



# The Labor Party of Belgium (PTB-PVDA): A Modern Radical Left Party?

Pascal Delwit\*

Centre d'étude de la vie politique (Cevipol), Department of Political Science, Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Brussels, Belgium

In a phase of political and electoral downturn of several radical left parties, the Labor Party of Belgium (PTB-PVDA) strikes the imagination due to its increasing influence. A party of Maoist origin, the PTB-PVDA has been undergoing organizational and communication change since the mid-2000's. In this article, we argue that these changes have created a very singular party. Going against prevailing partisan developments, the heart of the party remains the party-in-central-office. The party has quite a dynamic life between elections, seeks to recruit and recruits party members, trains and mobilizes its membership, borrowing from the paths of historical Belgian pillarization or the model of party of social integration. At the same time, the PTB-PVDA incorporates current partisan modifications: a strong personification, a great investment in social networks, a populist rhetoric, a redesigned communication and a focus on elections to be able to benefit from public party funding. This combination of old and new makes it one of a kind party in Europe and among the European Radical Left. However, this original organizational scheme raises the question of its fate: the aggregation of the various elements requires that it remains in the parliamentary opposition.

**Keywords:** radical left, socialist populism, Labor Party of Belgium, left parties, left populism

## OPEN ACCESS

### Edited by:

Vincenzo Emanuele,  
Guido Carli Free International  
University for Social Studies, Italy

### Reviewed by:

Juan Rodríguez Teruel,  
University of Valencia, Spain  
Raul Gomez,  
University of Liverpool,  
United Kingdom

### \*Correspondence:

Pascal Delwit  
pascal.delwit@ulb.be

### Specialty section:

This article was submitted to  
Elections and Representation,  
a section of the journal  
Frontiers in Political Science

**Received:** 26 January 2022

**Accepted:** 21 April 2022

**Published:** 11 May 2022

### Citation:

Delwit P (2022) The Labor Party of  
Belgium (PTB-PVDA): A Modern  
Radical Left Party?  
Front. Polit. Sci. 4:862949.  
doi: 10.3389/fpos.2022.862949

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last 15 years, European radical left parties have enjoyed an upsurge in attention and analysis. March (2011) was at the forefront of this renewal of work and even questioned it in the light of the emergence of new mainstream parties (March, 2008, 2015). In fact, the number of pieces of work devoted to this family of parties has grown.

Particular focus has been placed on several organizations: Syriza in Greece (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014; Ramiro and Gomez, 2017), La France insoumise (Cervera-Marzal, 2021; Chloé et al., 2021), Podemos in Spain (Mazzolini and Borriello, 2021), The Portuguese Left Bloc—BE—(Lisi, 2009, 2016), and to a lesser extent, Die Linke in Germany (Landwehrle, 2010; Chiocchetti, 2017). Paradoxically, one of the biggest parties on the radical left, the Progressive Party of Working People—AKEL—has not been revisited in any great depth (Charalambous, 2012; Katsourides, 2016). In the same way, some relevant Communist Parties, such as the Portuguese—PCP— or Greek—KKE—Communist Parties (Jalali and Lisi, 2012), take up little of the new research. Incidentally, the Finnish Left Alliance—VAS—the Swedish Left Party—VP—or the Norwegian Socialist Left Party—SV—are more likely to be approached on the basis of their membership of the New Politics Party family (Bornschieer, 2010; Haugsgjerd Allernm, 2013, p. 74).

In the main, attention has been focused on a few parties in Southern Europe: Syriza, Podemos, La France insoumise and, to a lesser extent, the Left Bloc; in other words, the post-2008 movements and parties (Charalambous, 2022, p. 4), paying special attention to left-wing populism (Borriello and Jäger, 2020, 2021; Charalambous and Ioannou, 2020).

Almost 15 years after the beginning of this—modest—wave of articles and pieces of work on the radical left, the politico-electoral picture one gets of this political family is, strangely, significantly more somber than it looked at the close of the 2000's and in the opening years of the following decade. Syriza lost the elections in 2019. In 2019, Podemos was notching up scores which were substantially lower than what it had enjoyed in 2015. In Cyprus, the AKEL has experienced a considerable collapse if one compares where it is now to the legislative elections of 2016, not to mention 2011. The Dutch Socialist Party—SP—is facing a devastating demise and in 2021, Die Linke almost failed to win a single seat in the Bundestag. For its part, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia—KSCM—could not escape this fate in the 2021 election. For the first time since the fall of the communist regime, KSCM is no longer represented in the Chamber.

This rapid overview bears witness to a difficult series of events for the radical left: things are undoubtedly looking less cheerful than they seemed 6–7 years ago. This slump was, unsurprisingly, reflected in the European elections. The Left could only count 39 MEPS from its ranks after the spring 2019 elections, compared with 52 5 years previously. Of course, the overall picture is not identical, but there is a clear direction of travel. In this group, there are three radical left parties which are bucking the trend: The Left in Slovenia and in Luxembourg, and the Labor Party of Belgium—PTB-PVDA. These three parties are making progress in their respective states. They are not very well-known (Lourenço, 2021, p. 774). The Slovenian Left and the Left in Luxembourg, on the one hand, and the PTB-PVDA, on the other, are markedly different. In Slovenia and in Luxembourg, The Left has only recently emerged onto the political scene. In contrast, the Labor Party of Belgium goes back quite a long way. The PTB-PVDA was formally set up in 1979, but there was another organization which pre-dated it: AMADA (All power to workers), which had been established in 1970.

## THE LABOR PARTY OF BELGIUM: A FORGOTTEN PARTY

AMADA and the PTB-PVDA are a Maoist organization which passionately defends the cultural revolution, the teachings of Mao and the Chinese position when it comes to international relations. In the 1970's, many Maoist organizations came into being but almost all had unraveled by the end of the decade, leading “to the almost total extinction” of this political movement (Bourseiller, 2008, p. 403). The death of Mao in 1976, the new path embarked upon by China and the departure into the workforce of the students who had been the chief standard bearers of these movements are the chief reasons for this. The Socialist Party in the Netherlands and the Labor Party of Belgium are the sole survivors.

## The Dutch SP: Imitate, Without Imitating

Not much has been written about the path taken by the Dutch SP, but it is nevertheless known thanks to the work of Voerman (2012), Lucardie and Voerman (2019), or March (2011), and their links to analytical works which focus on social populism (Visser et al., 2014). This party has always had a special relationship with the PTB-PVDA.

Initially known as the Communist Party of the Netherlands/Marxists Leninists—KPN-ML –, the party renamed itself Socialistische Partij in 1972. Little by little, it abandoned its Maoist reference points and its Marxist-Leninist identity. It also did away with the notion of being an avant-garde party, as well as its role, once key, as a working-class party. The Socialist Party claims to be the “party for ordinary people.” In October 1991, the SP defined itself simply as “socialist.” In 1999, in its new manifesto, it abandoned the goal to build a socialist society and rallied behind the cause of representative democracy as political regime (Voerman, 2012, p. 111). In the first part of the 2000's, the SP made progress in the polls, spurred on by its leader, Jan Marijnissen, who lent the party an air of socialist populism. The SP presented itself as the anti-establishment party par excellence (Voerman and Lucardie, 2007) and proceeded to fundamentally revise its approach to political communication. Back then, two elements formed the heart of the party's strategy: making its electoral and political campaigns more personal and making sure they were run by strong personalities and the scale of the protest which it took on. “Vote against, Vote SP” (*Stem tegen, stem SP*) became its key slogan. The slogan was built around a tomato, the new party emblem. It symbolized both the color red, which stands for the left in Europe, and challenging things, i.e., by throwing tomatoes. These choices, which paid off at the ballot box, were made on the basis of beliefs which occasionally bordered on xenophobia. Claiming that they were standing up for what the people wanted, the party advocated a stricter integration policy by offering foreigners an alternative: assimilate or pack your bags and go home. Adopting this position helped the party to reach an electoral ceiling in 2006—16.6% of the votes—and to welcome a large number of party members (Delwit, 2014, p. 269–270). Following this, the SP set its sights on power sharing but never managed to turn its dream into a reality. Faced with the rise in power of the radical right-wing party, the Party for Freedom (PVV), the SP has been dropping in the polls for several years now. This journey is important for our purposes, as it has been very closely monitored and dissected by the Labor Party of Belgium, which has enjoyed close links with the SP since it was set up.

## PTB-PVDA: Political Evolution

The dynamics which gave rise to the establishment of the PTB-PVDA began with the student movements at the Université catholique de Louvain (Catholic University of Louvain) demanding the transfer of the French-speaking part of the university to Wallonia (Delwit, 2012). In this social movement of the 1960's, a small share of the students also adhered to the ideals of Third-Worldism and Chinese communism. In 1968, a group of them created a small trade union structure, The Students' Trade Union—SVB –, and studied Mao's thinking,

one of the strongest ideas being to “go to the people.” Many went out to work during their university holidays. There, they learned craftsmanship and the expectations of the world of work and spread the revolutionary word. Gradually, several of them gained a foothold and participated in large-scale social movements, notably in the miners’ strikes in Limburg or the dockers’ strikes in Antwerp. In 1970, they founded a new political movement, AMADA. The movement created a French-speaking counterpart in 1974—TPO—and presented itself back then as a “communist party in the making.” Primarily made up of students who had opted to work in factories and become professional revolutionaries, AMADA-TPO aimed to be an organization which based its work on what Marxism-Leninism had achieved and Maoist thinking. In Belgium, AMADA-TPO, followed by the PTB-PVDA, carried out a number of actions in parallel: attempting to spread the word about the revolution, learn about the “masses” and educate them, establish themselves in the largest firms and stand up for Chinese ideas when it came to international relations. Beginning with the Chinese the Three Worlds Theory, the PTB-PVDA demonstrated an unbridled anti-Soviet stance and characterized the USSR as the main threat.

At the start of the 1980’s, the most remarkable thing was having survived. The radical push, which occurred at the end of the 1960’s, was just a memory. The neo-liberal wave was rising, Deng Xiaoping’s China was letting go of Maoism and the image of the working class holding the fate of socialism in its hands was fading. The PTB-PVDA living to fight another day is down to its persistence and the choice of direction made by some of its founders (here, Ludo Martens, its President, is at the forefront). As party strategist, Ludo Martens has been able to explain every shift in the international debate on communism, every twist and turn taken by the party and the resulting processes to set things straight. Incidentally, his actions went beyond Belgian borders. His analyses of the history of the Soviet revolution, in particular Stalinism, are perhaps *the* reference to consult when it comes to the European Marxist-Leninist movement, as he does in *Another view of Stalin* (Martens, 1995).

Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, the PTB-PVDA looked like a Maoist and Marxist-Leninist party made up of activists who were permanently involved in promoting the revolution, the struggle for social justice and combating racism, which held an annual gathering of parties which held similar views, the international communist seminars. Nevertheless, the Labor Party has never managed to break through into the institutions of Belgian representative democracy. Overall, its electoral performances are the stuff of anecdotes (Table 1). Occasionally, it has performed well in some municipalities at local elections, in particular in Antwerp.

For the PTB-PVDA, the dawn of the twenty-first century was a turning point. Indeed, it found itself dealing with several difficulties at the same time. The first issue had to do with the leadership of the party. Ludo Martens was spending more and more time in Congo, where he was working as a political adviser to Laurent-Désiré Kabila, the President of the Republic. In Belgium, the daily running of the party had been taken over by the General Secretary, Nadine Rosa-Rosso. This situation led to tensions. In addition, 30 years after AMADA had been

created, the PTB-PVDA was still, for the most part, being run by its founding fathers. The *children’s* generation was champing at the bit after many disappointed hopes. Several times, the party hoped that its electoral time had come, but every election result brought bitter disappointment. However, two pilot experiments in the local elections of 2000 had garnered successful results. In the municipalities of Zelzate and Herstal, the Labor Party had made progress in the polls, getting two local councilors elected in Zelzate (12.8% of the votes) and two in Herstal (7.2%). A locally-led, personal campaign had borne fruit.

Yet it was another setback in the legislative elections of 2003 that led to a fork in the road. The vote had been part of a political experiment. In the constituency of Antwerp, which was the most important one for the party, a list of alliance between the PTB-PVDA and the European Arab League had been drawn up under the heading “Resist.” The results were no better or worse than in the 1995 and 1999 elections, but the Antwerp list crystallized a split. In what was then the stronghold of the radical right-wing party, the Flemish Blok (Mudde, 1995), a number of activists or voters loyal to the PTB-PVDA refused to be part of the Resist list. Something which might have been just one of many endless blips became a major crisis. It led to the sacking of the General Secretary and the transformation of the content of the presidency under Ludo Martens. He ended up being replaced at the following congress by Peter Mertens. One generation was passing on the baton to the next. This all took place as the party was completely overhauling the way it did politics and communicated with the outside world.

To a broad extent, the PTB-PVDA borrowed the communication and rhetorical style used by the Dutch SP. For the Labor Party, it was a must to follow certain “golden rules” and methods demonstrated by the Dutch party (PTB, 2008, p. 139–140). Debating the theory and goals of the movement would, from that point on, become a strictly internal matter. Any public utterances needed to be easy to understand, have clear objectives and have a direct bearing on issues directly linked to the concerns or feelings of the population. Initially, the Labor Party banked on resentment. Just like the SP’s *Stem tegen* campaign, the PTB-PVDA conducted operation *Nez rouges. Contre le cirque politique* (Red noses. Against the political circus). And, at the federal elections held in 2010, it mimicked the SP with its slogan “Votez contre ce cirque politique, votez PTB” (Vote against this political circus, Vote PTB). Following this, the party put in place a communication strategy tailored to everyday issues and concerns: mobility, carparks, household waste, purchasing power, etc. The key objectives of the party were no longer being voiced. Overnight, the party went from being Marxist-Leninist to Marxist. Any reference to Stalin or Mao was banned and taking a stand on international issues became of secondary importance when it came to the party’s communication strategy.

From 2010, the PTB-PVDA veered between adopting a populist-socialist political style and keeping up a Marxist approach. The party combined both. It regularly referred, explicitly or implicitly, to the fight against the establishment, or the pitting of a “them” against an “us.” The titles of several books penned by party leaders illustrate this point: *Comment-osent-ils?*

**TABLE 1** | Electoral results of the labor party (previously AMADA-TPO) at the legislative (L) and regional (R) elections in Belgium (1974–2019).

	Belgium		Wallonia		Brussels		Flanders	
	Percentage	Seats	Percentage	Seats	Percentage	Seats	Percentage	Seats
1974 (L)	0.4	0					0.7	0
1977 (L)	0.5	0	0.1	0			0.6	0
1978 (L)	0.8	0	0.2	0			1.2	0
1981 (L)	0.8	0	0.2	0			1.2	0
1985 (L)	0.8	0	0.3	0			1.1	0
1987 (L)	0.7	0	0.5	0			0.9	0
1989 (R)					0.4	0		
1991 (L)	0.5	0	0.5	0			0.5	0
1995 (L)	0.6	0	0.7	0	0.6	0	0.6	0
1995 (R)			0.5	0	0.5	0	0.6	0
1999 (L)	0.5	0	0.5	0	0.4	0	0.6	0
1999 (R)			0.6	0	0.4	0	0.6	0
2003 (L)	0.6	0	0.6	0	0.6	0	0.6	0
2004 (R)			0.6	0	0.5	0	0.6	0
2007 (L)	0.8	0	0.7	0	0.6	0	0.9	0
2009 (R)			1.2	0	0.8	0	1.0	0
2010 (L)	1.6	0	1.9	0	1.5	0	1.4	0
2014 (L)	3.7	2	5.5	2	3.8	0	2.8	0
2014 (R)			5.8	2	3.4	4	2.5	0
2019 (L)	8.6	12	13.8	7	12.3	2	5.6	3
2019 (R)			13.7	10	12.1	11	5.3	4

Source: ministry of Interior; Calculations made by the author.

(*How dare they*; Mertens, 2012), *Ils nous ont oubliés* (*They forgot about us*; Mertens, 2021), *Ils nous rendent fous* (*They Drive us crazy*; De Witte, 2021). At other times, the dividing line was seen through the prism of the class divide, in the form of a modernized class struggle. The driving force for the change is the “working class.”<sup>1</sup>

## Electoral and Political Breakthrough

This operation to modernize party communication and reshuffle political staff bore fruit from an electoral point of view. In the space of 15 years, the PTB-PVDA moved from being something approaching a blank page to achieving the status of a relevant player. In the 2000 local elections, the party walked away with four local councilors. In 2006, 11 were elected; 30 in 2012. Six years later, the party surged to 138 local councilors. However, the shake-up was most striking in the legislative and regional elections. In 2014, the PTB-PVDA managed for the first time to have two federal MPs elected. Five years later, it was twelve. At the regional level in Belgium, they also managed to gain a foothold in parliament: four MPs in the Brussels region in 2014 and 11 in 2019; two MPs elected to the Walloon region in 2014 and 10 in 2019. Finally, in the Flemish region, the PTB-PVDA made its entrance in 2019, getting 4 MPs elected (**Table 1**).

Politically and symbolically, the PTB-PVDA also took two significant steps forward. In 2014, the leader of the Labor Party was, for the first time, granted an audience with the king after

the elections. He was also received by the leaders of the French-speaking Socialist Party—PS—for discussions on setting up a government in the Walloon region and the Brussels Capital region. This happened again in 2019. The second stage was the party’s decision to participate in managing a municipality. Following the 2018 local elections, the PTB-PVDA formed a coalition with the Flemish Socialist Party—sp.a, now known as Vooruit—in Zelzate.

Thus, in the space of 10 years, the politico-electoral status of the Labor Party changed dramatically. Its blackmail potential (Sartori, 1976, p. 108) has now become a tangible reality. This potential is greater than the sole impact from the weight of its representation in local councils or parliaments. The PTB-PVDA is very much involved in certain areas of society. This is the case, for example, when it comes to the social question, where it is extremely present and visible.

Although the PTB-PVDA borrowed from the Dutch SP when it came to its socialist/social populist stance, as well as drawing inspiration from the latter’s communication and facilitation model, it didn’t follow the same playbook in terms of transforming its ideology and identity. For the Labor Party of Belgium, the socialist vision of society remains the end to be achieved (PTB, 2021, p. 6). “In the National Board, there is a consensus that we do not want to go down the same path as the Dutch SP,” pointed out Peter Mertens in 2012.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, the party did not allude to it again, nor, exceptionally, nor

<sup>1</sup>In French, the party is using the term “classe travailleuse,” which is different than “classe ouvrière.” It refers to all employees.

<sup>2</sup>Interview with Peter Mertens, Brussels, 9 August, 2012.

was it discussed outside the party. However, the path toward a kind of split or even “revolution” is indeed what kept the party running. Its terms are not specified. But the PTB-PVDA wants to be an “authentically left” party, close to parties which it felt are on the same page, like the Portuguese Communist Party, the Cypriot party AKEL, and, in a less visible way, the Greek Communist Party.

How did the party manage to redesign the way it was organized, allowing it to bring together one type of internal dynamic and an external approach of a different nature, even as partisan organizational models were being reconfigured?

## CHANGES IN PARTISAN ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS

“(Political) parties today are far less defined by their programme or the class their supporters come from than by the way they are organized,” claimed Duverger (1951, p. 20) in his seminal work on political parties. In his view, the organizational chart was summed up in a dichotomy between Mass Parties and Cadre Parties. The latter were most often parties of parliamentary origin, whilst the former were almost always parties of external origin. Although it is simplistic, this dichotomy has been used a lot, often chronologically: Mass Parties are followed by Catch-all-Parties (Kirchheimer, 1966). And the latter are followed by Cartel Parties (Katz and Mair, 1996) or Electoral-Professional Parties (Panebianco, 1988).

### Breaking or Penetrating the Cartel

One of the strongest barriers for the new parties, in particular the Contender Parties (Harmel and Robertson, 1985, p. 517), is the question of resources. In Belgium, as in other European countries, political parties have been funded by the public purse since 1989. That was the year that the Belgian legislator adopted a law governing the public funding of parties. The law contained two facets: party funding, and limiting and controlling electoral expenditure. On the funding side, the legislator provides for the public funding of parties and prohibits donations from companies. If political parties fulfill the conditions required for them to benefit, funding occurs on a fixed and variable annual basis depending on the number of votes obtained by the party under consideration. But, in order to receive public funding, parties needed to satisfy conditions. The main one states that political parties must have at least one MP and one senator elected. For a new political party or a small fish in the big political pond, this was far from easy.

Two reforms changed the situation. The first set the ball rolling. In 2004, the parliament voted to reform the law, after which access to party funding would kick in once a party got an MP or senator elected. The second tightened things up. In 2002, the parliament introduced a 5% electoral threshold in constituencies in order to benefit from the distribution of seats. Challengers have thus seen the cartelisation loosen up when it came to access to public funding but tighten when it came to access to representation. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that setting a 5% threshold in constituencies went hand in hand with

a change to constituencies themselves. Until the 2003 elections, they had been districts in provinces possibly paired together. After the change took place, provinces became constituencies with a higher magnitude.

### A Farewell to Members?

The advent of the Cartel Party, funding being linked to electoral results, the importance of communicating through audio-visual channels and *via* social networks and the advent of digital parties made members less essential. In parallel, the shift toward a more individualistic society (Ignazi, 2020), the collapse of the feeling of belonging to something collectively, major changes in the world of work and widening structural cleavages (Hooghe et al., 2002; Kriesi et al., 2008) affected the approach to collective action, and thus belonging to parties. In Europe, party membership became part of a downward trend (Mair and Van Biezen, 2001; Van Biezen et al., 2012; van Haute and Gauja, 2016), in particular for parties of social integration (Delwit, 2011).

As far as the parties were concerned, their center of gravity shifted toward the party-in-public-office (Katz and Mair, 1993). Elections formed the focus of people's attention and resources. Party life between one election and the next faded away, leading to a sense of demotivation on the part of members, who felt that members might “matter to parties,” but “votes matter more” (Kölln, 2015, p. 708). Communicating with the public through the television or digital communication replaced activism. In addition to the decline in membership, this resulted in a demobilization of those who stayed (Whiteley and Seyd, 1998).

Most radical left parties did not escape these trends. Historically, communist parties were of the Leninist type of party model: a small organization of (semi)professional activists committed to the revolution. However, in a democratic framework, communist parties could not adopt this conception of a party and often became parties of social integration, especially in States where they had a strong foothold—Cyprus, Finland, France, and Italy. Communist parties became veritable counter-societies, just as some Social Democratic or Christian Democratic parties had been. In Europe, this model is now the exception if it exists at all and it is in decline. The radical left parties have embarked upon other paths, even though the number of members ought to be viewed as an important indicator for them (Striethorst, 2010). For many, people leaving the party is a reality (Ramiro and Verge, 2013, p. 45; Delwit, 2016): Die Linke in Germany, the United Left in Spain, the Left Alliance in Finland, the Communist Party in France, in Bohemia and Moravia, in Portugal or in Greece.

As for the new parties, there is an alternative: the path of a small party seen through the lens of its members—Syriza, the Luxembourg Left, the Portuguese Left Bloc—or the building of a “platform party” and a “multi-speed membership” (Scarrow, 2015, p. 26; Gomez and Ramiro, 2019), the two examples of which are La France insoumise or Podemos in Spain. The sense of belonging or the member status differs greatly from that of the other parties (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018). In La France insoumise, everyone can join the movement on the digital platform, with no other condition than that of “respecting its principles.” No fees are asked for. What is the PTB-PVDA's

position on all this change and in light of its own change of direction and how can it be described?

## The PTB-PVDA, a One of a Kind Party

The Labor Party is a party of external origin. If we look at the Panebianco (1988) criteria, the origin of the PTB-PVDA allows us to pin the path taken by the party on two variables. The PTB-PVDA does have a pre-existing organization, AMADA-TPO, and Ludo Martens very much gave the impression of being a charismatic leader. The relationship to the third variable to explain the origin of the party and, above all, its growth, is more convoluted. Formally speaking, the PTB-PVDA does not benefit from the support of a sponsor. Certainly, AMADA-TPO carried out missions to China and maintained relations with the Chinese Communist Party, but it did not come into being to fulfill China's wishes, nor those leading the CPC. In Belgium, the CPC had fulfilled this role—unsuccessfully—by creating and funding a split in the Belgian Communist Party in 1965 (Delwit, 2014, p. 48).

However, the PTB-PVDA lived and acted as such and, from an organizational point of view, it unfurled in the classic form of a communist party, gaining more and more ground.

In the beginning, the party structure was conceived of along exactly the same lines as the structure which was briefly imposed upon communist parties after the First World War. The PTB-PVDA built itself into a vanguard party, made up of seasoned and devoted activists, who joined the party with a view to being entirely committed and self-sacrificing. As for the place activism had in the party, a tension arose in the communist movement in this regard: in the workplace or at home. Did activists need to organize themselves into cells (workplace) or sections (area where one lives)? Following the various stages in the history of the Communist International, the activist focus changed. The same can be said of the history of the Labor Party. Following twists, turns and rectifications, the organization adapted. In 2008, the party agreed on the coexistence of the two levels of activism, dubbing them “basic unity.” It could be at home or in the workplace. Nevertheless, the political dynamics differs in both cases.

To a large extent, the home has become the structuring space par excellence. There are several reasons for this. First, the party wanted to broaden its base, partly as part of a logic that assumes less involvement from a certain kind of member. Organizing in one's home is a much easier way to swell the party ranks than in the workplace. Moreover, the party wants to make the local authority an area par excellence of political awareness and affirmation. This implies a sufficiently strong presence to organize extra-institutional actions, like demonstrations, and get one or several local councilors elected in local elections.

Nevertheless, the PTB-PVDA is not absent from the professional world. On the contrary, it is both very involved and very industrious there. The Labor Party also tries to raise people's awareness that another type of society is possible. Its presence in social movements, strikes and demonstrations on the social issue is very striking. However, its action takes place within a specific framework. The PTB-PVDA needs to take account of the trade union reality. Belgian trade unionism is characterized

by certain traits (Arcq and Blaise, 1999). We might start by highlighting ideological diversity. Two large confederations dominate the trade union landscape: the General Federation of Labor of Belgium (FGTB-ABVV) historically linked to the socialist movement, and the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (CSC-ACV). Both confederations were one of the parts of Belgian pillarisation (Lorwin, 1971). There is also a liberal trade union confederation, the General Central of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (CGSLB-ACLVB). It holds far less sway, but finds something of an audience in the world of employees and civil servants. According to European standards, the unionization rate is high and unions carry out missions as subsidiary agents of the State, notably the payment of unemployment benefits.

At all times, unions have little appreciated politicians interfering in union affairs. This was particularly true of their attitude to the Communist Party, but was also the case for nationalist Flemish parties and even parties from their own pillar. However, the fact remains that the Labor Party has taken the trade union world by storm. It acts in two ways. First, it infiltrates. The party attempts to win over trade union sectors. These might be sectors of professional activity, like some public services—transport, for instance –, but also the trade union on a territorial scale. The hold of the PTB-PVDA on the FGTB-ABVV in the biggest city in Wallonia, Charleroi, is very strong today. The FGTB-ABVV is the first target but the CSC-ACV is also the target of an infiltration strategy at some levels. Second, it tries to influence the choices made by unions at different levels, be it company level, a sector of activities, a region or federal level. For example, the party was able to attract both FGTB and CSC agreement to call for a protest in favor of “peace” after Ukrainian invasion. This call was not sustained by other parties or any Ukrainian organization. This parallel strategy bears fruit but also creates internal tensions within the headquarters and amongst union leaders.

The party wants to move forward toward the working class. At the last congress, the strengthening of the party's establishment inside companies has been described as a top priority: “We want to focus our work on building strongholds of struggle in the industry” (PTB, 2021a, p. 87).

## The Process Toward Personalisation and a Vote-Seeking Party

Unlike the overwhelming majority of parties, the Labor Party refused to get completely involved in a model, either Electoral-Professional Party or Platform Party. Since the 8th congress, held in 2008, the PTB-PVDA has gone for an explosive combination of organizational paths.

To begin with, the Labor Party poured everything into personalities. It worked very hard to bring two big characters to prominence: Peter Mertens, party President until December 2021, and Raoul Hedebouw, the new President. The same approach was taken in the provinces and some local areas deemed strategically important.

Personification is carried out there in a methodical way at different institutional levels but, unlike what Passarelli observed (Passarelli, 2015, p. 9), this is not happening with a

**TABLE 2** | Expenditure of the PTB-PVDA and its peripheral organizations on the Facebook network from April 2019 until December 2021.

Party and peripheral organizations	Euros	People	Euros
PTB-PVDA	1,332,708	Peter Mertens	421,122
Comac	107,132	Kim De Witte	31,611
RedFox	49,887	Jos D'Haese	29,496
Viva Salud	5,193	Raoul Hedebouw	28,043
Medecine for the People	3,101	Marc Botenga	23,116
Marianne	976	Gaby Colebunders	14,286
Lava	331	Tom De Meester	6,572
		Sander Vandecapelle	5,307
		Line De Witte	4,995
		Lise Vandecasteele	4,284
		Natalie Eggermont	2,572
		Nadia Moscufo	2,346
		Maria Vindevoghel	1,367
		Sofie Merckx	1,121
		Nabil Boukili	1,082
		Julien Liradelfo	950
		Françoise De Smedt	840
		Youssef Handichi	796
		Ayşe Yigit	736
		Germain Mugemangango	500
		Kevin Kestemont	352
		Greet Daems	350
		Pauline Boninsegna	297

Source: Facebook.

view to being “opposed to a collective dimension.” Executives and parliamentarians receive an appropriate media training. Elections are prepared for by paying scrupulous attention to detail. And social networks and online communication are used on a daily basis in a highly competent way which suggests a mastery of the various social networks being used.

At the 10th congress, held in December 2021, the party went even further. The most popular personality, Raoul Hedebouw, was elected President, whilst the post of General Secretary was recreated, with the job going to Peter Mertens, a man less at ease dealing with the press and PR side of things than Hedebouw, but being the party strategist, along with former Vice-president David Pestieau, now Political Director. More than ever, the Labor Party would be to take the personal approach with real people at the helm. Incidentally, at its heart, party leaders referred to the “Hedebouw effect” when it came to the success the party was enjoying.

The PTB-PVDA is also fully involved in digital and classic forms of communication, and has mastered the codes. The party, its key figures, many basic units and activists are on social media every day. Furthermore, the Labor Party invests a great deal of money in social networks. From April 2019 until December 2021, the PTB-PVDA and its peripheral organizations spent 2,081,469 euros on Facebook alone (Table 2).

The focus on the elections is very real. Following the 2003 crisis and the refounding of the party at the 8th congress in 2008, one of the primary objectives for the party was to win a seat in parliament. This was to increase the process of upping the number of familiar faces in the party, deepen certain facets when it came to the party’s populist-socialist stance and give a voice to various segments of citizens (Berman and Snegovaya, 2019, p. 16) but, above all, the goal was to completely change the means at the party’s disposal. The PTB-PVDA achieved this goal in the legislative elections of 2014 and enjoyed even greater success in 2019. This opened up the channels of public funding to the party. For example, in 2020, the PTB-PVDA was the recipient of 5.6 million euros of public funding, to which we can add aid in the form of material and staff from parliamentary assemblies (The Chamber, Senate and the regional and community parliaments). The party status was therefore radically transformed.

## A New Kind of Party of Social Integration

In parallel, the Labor Party continued life as “an organization” (Webb, 2002, p. 9). Indeed, breaking into the parliamentary arena, accessing public funding and the importance which was placed on communication were not done at the expense of the partisan structure. One might sum up the organizational path taken by the party by making two observations.

First, the PTB-PVDA embarked on a process of transformation with the aim of becoming a large party of social integration (Neumann, 1956). Following in the footsteps of Belgian pillarisation, the PTB-PVDA built, little by little, a form of pillar of its own. Alongside the partisan structure, the party developed a world of peripheral organizations. It can promote a network of medical centers—Medicine for the people –, a law firm—Progressive Lawyers Network –, three youth organizations—The pioneers for children, RedFox for teen-agers and COMAC mainly for students –, an organization for women’s leadership—Marianne –, a platform to support refugees—Friendships Without Borders –, organizations focusing on international topics—INTAL and Viva Salud (medical aid organization for developing countries like Congo, Laos, Vietnam or the Philippines). The party also has a publishing house—EPO—and edits a review—Lava—and monthly—Solidaire. It holds a large annual gathering in September—Manifesta –, which hosts several thousand people. And it tries to build up positions in certain trade union sectors within the FGTB-ABVV and the CSC-ACV. In November 2021, the Labor Party launched a new peripheral organization, People’s Relief. Drawing on Belgian political and social history, the PTB-PVDA also aimed to go one step further as part of revisiting the process of pillarisation: build up communal strongholds, something which has been very important in the history of Belgian socialism (Delwit, 2021a) but also when it came to communism taking hold in some European states, i.e., the PCF in France (Stovall, 1989), the PCP in Portugal or the KKE in Greece. With this desire to build a modern counter-society, the Labor Party, unlike many parties in Europe, focuses heavily on membership, members and member support. The PTB-PVDA simplified and broadened the membership process and encouraged its members to be proactive when it came to recruiting.

The party created three categories of members: the advisory member (*membre consultatif*), the group member (*membre de groupe*) and the activist member (*militant*). The term “advisory member” refers to a member as laid out in article 21 of the PTB-PVDA statutes (PTB, 2021b, p. 9). The only condition which needs to be met by this type of member is to “identify” with the party and pay membership fees (around 20 euros/year). These members are in regular contact with the party and the party messages. Sympathy for the party is maintained via social networks, emails and invitations to participate in activities. Passive members can carry out simple tasks, such as passing on party messages on social networks, getting involved in one or two actions per year where they are physically present and, in addition to paying their membership fees, making the occasional contribution, particularly during the election campaign. Finally, they can be called upon to feature on an electoral roll, particularly in local elections. In 2018, 1,429 candidates stood on a PTB-PVDA list.

The group member must have an interview about its membership, must take place “regularly in basic group meetings” and should follow a series of lectures on the history and life of the party (PTB, 2021a, p. 10). In political scientist typologies (van Haute, 2009), this kind of member can be likened to an activist.

With the activist member, we are dealing with middle and senior-ranking party staff. Alongside the stipulations for the advisory members and group members, two other conditions are laid down: the activist member must be prepared to “follow the activist training programme” and s/he must apply the “established financial rule” (PTB, 2021a, p. 11). The training courses offer a grounding in the party’s ideology and the—real—objectives of the party. As for the financial rules, the activist members commit to paying the party what is considered more than a workers’ wage. Even if the PTB-PVDA has managed to access public party funding, it remains highly assertive when it comes to financial rules. All the activist members and all of the party professionals must also enter into an agreement with the party in respect of pay. Incidentally, all lower-ranking MPs—serving local areas or provinces—must pay back to the party the attendance fees which they are paid, however modest (PTB, 2021a, p. 27).

Having taken steps to broaden its base, the PTB-PVDA has also managed to transform itself. From 2003 to 2021, its membership increased. With 1,354 affiliates in 2003, the party reached 2,890 members in 2008, 3,939 in 2010 and climbed to 9,692 in 2014 and 23,609 in 2021 (Table 3). Most of them are advisory members (PTB, 2021b, p. 131). For the party, one of the main challenges is to greatly increase the number of group members. In December, doubling the number of group members in order to reach 6,000 has been set as a key goal by the congress (PTB, 2021b, p. 132). More globally, the ratio between the number of “organized members” (Group members plus active members) and party membership should exceed 25% (PTB, 2021b, p. 135).

The second characteristic is that the Labor Party has not abandoned a way of running things which is based on democratic centralism (PTB, 2021a, p. 22). The PTB-PVDA remains a highly centralized political party, both in the way it is run

**TABLE 3 |** Labor party and COMAC membership (2000–2021).

Year	Party membership	COMAC membership
2000	1,254	
2003	1,354	
2005	2,251	97
2006	2,335	185
2007	2,625	242
2008	2,890	382
2009	3,154	428
2010	3,939	
2011	4,477	563
2012	5,602	474
2013	6,810	569
2014	9,692	653
2015	9,992	556
2016	12,018	632
2017	14,622	617
2018	16,598	1181
2019	20,276	1321
2020	22,804	1169
2021	23,609	739

Source: Headquarter of the Party and COMAC; *Le Soir*, December, the 5th 2021.

and in its decision-making process. Members, base units, provincial federations and peripheral organizations are run according to the wishes and choices of the center. Compliance with trade-offs and guidelines is key. Debate is permitted and sometimes happens, but is a strictly internal matter. Speaking to the public is strictly prohibited. Members of the PTB-PVDA have not seen the party statutes give them any new rights, something which runs counter to the process for granting members’ prerogatives. The symbolic example of the election of the President (Chiru et al., 2015) demonstrates this. Even if several pieces of work have pointed out the limits to the new members’ prerogatives (Cross and Pilet, 2015) and the four knights of party democracy—inclusion, diffusion, pluralism, and deliberation—(Ignazi, 2020, p. 17) are a reality for very few parties, the Labor Party of Belgium is undoubtedly one of the least inclusive European parliamentary parties when one looks at classic indicators.

Until 2015, the party President was elected by the party’s National Board, which is made up of around 40 people. Since then, s/he is elected by the congress following a proposal from the National Board. Therefore, members are not involved in the process. In practice, the same goes for the congressmen and women. In 2021, just one person applied: Raoul Hedebouw. As for the list of those standing for the National Board, it was established in a small group. Any applicants who weren’t selected were invited to drop out of the race. In 2021, just two refused, but were not elected.

Whether we are talking about the organizational changes observed in a very large number of parties, the way the vast majority of radical left organizations are changing nowadays



or the depillarisation process in Belgium (Hellemans, 2020, p. 145; van Haute and Wauters, 2019), the PTB-PVDA is a real exception. It is simultaneously carrying out a process which combines, on the one hand, upholding a way of running things based on democratic centrism and on the other on the dynamics of pillarisation, which is the foundation of the historical power of the socialist and Catholic families in Belgium. But socialist and Catholic pillarisation was, to a large extent, founded on a philosophy of specialization, decentralization (Bartolini, 2000, p. 85) and competition amongst various pillar organizations. The path taken is therefore very different and very far removed from the model of the party federation (Bolleyer, 2011), even if one should be cautious in making comparisons, since it is true that in terms of pillars, we are talking about very different realities.

With regard to the changes which most parties have gone through, the PTB-PVDA bucked the trend when it comes to parties-in-public-office. The party-in-central-office facet is pre-eminent. Furthermore, a form of mistrust is displayed when it came to an established professional routine. Just one of the six regional parliamentarians from 2014 was re-elected. The five others did not stand again or they did so in a context where they could no longer be elected. Many permanent members of the party regularly change jobs and workplaces. The personalities which ought to provide the face of the party at local level are amongst the only ones who don't have to change their place of residence in their activist-professional trajectory.

Much attention is paid to recruitment and, as far as possible, to member engagement, be it physical or virtual. The feeling of belonging to a community is maintained and regular meetings are held, including a large annual gathering. In contrast, the formal power of members is substantially less than it is for the majority of modern parties, notably for some radical left parties. There are no consultations or internal discussions, even if they are accompanied by a plebiscite dimension (Ignazi, 2020, p. 13) or controlled by the leadership when it comes to their purpose and timing (Deseriis, 2020, p. 1,781). No public controversies, still less ideological platforms or currents.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The modernity of the PTB-PVDA therefore consists of this successful blend of old and new. From the old organizational model of communist parties, no longer the sole preserve of the KKE, PCP or the AKEL among the European radical left; from the old dynamics of socialist and Catholic pillarisation in Belgium; from the old parties of social integration, on whom Neumann (1956) based his theories. From the new, built around the notion of personification or banking on personalities, which was given more depth with the election of Raoul Hedebouw to the presidency of the party, the real command of communication with classic media and social networks and the importance attached to elections or the diversification of ways of joining the party (Scarrow, 2015, p. 30). The socialist-populist tone naturally

helps in this dynamic. Nuance and subtlety are absent from the words of the Labor Party.

Nevertheless, this combination is incomplete. From the point of view of the evolution of the radical left, one can pinpoint little communication on issues which do not relate to socio-economic dimensions, as is the case for the KKE or the PCP (Fagerholm, 2017, p. 28). In parallel, one should note the small number of women in the party. There are no women in any of the key management posts in the party. Only Françoise De Smedt can be mentioned in her capacity as group leader in the Brussels parliament and, since January 2022, Sofie Merckx, as group leader in the Chamber.

Still on development, this organizational edifice is a surprising and singular victory in the landscape of radical left parties. However, it still gives rise to questions and reveals certain weaknesses.

The first is a certain lack of symmetry when it comes to success. In terms of elections, it has made its mark in the French speaking part of Belgium. Even if the PTB-PVDA has also made inroads in Flanders, most of the Flemish territory remains a mission land for the party (Delwit, 2021b). One can definitely point to three reasons for this.

- The French speaking part, which until the 1960's was the most industrial part of the country, reveals a trade union and political structure which is more kindly disposed to a left party. Historically, the socialists also performed better there than in Flanders and this remains the case. The same went for the Communist party (Delwit and De Waele, 1994). The PTB-PVDA cannot get around this.
- In Belgium, there is a lack of symmetry when it comes to national feeling. There is no national Belgian feeling or if there was one once upon a time, it no longer exists. There is no national Francophone, Walloon or Brussels feeling. But there is a national Flemish feeling. The Flemish nationalist party, The New Flemish Alliance—N-VA –, is incidentally the number one party in Flanders and in Belgium. This affects how priorities are set out. In this way, themes of identity are more gripping in Flanders than they are in the French-speaking part of the country. Social issues are approached rather differently in the three regions of the country. The social question is the prerogative of left parties in French speaking areas. This is not the case in Flanders. There, it is also viewed from a welfare chauvinism perspective. The radical right-wing Flemish Interest did this in the 2019 election, for example by calling for 65 to be reinstated as the legal retirement age or a minimum pension of 1,500 euros, but just for Flemings (Vlaams Belang, 2019, p. 63). The PTB-PVDA is thus facing specific competition in Flanders. Those from the radical right are few and far between in Brussels and Wallonia (Close and Ognibene, 2021) and the Euroscepticism shown by the nationalist parties is absent there, which is an important factor from a political and electoral point of view (Wagner, 2021).
- Finally, this different reading of social issues reveals another dissimilarity. The Labor Party has the monopoly on populist or simplistic language in the French-speaking world. This is not

the case in Flanders. The Flemish Interest is a populist radical right party, incidentally even more assertive and invested in social networks than the PTB-PVDA. This party and its basic structures spent 2,650,849 euros between spring 2019 and December 2021 on Facebook to which party leader expenses should be added. The President alone spent 758,892 euros during the same period. The Flemish Interest places the topics of law and order and ethnocentric issues at the heart of its communication strategy: against Francophones, foreigners, Muslims or refugees. After spending some time in the political wilderness between 2012 and 2018, the Flemish Interest bounced back and made its mark on the public by making progress in the local elections in 2018 (Delwit, 2019), doing even better in 2019. In choosing Raoul Hedebouw as its President, the PTB-PVDA hopes to perform better in its battle against the radical right party in Flanders.

To finish, here is the crux: the primary goals of the party (Harmel and Janda, 1994). Over several years, the PTB-PVDA has moved from nearly nothing to the status of a relevant player with undeniable clout. This has come about thanks to methodical work and a style of approach which pays attention to detail, but has also happened in a specific context: the post-2008 financial, economic and social crisis, political and social exacerbation, the collapse of European Social Democracy (Delwit, 2021c), including in Belgium (Delwit, 2021a; Moens and Bouteca, 2021), and the populist surge. But what can be made of this electoral progress?

To date, the PTB-PVDA has refused to compete for power apart from at local level, where it hopes to broaden the experience in 2024. The ambition discussed in congress is to extend this presence to local governments. It does not seem to be mutually exclusive of socialist-populist opposition at other levels. Burned by the contemporary electoral collapse of the Dutch SP as well as the difficult situation in which Syriza and AKEL find themselves, the Labor Party has no desire to throw itself into this *adventure*. The PTB-PVDA has become a vote-seeking party in order to grow, to capture public funding, to receive more media and public attention, and to better prepare the “revolution.” Interestingly, some party leaders have publicly referred to the revolutionary essence and will of the party after the December 2021 party congress. This remains exceptional, but it was no longer the case since 2008. This reflects a soft leftist turn and the will to stress the primacy of the teleological dimension (Courtois and Lazar, 1987, p. 9) of the party after the electoral breakthrough: “No fuel” within the party for a “pragmatic” vote-seeking approach (Burchell, 2001, p. 122). This new vote-seeking approach is parallel to the refusal of the party to govern or adopt any coalition-seeking stance. Publicly, the PTB-PVDA does not say no to power but takes refuge behind a formula which allows it to easily withdraw: “Yes to compromise, no to dishonest compromises.”

In doing so, the Labor Party is facing a twofold problem/question.

- Is it possible in the twenty-first century to be a powerful counter-society party in the long-term whilst on the opposition benches? Certainly, the PCF and the PCI were for a long time in their history, but in a difficult social set-up and by being the first left party in their political system. Moreover, the Greek and Portuguese examples are hardly convincing at present.
- Another question arises when it comes to Belgian pillarisation. This was accomplished in parallel with the rise to power of the pillar parties. The aim was to meet the expectations of the various pillar organizations and related citizens. In the most pillarised phase of Belgian political history, the interwar period, the socialist union was the first promoter of the workers’ party participating in government (the workers’ party is the ancestor of the socialist party), and the most right-wing sector in the socialist pillar. Even if it is difficult to transpose past configurations into the future, the issue of the exercise of power appears to be the thorniest one for the PTB-PVDA. Firstly, it seems unlikely to increase its capacity to influence the course of events and to implement specific public policies from outside the government either at the federal or the regional level. Secondly, in the long run, it appears difficult to perpetuate its organizational model, especially a high level of political and social mobilization without reaching some policy goals. During the last congress of December 2021, the party launched the promotion of a “Red Five Plan” (PTB, 2021a, p. 67),<sup>3</sup> a new Keynesian outlook for the future: impossible to understand how it could be implemented outside any government.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets presented in this study can be found in online repositories. The names of the repository/repositories and accession number(s) can be found at: Facebook Ads Library Report, <https://www.facebook.com/ads/library> and Ministry of Interior; <https://elections2019.belgium.be/>; <https://elections2014.belgium.be/>; <https://elections2010.belgium.be/>; <https://elections2007.belgium.be/>; <https://elections2003.belgium.be/>; <https://elections2009.belgium.be/>; <https://elections2004.belgium.be/>.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our gratitude goes to the Labor Party and COMAC headquarters for all sent information to the author.

<sup>3</sup>The main components of the RED Five Plan are: (1) the establishment of an European State consortium of Energy, (2) A new push in public transportations, (3) The introduction of a digital turn in economy, (4) A new in-depth development in health services, and (5) and a new big impulse for public housing.

## REFERENCES

- Arcq, E., and Blaise, P. (1999). *Les syndicats en Belgique*. Brussels: CRISP.
- Bartolini, S. (2000). *The Political Mobilization of the European Left, 1860–1980: The Class Cleavage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511521560
- Berman, S., and Snegovaya, M. (2019). Populism and the decline of social democracy. *J. Democr.* 30, 5–19. doi: 10.1353/jod.2019.0038
- Bolleyer, N. (2011). New party organization in Western Europe: of party hierarchies, stratarchies and federations. *Party Polit.* 18, 315–336. doi: 10.1177/1354068810382939
- Bornschieer, S. (2010). The new cultural divide and the two-dimensional political space in Western Europe. *West Eur. Polit.* 33, 419–444. doi: 10.1080/01402381003654387
- Borriello, A., and Jäger, A. (2020). Left-populism on trial: laclauian politics in theory and practice. *Theor. Event* 23, 740–764.
- Borriello, A., and Jäger, A. (2021). The antinomies of Ernesto Laclau: a reassessment. *J. Polit. Ideol.* 26, 298–316. doi: 10.1080/13569317.2020.1855775
- Bourseiller, C. (2008). *Les maoïstes. La folle histoire des gardes rouges français*. Paris: Plon.
- Burchell, J. (2001). Evolving or conforming? Assessing organisational reform within European Green Parties. *West Eur. Polit.* 24, 113–134. doi: 10.1080/01402380108425455
- Cervera-Marzal, M. (2021). *Le populisme de gauche Sociologie de la France insoumise*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Charalambous, G. (2012). “Le parti progressiste du peuple travailleur (AKEL). Un profil socio-politique,” in *Les partis de la gauche anticapitaliste en Europe*, eds D.-L. Seiler, and J.-M. De Waele (Paris: Economica), 240–261.
- Charalambous, G. (2022). *The European Radical Left Movements and Parties since the 1960s*. London: Pluto Press. doi: 10.2307/j.ctv244sspv
- Charalambous, G., and Ioannou, G. (2020). *Left Radicalism and Populism in Europe*. London: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9781351133630
- Chiocchetti, P. (2017). *The Radical Left Party Family in Western Europe, 1989–2015*. London: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/97813515622057
- Chiru, M., Gauja, A., Gherghina, S., and Rodríguez-Teruel, J. (2015). “Explaining change in party leadership selection rules,” in *The Politics of Party Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective*, eds W. Cross, and J.-B. Pilet (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 31–49. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198748984.003.0003
- Chloé, A., Bristielle, A., and Chaze, L. (2021). From The Front de gauche to La France insoumise: causes and consequences of the conversion of the French Radical Left to Populism. *Partecipazione e Conflitto*. 14, 933–953. doi: 10.1285/i20356609v14i2p933
- Close, C., and Ognibene, M. (2021). “Les droites radicales en Belgique francophone,” in *Les partis politiques en Belgique*, eds P. Delwit, and E. van Haute (Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles), 421–452.
- Courtois, S., and Lazar, M. (1987). *Le communisme*. Paris: M.A. éditions.
- Cross, W., and Pilet, J.-B. (2015). “Parties, leadership selection, and intra-party democracy,” in *The Politics of Party Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective*, eds W. Cross, and J.-B. Pilet (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 165–173. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198748984.003.0010
- De Witte, K. (2021). *Ils nous rendent fous*. Antwerp: EPO.
- Delwit, P. (2011). “Still in decline? party membership in Europe,” in *Party Membership in Europe: Exploration into the Anthills of Party Politics*, ed E. van Haute (Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles), 25–42.
- Delwit, P. (2012). *La vie politique en Belgique*. Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles.
- Delwit, P. (2014). *PTB. Nouvelle gauche, vieilles recettes*. Liège: Luc pire.
- Delwit, P. (2016). *Les gauches radicales en Europe. XIXe-XXIe siècles*. Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles.
- Delwit, P. (2019). Radical right-wing parties facing the wall of the local? the vlaams belang and local elections (1982–2018). *Open J. Polit. Sci.* 9, 631–651. doi: 10.4236/ojps.2019.94039
- Delwit, P. (2021a). “Le Parti socialiste (PS). Les défis d’une social-démocratie en déclin,” in *Les partis politiques en Belgique*, eds P. Delwit, and E. van Haute (Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles), 225–251.
- Delwit, P. (2021b). “Le Parti du travail de Belgique – Partij van de Arbeid (PTB-PVDA). Redéploiement de la gauche radicale en Belgique,” in *Les partis politiques en Belgique*, eds P. Delwit, and E. van Haute (Brussels, Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles), 349–375.
- Delwit, P. (2021c). “This is the final fall”. An electoral history of European Social Democracy (1870–2019). *Cevipol Working Pap.* 1, 1–61.
- Delwit, P., and De Waele, J.-M. (1994). “The decline and fall of the Communist Party of Belgium,” in *West European Communist Parties After the Revolutions of 1989*, eds P. Heywood, and M. Bull (London: Macmillan), 119–145. doi: 10.1007/978-1-349-23692-3\_5
- Deserriis, M. (2020). Digital movement parties: a comparative analysis of the technopolitical cultures and the participation platforms of the Movimento 5 Stelle and the Piratenpartei. *Inform. Commun. Soc.* 23, 1770–1786. doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2019.1631375
- Duverger, M. (1951). *Les partis politiques*. Paris: Seuil.
- Fagerholm, A. (2017). What is left for radical left? A comparative examination of the policies of radical left parties in Western Europe before and after 1989. *J. Contemp. Eur. Stud.* 25, 16–40. doi: 10.1080/14782804.2016.1148592
- Gomez, R., and Ramiro, L. (2019). The limits of organizational innovation and multi-speed membership: podemos and its new forms of party membership. *Party Polit.* 25, 534–546. doi: 10.1177/1354068817742844
- Harmel, R., AND Robertson, J. D. (1985). Formation and success of new Parties. A cross-national analysis. *Int. Polit. Sci. Rev.* 6, 501–523. doi: 10.1177/019251218500600408
- Harmel, R., and Janda, K. (1994). An integrated theory of party goals and party change. *J. Theoret. Polit.* 6, 259–287. doi: 10.1177/0951692894006003001
- Haugsgjerd Allernm, E. (2013). The contemporary relationship of ‘new left’ and ‘new right’ parties with interest groups: exceptional or mainstream? The case of Norway’s socialist left and progress party. *Scand. Polit. Stud.* 36:1, 67–90. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9477.2012.00297.x
- Hellemans, S. (2020). Pillarization (‘verzuiling’). on organized ‘self-contained worlds’ in the modern World. *Am. Sociol.* 51, 124–147. doi: 10.1007/s12108-020-09449-x
- Hooghe, L., Marks, G., and Wilson, C. J. (2002). Does left/right structure party positions on European integration. *Comparat. Polit. Stud.* 35, 965–989. doi: 10.1177/001041402236310
- Ignazi, P. (2020). The four knights of intra-party democracy: a rescue for party delegitimation. *Party Polit.* 26, 9–20. doi: 10.1177/1354068818754599
- Jalali, C., and Lisi, M. (2012). “Quand le changement semble dangereux: l’évolution du parti communiste portugais,” in *Les partis de la gauche anticapitaliste en Europe*, eds J.-M. De Waele, and D.-L. Seiler (Paris: Economica). 198–222.
- Katsourides, Y. (2016). *Radical Left Parties in Government: The Cases of SYRIZA and AKEL*. London: Palgrave. doi: 10.1057/978-1-137-58841-8
- Katz, R. S., and Mair, P. (1993). The evolution of party organizations in Europe: the three faces of party organization. *Am. Rev. Polit.* 14, 593–617. doi: 10.15763/issn.2374-7781.1993.14.0.593-617
- Katz, R. S., and Mair, P. (1996). Changing models of party organization and party democracy. *Party Polit.* 1, 5–28. doi: 10.1177/1354068895001001001
- Kirchheimer, O. (1966). “The transformation of the Western European Party Systems,” in *Political Parties and Political Development*, eds J. Lapalombara, and M. Weiner (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 177–200. doi: 10.1515/9781400875337-007
- Kölln, A.-K. (2015). The effect of party membership on party organisations in Europe. *Eur. J. Polit. Res.* 54, 707–725. doi: 10.1111/1475-6765.12110
- Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschieer, S., and Frey, T. (2008). *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511790720
- Landwehrln, T. (2010). *Die Linke. L’émérgence du nouveau parti de la gauche antilibérale allemande: une menace pour le SPD, un défi pour la gouvernabilité de la République fédérale*. Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials.
- Lisi, M. (2009). New politics in Portugal: the rise and success of the left bloc. *Pôle Sud.* 30, 127–144. doi: 10.3917/psud.030.0127
- Lisi, M. (2016). U-turn: the Portuguese radical left from marginality to government support. *South Eur. Soc. Polit.* 21, 541–560. doi: 10.1080/13608746.2016.1225331
- Lorwin, V. (1971). Segmented pluralism: ideological cleavages and political cohesion in the smaller European democracies. *Compar. Polit.* 3, 141–175. doi: 10.2307/421297

- Lourenço, P. (2021). Studying European radical left parties since the fall of the Berlin wall (1990–2019): a scoping review. *Swiss Polit. Sci. Rev.* 27, 754–777. doi: 10.1111/spsr.12478
- Lucardie, P., and Voerman, G. (2019). “The Dutch socialist party: from Maoist sect to social democratic mass party with a populist style,” in *The Populist Radical Left in Europe*, eds G. Katsambekis, and A., Kioukiolis (London: Routledge), 113–128. doi: 10.4324/9781315180823-6
- Mair, P., and Van Biezen, I. (2001). Party membership in twenty European Democracies, 1980–2000. *Party Polit.* 7, 5–21. doi: 10.1177/1354068801007001001
- March, L. (2008). *Contemporary Far Left Parties in Europe: From Marxism to the Mainstream?* Berlin: F. Ebert Stiftung.
- March, L. (2011). *Radical Left Parties in Europe*. London: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9780203154878
- March, L. (2015). *Beyond Syriza and Podemos, Other Radical Left Parties Are Threatening to Break Into the Mainstream of European politics*. London: Blog LSE.
- Martens, L. (1995). *Un autre regard sur Staline*. Antwerp: EPO.
- Mazzolini, S., and Borriello, A. (2021). The normalization of left populism? The paradigmatic case of Podemos. *Eur. Polit. Soc.* 2020:1868849. doi: 10.1080/23745118.2020.1868849
- Mertens, P. (2012). *Comment osent-ils*. Brussels: ADEN.
- Mertens, P. (2021). *Ils nous ont oubliés*. Paris: Le temps des cerises.
- Moens, P., and Bouteca, N. (2021). “Vooruit (le sp.a). Entre triomphe et déclin” in *Les partis politiques en Belgique*, eds P. Delwit, and E. van Haute (Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles), 195–224.
- Mudde, C. (1995). One against all, all against one! a portrait of the Vlaams Blok. *Pattern. Prejudice.* 29, 5–28. doi: 10.1080/0031322X.1995.9970144
- Neumann, S. (1956). “Toward a comparative study of political parties,” in *Modern Political Parties*, ed S. Neumann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 395–421.
- Panbianco, A. (1988). *Political Parties: Organization and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Passarelli, G. (2015). “Parties’ genetic features: the missing link in the Presidentialization of Parties,” in *The Presidentialization of Political Parties, Organisations, Institutions, and Leaders*, ed G. Passarelli (London: Palgrave), 1–25. doi: 10.1057/9781137482464\_1
- Passarelli, G., and Tuorto, D. (2018). The meanings of party membership. A comparison of three parties. *Contemp. Italian Polit.* 20, 170–192. doi: 10.1080/23248823.2018.1474566
- PTB (2008). *8e congrès. Un parti de principes. Un parti souple. Un parti de travailleurs*. Antwerp: EPO.
- PTB (2021a). *Les statuts du PTB. Congrès de l’unité 2021*. Antwerp: EPO.
- PTB (2021b). *Congrès de l’unité 2021. Parti de la classe travailleuse. Parti de la jeunesse. Parti du socialisme*. Antwerp: EPO.
- Ramiro, L., and Gomez, R. (2017). Radical-left populism during the great recession: Podemos and its competition with the established radical left. *Polit. Stud.* 65, 108–126. doi: 10.1177/0032321716647400
- Ramiro, L., and Verge, T. (2013). Impulse and decadence of linkage processes: evidence from the Spanish radical left. *South Eur. Soc. Polit.* 18, 41–60. doi: 10.1080/13608746.2012.757452
- Sartori, G. (1976). *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis*. London: ECPR Press.
- Scarrow, S. (2015). *Beyond Party Members. Changing Approaches to Partisan Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199661862.001.0001
- Stavrakakis, Y., and Katsambekis, G. (2014). Left-wing populism in the European periphery: the case of SYRIZA. *J. Polit. Ideol.* 19, 119–142. doi: 10.1080/13569317.2014.909266
- Stovall, T. (1989). French communism and suburban development. The rise of the Partis Red Belt. *J. Contemp. Hist.* 24, 437–460. doi: 10.1177/002200948902400304
- Striethorst, A. (2010). *Members and Electorate of Left Parties in Europe*. Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung.
- Van Biezen, I., Mair, P., and Pogutke, T. (2012). Going, going... gone? The decline of party membership in contemporary Europe. *Eur. Journal for political Research.* 51, 24–56. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.01995.x
- van Haute, E. (2009). *Adhérer à un parti. Aux sources de la participation politique*. Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles.
- van Haute, E., and Gauja, A. (2016). “Introduction: party membership and activism,” in *Party Members and Activists*, eds E. van Haute, and A. Gauja (London: Routledge), 1–16. doi: 10.4324/9781315722214
- van Haute, E., and Wauters, B. (2019). Do characteristics of Consociational democracies still apply to Belgian parties? *Polit. Low Countr.* 1, 6–26. doi: 10.5553/PLC/258999292019001001002
- Visser, M., Lubbers, M., Kraaykamp, G., and Jaspers, E. (2014). Support for radical left ideologies in Europe. *Eur. J. Polit. Res.* 53, 541–558. doi: 10.1111/1475-6765.12048
- Vlaams Belang (2019). *Eerst onze mensen. Verkiezingsprogramma*. Brussels.
- Voerman, G. (2012). “Du maoïsme à la social-démocratie,” in *Les partis de la gauche anticapitaliste en Europe*, eds D.-L. Seiler, J.-M. De Waele (Paris: Economica), 108–124.
- Voerman, G., and Lucardie, A. (2007). *Sociaal-democratie nu definitief verdeeld: met volwassen SP is het abonnement van de PvdA op de linkse stem verlopen*. Amsterdam: NRC Handelsblad, 9.
- Wagner, S. (2021). Euroscepticism as a radical left party strategy for success. *Party Polit.* 2021:13540688211038917. doi: 10.1177/13540688211038917
- Webb, P. (2002). “Introduction. Political parties in advanced industrial democracies,” in *Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, eds P. Webb, D. Farrell, and I. Holliday (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1–15. doi: 10.1093/0199240566.003.0001
- Whiteley, P. F., and Seyd, P. (1998). The dynamics of party activism in Britain: A spiral of demobilization?. *B. J. Pol. Sc.* 28, 113–137. doi: 10.1017/S000712349800012X

**Conflict of Interest:** The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

**Publisher’s Note:** All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

Copyright © 2022 Delwit. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.