social Democratic ideology was created as an answer to the specific national challenges of a secondary industrial society. Western Europe especially after World War II, however, as a recent book by Hartmut Kaelble has eloquently demonstrated<sup>64</sup>, has become a tertiary industrial society in which national boundaries are becoming increasingly less important. Histories of the PvdA, especially those covering events since the 1970s, should, I think, take more account of this development. Studies of the PvdA in the past have tended to be rather introspective, an emphasis that was perhaps more justified for the period before 1970 than after that date.

Finally, I think, we need more work on the PvdA's role in foreign relations. There is no doubt that for the most part PvdA political leaders were not the movers and shakers in the foreign policy establishment, but it is equally true that many of the ideas which formed the basis for the present-day European Union emanated from the ranks of the Social Democrats and were only belatedly and often grudgingly accepted by the bourgeois political leaders who structured Dutch foreign policy. Historians, I think, would do well to give more credit to the traditions of internationalism among Dutch and other European Social Democrats than they have in the past.

64 H. Kaelble, *Auf dem Weg zu einer europäischen Gesellschaft. Eine Sozialgeschichte Westeuropas, 1880-1980* (Munich, 1987).

## De ekster en de kooi. Over het (bedrieglijke) succes van de theoretische geschiedenis in Nederland

JO TOLLEBEEK

De gebroeders De Goncourt vertellen in hun *Journal* een fraaie anekdote. Toen zij op een avond in april 1865 bij hun collega-romancier Ernest Feydeau dineerden, kwam — als zo vaak — Prins Napoleon ter sprake. Feydeau had een bezoek gebracht aan het huis in Romeinse stijl dat de Prins had laten optrekken. In de met renaissancemeubilair ingerichte antichambre gekomen, had de schrijver opgemerkt dat er nog een ivoren trap nodig was en een kooi, eveneens van ivoor. 'Op een goede dag ging hij erheen en vond er een Chinese kooi: een ivoren kooi die driehonderd frank gekost zou hebben ... Hij schreef het jammer te vinden dat er geen ekster in zat, zoals dat in Rome de gewoonte was. Hij kwam er een volgende keer, zag een ekster zonder staart en schreef in het bezoekersboek: 'Ernest Feydeau, die het jammer vindt dat de ekster geen staart heeft'. Hij kwam er weer en trof een ekster aan met staart, maar die niet praatte. Hij schreef: 'Ernest Feydeau die het jammer vindt dat de ekster niet praat'. De Prins kwam hem tegen en zei: 'U verveelt me met alles wat u me vraagt! Ik heb u een kooi gegeven, een ekster, een staart! ...'. En daar moest Feydeau het voorlopig mee stellen 1.

Dat was in elk geval meer dan de kadavers waarmee Cd. Busken Huet zich geconfronteerd wist. Toen die in december 1878, na een lezingentournee door zijn land van herkomst, in Parijs terugkeerde, kreeg één van zijn correspondenten te horen: '... zo vaak ik Nederland terugzie, ontvang ik den indruk van een land, gelegen aan de kust der Doode Zee, waar de vogels niet overheen kunnen vliegen zonder te sterven'. *Het Land van Rembrand* (1882-1884) mocht dan nog als 'eene stelselmatige lofredde op de Nederlanders' zijn opgezet, Huet bleef zich ergeren aan de achterlijkheid van zijn landgenoten en — meer specifiek — aan de treurige toestand van de nationale letteren. Toen de criticus in mei 1886 overleed werd op zijn schrijftafel de aanhef van een artikel gevonden, waarin werd vastgesteld: 'Geen Hollandsch auteur heeft in de laatste vijftig jaren een hollandsch boek geschreven, proza of verzen, hetwelk door Europa als eene aanwinst beschouwd is'<sup>2</sup>.

Huet voelde zich teleurgesteld en verbitterd; de jonge communist Jan Romein ging verder. Toen ook hij — in 1918 — verklaarde Nederland te beschouwen als een land dat voor de overvliegende vogels fataal was, toonde hij slechts minachting voor de

\* Een eerdere versie van deze tekst werd voorgedragen in de door de Rotterdamse Kunststichting georganiseerde lezingenreeks *Het Land van Huizinga* (23 november 1993); latere versies werden gepresenteerd in Amsterdam (13 december 1994) en Gent (11 januari 1995).

1 E. en J. de Goncourt, *Journal. Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, R. Ricatte, ed. (Parijs, 1989) I, 1152. Ik citeer uit de Nederlandse keuze uit het *Dagboek*. *Idem, De ivoren kooi*, vert. L. van Maris (Amsterdam, 1989) 19-20.

2 Cd. Busken Huet, *Brieven* (Haarlem, 1890) II, 106 en 277, en *Idem, 'De romantiek in Nederland'* in: *Idem, Litterarische fantasien en kritieken* (Haarlem, s. a.) XXII, 201.