

9 Vote against, vote SP! The Socialistische Partij in the Netherlands

The origins and development of the SP

The history of the Socialistische Partij (SP) starts with the establishment of the Kommunistische Eenheidsbeweging Nederland/Marxistisch-leninistisch (Communist Union Movement Netherlands/Marxist-Leninist, KENml).¹ Inspired by the ideas of Mao, the KENml took action against bad housing conditions and low salaries. While the party gained popularity among workers and students, it was also marked by internal tensions. Gradually, two factions had developed: a proletarian wing under the lead of Daan Monjé and a more intellectual wing symbolized by Kees de Boer. The proletarian wing adhered to the so-called mass line or the Maoist principle of spreading among the masses to learn from them. This contrasted with the idea of a vanguard party which was popular among the intellectual wing. Relations between both groups reached breaking point in the summer of 1971. The KENml split and a majority of its members decided to follow Monjé to the new Kommunistiese Partij Nederland/Marxisties-Leninisties (Communist Party Netherlands/Marxist-Leninist, KPN/ML). On 22 October 1972, the KPN/ML was renamed and the SP was officially established (Kagie, 2006; Voerman, 1987).

In its early years, the SP was a very dogmatic and centralized party with only limited electoral success. The party adhered to Marxist-Leninist principles enriched by the ideas of Mao. This resulted in a fierce criticism on parliamentary democracy and a call to spread a violent revolution in order to put a halt to capitalism. Inspired by the mass line of Mao, the party established numerous mass organizations, such as the Bond van Huurders en Woningzoekenden (Association of Tenants and Residence seekers, BHW) to mobilize as many people as possible. Because of their many door-to-door campaigns, the devoted SP members were sometimes nicknamed ‘Red Jehovah’s Witnesses’. Membership of the SP equalled a complete submission to socialist ideals. Students who liked to join the party were summoned to abandon their classes and start working in a factory. According to a former prominent SP member Koos van Zomereren, party membership entailed sacrificing one’s freedom, old friendships, leisure time and money. Inspired by the democratic centralism of Lenin, internal discussion was kept to a minimum within the party (Van der Steen, 1994; Voerman, 1987).

Despite its aversion for parliamentary activities, the SP decided to participate in elections to make the voice of the ‘ordinary man’ heard and to unveil democracy

from within. The many extra-parliamentary actions paid off at the local level. In the municipal elections of 1974, the party gained two seats in Nijmegen and three in Oss. Yet the radical ideology and heavy membership duties made the party unattractive to a large public. Its first throw of the electoral dice at the national elections of 1977 did not produce a parliamentary seat (0.3 per cent of the votes). Combined with a declining appreciation for the Chinese foreign policy, the party increasingly abandoned Maoism in the second half of the 1970s. The violent revolution became of secondary importance while parliamentary democracy became more valued. The SP also introduced supportive membership allowing partisans to contribute financially without the heavy duties for full members.

Despite the abandoning of Maoism the SP remained loyal to its democratic socialist credentials. Fighting capitalism in an old-fashioned style was considered more important than professionally campaigning or developing a research centre. Many extra-parliamentary actions were organized but few of them resonated among the citizens at large. Despite some local strongholds, the party also lacked a nationwide image. After the disappointing elections of 1977, the SP failed another four times to enter the Dutch Parliament.

Things started changing in October 1986 with the death of party leader Monjé. His successor, Jan Marijnissen, made the party more visible and slowly started a process of professionalization. In 1993, the party hired a communication expert for the first time. Niko Koffeman proposed the logo of a tomato, relating both to the colour of socialism and the symbol of protest. He moreover recommended changing the party's slogan from 'Honest and active' to 'Vote against, vote SP'. By denouncing the established parties while defending the 'ordinary people' the SP was thought to attract protest voters in a more pronounced way (Kagie, 2006). The professional and populist campaign led to a first success at the 1994 national elections (Van der Steen, 1994). Seventeen years after their first attempt, both Marijnissen and Remi Poppe managed to get elected into Parliament.

With Marijnissen as a popular leader and a slow but steady process of moderation, the party gained additional votes in the years to come. In 2002 the party decided to change its slogan from 'Vote against, vote SP' to 'Vote for, vote SP'. With the renewed slogan, the SP attempted drawing on an electorate beyond protest voters. Prior to the 2003 elections, the polls indicated an impressive victory for the SP (twenty-two seats) but the actual result was less spectacular (nine seats). Opponents of the SP labelled it as a radical party without realistic solutions for policy problems. Some observers have also argued that Marijnissen was not always well prepared in debates (Kagie, 2006: 61–62). The party probably suffered also from the neck-and-neck race between the PvdA and the CDA. This made strategic voters opt for the PvdA instead of the SP (Van Holsteyn, 2006).

As can be seen on Figure 9.1, the real breakthrough of the SP came in 2006 when the party secured no less than 16.6 per cent of the votes. Part of this exceptional result can be explained by the fact that the SP positioned itself more closely to the PvdA. In an attempt to increase its coalition potential, the SP also sidelined some old dogmas such as its earlier proposals of leaving NATO or abolishing the monarchy. Because it was clear that the CDA would win the elections, strategic voting was also less of an issue. The results of the DPES 2006 study show that

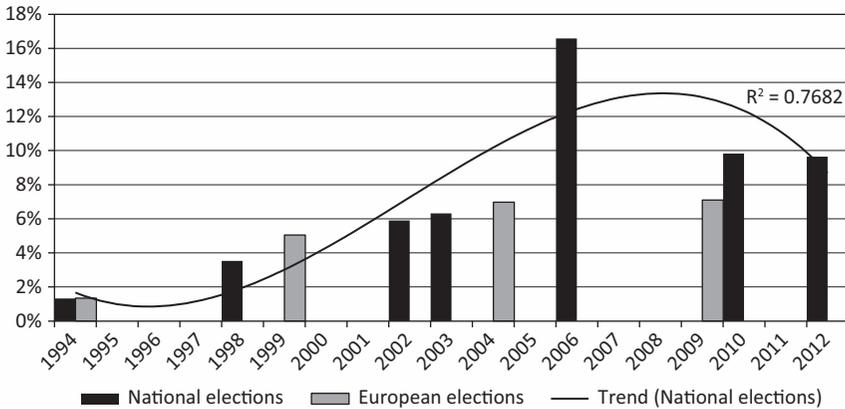


Figure 9.1 Vote share of the SP over time

Source: www.nsd.uib.no/european_election_database/

35 per cent of the SP electorate in 2006 had previously voted for the PvdA.² In 2010 the party's electoral share declined again to 9.8 per cent (Van Kessel, 2010). This loss might be partly attributed to a leadership vacuum after Marijnissen stepped down because of health problems in 2008. His successor, Agnes Kant, was not very popular and after disappointing local elections, Emile Roemer was appointed to lead the SP campaign in 2010 (Schumacher and Rooduijn, 2013: 131). It is also possible that some voters have grown disappointed in the fact that the party has not been able to impact directly on policies despite its success in 2006. In spite of its stability and electoral growth, the SP remains an opposition party. The early elections of 2012 did not make much of a difference for the SP as the party gained exactly the same number of seats than it did two years earlier.

The ideology of the SP

As mentioned earlier, the SP is a social populist party although the party's ideology has been marked by some changes and a gradual process of moderation has been taking place. Until 1980, the SP was a Marxist-Leninist party which found its inspiration straight from the 'red book' of Mao. A violent revolution to overthrow the capitalist system was the ultimate goal. Mao's mass line provided the breeding ground for the SP's populism. The mass line stated,

Go to the masses and learn from them, synthesize their experience into better, articulated principles and methods, then do propaganda among the masses, and call upon them to put these principles and methods into practice so as to solve their problems and help them achieve liberation and happiness.

(cited in Vossen, 2010: 16)

Since 'the masses' were generally not susceptible to revolutionary ideas, indicated by the SP's poor election results, the party gradually started to abandon the ideas

of Mao. The SP also grew increasingly critical towards China's foreign policy. When Mao died in 1976, the SP sent a telegram praising itself lucky to be part of his legacy but in the party literature, Mao and China were gradually silenced. The party would later acknowledge that existing socialist countries do not provide examples for solutions in the Netherlands. While the idea of a violent revolution faded, the mass line remained important for the SP.

From 1980 until at least 1998 the SP developed into a more pragmatic social populist party with clear Marxist elements. Party secretary Tiny Kox argued that in such a party, 'the wisdom of books is taken over by wisdom of experience' and 'dogmas are exchanged for solid analyses with sometimes unorthodox conclusions' (Van der Steen, 1994: 173). The SP claimed to know what lived among the 'ordinary people' and published two controversial brochures about feminism and guest workers in 1986. Drawing on 'narrow contacts' with female workers, the SP concluded that women were not interested in feminism. In fact, feminism would only divide men and women while drawing attention away from class struggle. In 'Gastarbeid en Kapitaal' (Guest Labour and Capital), the SP argued that immigrant workers should choose between adopting Dutch citizenship or returning to their country of origin. These publications led to severe criticism among left-wing intellectuals and the SP was even accused of extreme-right ideas (Van der Steen, 1994; Voerman, 1987).

From 1998 until 2006, the party remained social populist but the Marxist elements gradually disappeared. The struggle against capitalism is now replaced by a struggle against 'neoliberalism'. In its 2002 program, the SP claims that all Dutch governments (including the ones in which the PvdA participated) of the last two decades were but variations of one neoliberal political project. While a clear definition is lacking, it seems that the party uses neoliberalism to refer to a socioeconomic system where profit is considered more important than human dignity, solidarity, the environment and democracy. Consequently it is argued that neoliberal policies have had many detrimental consequences: a reduced access to health care and education, a rising inequality, environmental damage and an erosion of democracy and national sovereignty (SP, 2002).

To counter neoliberalism the SP proposes a radical left-wing policy. Further social and environmental breakdown can only be prevented by immediately bringing all processes of privatization to an end while providing the government with a much larger role in the way the economy is organized. By increasing the tax share to 72 per cent for the highest incomes, inequality could be drastically reduced. In the 1998 programme, the SP also argued that the highest salaries should only be three times as high as the minimum wages (SP, 1998). To increase environmental protection, the SP proposed a drastic reduction of emissions while abandoning the use of nuclear energy. The party also wanted to protect the most vulnerable groups in society such as the homeless, handicapped and immigrants. Homeless people should receive housing and more care and assistance. Refugees should be welcomed better and immigrants should be provided with suffrage at both the municipal and provincial level (SP, 2002).

To restore the voice of the 'ordinary people' and revitalize democracy, the SP proposes the introduction of the referendum and the citizen initiative. Furthermore,

the SP argues that the First Chamber should be abolished. To restore the voice of the people in the economic realm, the party also favours a greater say of employees in the policies of companies. The SP also denounces the monarchy and calls for an elected head of the state. Supranational organizations such as the EU or NATO are regarded with suspicion by the SP. Since the EU is considered a ‘neoliberal project, attempting to increase the power of large corporations while reducing the control of the democratic governments’, the party proposes an immediate ban on transferring competencies to the EU (SP, 2002: 571). With regard to NATO, the SP even argues that the Netherlands should leave this ‘dangerous military institute’ (SP, 2002: 572).

From 2006 on, the party has dropped certain radical views in an attempt to increase its coalition potential. Leaving NATO or abolishing the monarchy is no longer a *conditio sine qua non* for government participation. The party has also lost some of its populist appeal. However, ‘the SP has not been able to resist some populist tendencies in the last couple of years’ (Voerman, 2009: 31, own translation). In 2008, Marijnissen argued, ‘They promise all kinds of things in The Hague but eventually they make a mess out of it. In the end they only care for each other and for themselves.’³ I agree with Voerman (2009) that the SP is now in an ambivalent situation. The SP has accepted parliamentary democracy and acknowledges the importance of political parties. Antiestablishment rhetoric has waned to some extent. Yet the disposition of the selfish political class against the misled ‘people of the country’ by SP leaders such as Marijnissen, Kant and Ronald van Raak is still easily recognized as populist by many voters. To claim that the SP has social-democratized might also be considered an exaggeration (March, 2011: 131).

The voters of the SP

Data and methods

Since the SP has participated in many elections, the focus will not be on one specific campaign or election. Instead I will analyse the SP electorate at the elections of 1998, 2002, 2006 and 2010. While the SP also gained parliamentary representation in 1994, the vote share of the party was too small to enable a meaningful statistical analysis. Since the campaigns and election studies of 2002, 2006 and 2010 have all been discussed in previous chapters, I will only briefly provide some information on the 1998 election study.

The 1998 campaign started slowly. After four years of the purple cabinet (PvdA, D66, VVD), one of the main questions of the 1998 campaign was whether the coalition could continue. As the PvdA faced increasing competition on the left side of the party landscape (from SP and GroenLinks), the party hoped for a horse race between PvdA and VVD for the title of prime minister. This way the PvdA could attract strategic voters from the left. The third coalition party, D66 had experienced difficulties in its first time as a coalition partner. As a junior partner, the party failed to realize much of its ambitious program. The result of the 1998 elections was that the PvdA and VVD both gained seats while D66 went

from twenty-four to fourteen seats. GroenLinks and the SP also won the elections while the CDA could not profit from its opposition status.

The Dutch Parliamentary Election Study of 1998 was conducted by the University of Twente with the assistance of Kees Aarts, Henk van der Kolk, Marlies Kamp and Jacques Thomassen. The study was carried out in two waves. From 30 March until 5 May, the research team was able to interview 2,101 respondents out of a total of 4,207 (50 per cent). From this group, 1,814 respondents (86 per cent) were reinterviewed in the postelection wave which was held from 11 May until 4 July. To reduce nonresponse bias, a limited number of questions on political interest, efficacy and voting behaviour were also asked to those who refused to participate in the first and second wave. A total of 926 out of 2,106 initial nonrespondents (44 per cent) were interviewed this way (Aarts, van der Kolk, and Kamp, 1999). In line with the previous chapters, three models (socio-demographics, attitudes, mixed) will be presented to explore what drives SP support. Since the results of four election years will be explored, the three models will be presented in separate tables, however.

Results

Table 9.1 reveals the socio-demographic drivers of SP voting from 1998 until 2010. Since the odds ratios are smaller than one on every occasion, it seems that women are more likely to vote social populist than men. Only in the last two elections was this variable significant, however. Concerning age it is even more difficult to draw a clear pattern. While the SP drew disproportional support among younger voters in 2006, age did not play a role in the other elections. The education gap hypothesis is largely refuted on the basis of our results. Only in 2010 does it seem that those with a low to middle educational attainment were significantly more likely to vote for the SP. In 1998 and 2002, however, the lower educated were even less likely to vote SP (compared to the higher educated). Turning to social class we find that the (lower) working class is three to six times as likely to support the SP compared to the upper (middle) class. The unemployed/not working are not more likely to support the party. Whether one is a member of a trade union seems generally not very relevant for an SP vote. Finally, it appears that the nonreligious are more likely to support the Socialist Party. In all four elections, the effect is significant.

Table 9.2 explores the effect of attitudinal characteristics on the SP vote. Although the effect is only significant in two out of four elections, it seems that dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy plays a role in social populist support. The absence of an effect in 2002 and 2010 might be explained by the fact that the LPF and PVV convinced a large number of dissatisfied voters on these occasions. Schumacher and Rooduijn (2013) came to a similar conclusion. They found that SP voters are also guided by protest but 'combine these motivations with policy considerations and/or party leader consideration' in contrast with PVV voters who are 'pure' protest voters (Schumacher and Rooduijn, 2013: 132).

As expected, the SP is predominantly supported by voters who place themselves on the left of the left-right scale. With one exception in 2002, egalitarian

Table 9.1 Logistic regression of SP vote, 1998–2010 (socio-demographics)

	1998		2002		2006		2010	
	Exp (B)	Sig						
Sex (ref. woman)	.98	.947	.77	.309	.80	.068	.62	.003
Age	1.01	.462	.99	.149	.99	.004	1.00	.818
Education (ref. high vocational, university)		.142		.018		.435		.089
Elementary	.25	.011	.26	.045	1.00	.995	1.69	.202
Lower vocational	.57	.185	.14	.003	.76	.227	1.83	.031
Secondary	.75	.468	.45	.065	1.09	.697	2.23	.009
Middle level vocational, higher level secondary	.63	.203	.50	.023	1.09	.603	1.62	.030
Subjective class (ref. upper (middle) class)		.000		.012		.000		.000
Lower/working class	5.94	.000	3.13	.005	3.58	.000	4.02	.000
Middle class	1.83	.156	1.36	.355	2.42	.000	2.54	.001
Unemployed (ref. unemployed)	.44	.209	.75	.704	.90	.502	1.27	.277
Membership (ref. trade union member)	1.31	.366	.83	.486	.93	.622	.63	.009
Religious attendance (ref. regular attending)	4.72	.001	2.19	.047	3.41	.000	2.73	.000
Constant	.01	.000	.13	.038	.07	.000	.02	.000
Nagelkerke R ²	.085		.068		.086		.098	

Note: Variables that are significant at the $p < .10$ level are depicted in bold.

Table 9.2 Logistic regression of SP vote, 1998–2010 (attitudes)

	1998		2002		2006		2010	
	<i>Exp (B)</i>	<i>Sig</i>						
Satisfaction with democracy (not at all satisfied)	1.87	.006	.88	.587	1.49	.000	1.06	.670
Left-right position (right)	.75	.000	.56	.000	.69	.000	.81	.000
Income differences (decreasing difference)	1.57	.000	1.17	.154	1.13	.010	1.22	.001
Ethnic minorities (adjust to Dutch culture)	.98	.835	1.00	.963	1.03	.447	1.01	.807
Crime (government should act tougher on crime)	.83	.218	1.00	.974	1.05	.435	1.00	.939
Europe (unification has gone too far)	1.26	.005	1.12	.150	1.15	.001	1.16	.002
Referendum (decision referendum)					1.45	.000	1.54	.000
Constant	.00	.000	.52	.506	.20	.002	.13	.000
Nagelkerke R ² :	.186		.225		.247		.128	

Note: Variables that are significant at the $p < .10$ level are depicted in bold.

attitudes are also an important predictor for SP voting. Anti-immigrant attitudes do not play a role, however. The same goes for authoritarian attitudes which are also not significant. Interestingly enough, it seems that anti-European attitudes systematically fuel social populist support. This is in line with the party's Euro-scepticism. Finally, it appears that those adhering to the idea of direct democracy are also more likely to support the SP.

Table 9.3 shows the results of a logistic regression in which socio-demographic variables and attitudes are estimated simultaneously. The mixed model does not provide many new insights as most of the previous findings are confirmed. Apart from subjective class and religion, few socio-demographic variables systematically predict a vote for the SP. Dissatisfaction with democracy remains significant in two out of four tests. Furthermore, a left-wing positioning on the left-right scale and egalitarian attitudes also systematically increase the odds to vote social populist. While opposition to immigration and authoritarian attitudes remain unimportant, anti-European sentiments increase the likelihood of SP support. Finally, adhering to the idea of direct democracy remains significant in predicting SP support even when controlled for a host of socio-demographic variables.

Table 9.4 reveals which voters would potentially vote for the SP, drawing on the question 'How likely is it that you would vote for the SP in the future?' which was answered by each respondent with a score ranging from 0 to 10. It should be stressed that this question was only asked in the first wave in 2006 so this might slightly distort the findings.

With regard to gender there is no clear pattern to discern. Yet age is linked with SP support in a systematic way: in every election younger voters are more likely to support the social populist party. An analysis of the role of education does not lend support for the education gap hypothesis. In fact, the higher educated report a higher probability of voting for the SP in three out of four elections. The negative effect of subjective class on the probability to cast an SP vote is confirmed. Being unemployed or not working does not increase social populist voting, however. While being member of a trade union had no effect in 1998 and 2002, it seems that the SP recruited a disproportionate number of voters with union links in 2006 and 2010. Finally, religion has a clear negative impact on the probability of a (future) SP vote.

Turning to attitudes, we observe a number of interesting findings. It appears first and most that the potential electorate of SP is not significantly unsatisfied with the functioning of democracy. This is surprising as the actual SP voters were politically dissatisfied in 1998 and 2006. As expected, we find support for the idea that SP voters are located at the left-wing extreme of the left-right scale. It is not surprising that they are therefore also adhering to egalitarian values. It is also interesting to see that potential SP voters are positive towards immigration. The average SP supporter disagrees with the statement that ethnic minorities should adapt to Dutch culture. In 2006 and 2010 authoritarian attitudes also decrease the likelihood of a future SP vote. At the same time, anti-European sentiments are significant in predicting a future vote for the national populist party. Finally, adhering to the idea of direct democracy also increases the likelihood of SP support. The adjusted R^2 values range from .22 to .33, which can be considered as normal values.

Table 9.3 Logistic regression of SP vote, 1998–2010 (socio-demographics and attitudes)

	1998		2002		2006		2010	
	Exp (B)	Sig						
Sex (ref. woman)	1.24	.450	1.23	.480	.92	.541	.78	.147
Age	1.01	.599	.99	.133	.98	.002	1.00	.626
Education (ref. higher vocational, university)		.132		.294		.299		.138
Elementary	.24	.023	.41	.222	1.33	.500	1.80	.192
Lower vocational	.54	.214	.22	.042	.72	.234	1.75	.071
Secondary	1.12	.789	.66	.398	1.03	.913	2.29	.012
Middle level vocational, higher level secondary	.82	.607	.66	.226	1.15	.459	1.59	.050
Subjective class (ref. upper (middle) class)		.068		.141		.031		.002
Lower/working class	2.72	.049	2.45	.048	1.69	.040	2.97	.001
Middle class	1.40	.461	1.62	.198	1.78	.008	2.01	.018
Unemployed (ref. unemployed)	.45	.276	.73	.700	1.05	.808	1.46	.108
Membership (ref. trade union member)	1.55	.173	.87	.636	1.15	.441	.67	.036
Religious attendance (ref. regularly attending)	4.79	.003	1.18	.693	3.43	.000	2.82	.003
Satisfaction with democracy (not at all satisfied)	2.02	.005	.87	.594	1.53	.000	1.05	.741
Left-right position (right)	.79	.003	.56	.000	.68	.000	.82	.000
Income differences (decreasing difference)	1.66	.000	1.20	.135	1.14	.012	1.22	.003
Ethnic minorities (adjust to Dutch culture)	.97	.717	1.01	.946	1.05	.380	1.03	.690
Crime (government should act tougher on crime)	.91	.537	1.01	.930	1.05	.484	.92	.258
Europe (unification has gone too far)	1.26	.007	1.17	.069	1.25	.000	1.09	.091
Referendum (decisions referendum)					1.35	.001	1.49	.000
Constant	.00	.000	.73	.835	.04	.000	.04	.000
Nagelkerke R ² :	.249		.257		.299		.193	

Note: Variables that are significant at the $p < .10$ level are depicted in bold.

Table 9.4 OLS regression of probability of SP vote (socio-demographics and attitudes)

	1998		2002		2006		2010	
	Exp(B)	Sign.	Exp(B)	Sign.	Exp(B)	Sign.	Exp(B)	Sign.
Constant		.000		.000		.000		.000
Sex (woman)	-.03	.231	-.05	.044	.02	.412	.07	.001
Age	-.15	.000	-.09	.000	-.07	.002	-.14	.000
Education (higher educated)	.06	.035	.08	.006	.06	.008	.00	.875
Subjective class (upper/upper middle class)	-.10	.000	-.05	.081	-.03	.219	-.08	.000
Unemployed	-.02	.524	.01	.663	-.01	.752	-.04	.114
Membership (trade union member)	.04	.105	.02	.529	.05	.012	.07	.001
Religious attendance (regularly attending)	-.10	.000	-.06	.024	-.08	.000	-.07	.000
Satisfaction with democracy (not at all satisfied)	.02	.365	-.03	.192	.01	.758	.00	.899
Left-right position (right)	-.25	.000	-.40	.000	-.43	.000	-.33	.000
Income differences (decreasing difference)	.16	.000	.15	.000	.11	.000	.15	.000
Ethnic minorities (adjust to Dutch culture)	-.07	.007	-.12	.000	-.04	.100	-.09	.000
Crime (government should act tougher on crime)	-.02	.453	.03	.319	-.06	.005	-.04	.088
Europe (unification has gone too far)	.06	.021	.01	.732	.07	.002	.06	.008
Referendum (decisions referendum)					.10	.000	.12	.000
Adj. R ² :	.219		.308		.325		.293	

Note: Variables that are significant at the $p < .10$ level are depicted in bold.

The SP over time

Although it has taken quite a while to become successful, the SP is by now an established actor on the left of the Dutch party system. There is no evidence that the Socialist Party will decline or disintegrate in the near future. This can be explained to a large extent by the mechanisms described in the theoretical chapter. First, the SP was not an entrepreneurial party but could rely on the network and finances of the KENml. In local strongholds such as Nijmegen and Oss, it had links with student movements and worker organizations. As a Marxist movement, the SP also received support from other radical left-wing organizations and parties. While no detailed reports exist, some sources suggest that China even directly sponsored the party financially (Kagie, 2006). By means of its extra-parliamentary actions – such as supporting strikes and protesting against polluting companies – and dense network of organizations such as the BHW and medical and community organizations, the SP has been able to build enduring links with society, allowing it to function without parliamentary success.

Second, the SP had to endure a very long time without parliamentary representation. While the party obtained some early local successes, it took twenty-two years before it gained parliamentary seats. This suggests that its members are not motivated (purely) by instrumental reasons but rather by idealistic motives. It is generally acknowledged that the SP has among the most devoted and active party members of all Dutch parties. With a total of 46,308 members in January 2011, it also ranks third among all Dutch parties in terms of party members.⁴ All of this suggests that the continuation of the SP is assured even if the party would temporarily not perform well.

A third element that deserves notice is the purifier status of the SP. Given that both the PvdA and the SP mobilize on similar issues, the SP's success is partly dependent on the ideological positioning and the leadership of the party it challenges. In 2003 and 2006, for instance, it seems that many voters hesitated between two similar alternatives, and sometimes the SP has been a victim of strategic voting (Van Holsteyn, 2006). The purifier status does not make the party irrelevant, however.

Turning to leadership, it appears that the SP has been led by more and less charismatic leaders. Particularly Marijnissen shares some but not all characteristics of a charismatic leader. It would be hard to find a reference of him claiming to have a special mission to save the people. At the same time, he frequently stresses his background as a welder in a metal factory, thereby emphasizing his link with the ordinary people. Occasionally, Marijnissen draws on friend-foe categorizations and conspiracy theories. He denounces the 'neoliberal money-obsessed elite' and contrasts it with the honest, altruistic working class. Conspiracy theories are expressed by referring to the hidden power of multinationals and international banks. Finally, Marijnissen possesses oratorical skills and a 'keen sense of publicity and humour' enabling him to paint a positive image in the media (Vossen, 2010). Yet not all party leaders of the SP have come as close to the notion of charismatic leadership as Marijnissen does. Agnes Kant, for instance, had an 'abrasive image and had been unable to project herself as an effective electoral asset to

replace Marijnissen' (March, 2011: 133). The leaders of the SP always tightly organized the party, however. A very active membership and solid functioning of the party have always been high on the agenda of the Socialist Party's leadership. Finally, it is important to mention that the party has not suffered from ostracism so far. In fact, the SP has joined governing coalitions in several larger cities such as Eindhoven and Nijmegen. Nevertheless, the party has never governed at the national level so far, and the party is not even always included in the negotiations after elections. At times, this might be a disadvantage as some voters might prefer alternative parties if they have more chances to affect policies.

Conclusion

In this chapter the origins and ideology of the SP have been explored first. The party originated out of the KENml and was clearly inspired by Maoism including the so-called mass line. Because of its radical views and rigid organization, the SP originally did not obtain much electoral success beyond some local strongholds such as Oss and Nijmegen. Gradually, however, the party started abandoning the idea of a violent revolution while maintaining a populist ideology. By 1994 the SP obtained its first parliamentary seats with the slogan 'Vote against, vote SP!' Under the lead of Marijnissen, the party became an established actor of the Dutch party system even though it has never gained governing power so far.

In a next step, the socio-demographic and attitudinal profile of the SP voters in 1998, 2002, 2006 and 2010 has been explored. The evidence with regard to populist factors was mixed. Dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy was a significant driver of SP support in 1998 and 2006 but less so in 2002 and 2010 when the LPF and PVV were successful. The importance of direct democracy for social populist support was confirmed in every test. However, the education gap hypothesis was largely refuted by the data. Particularly in 1998 and 2002 the Socialist Party attracted higher instead of lower educated voters. In 2010, however, the SP started attracting slightly more lower educated voters, suggesting perhaps a process of realignment.

Most of the facilitating factors for populist parties also contributed to the SP's success. First, the party seems to attract nonreligious and younger voters even though the age effect was not found in every test. More consistent was the finding that the SP receives disproportional support from voters who position themselves on the left of the left-right divide. Finally, opposition to European integration appeared an important motive to support the SP. Turning to the hypothesis specific for social populist parties, we found ample evidence that egalitarian attitudes contribute to SP voting.

In the final section, the electoral fate of the SP over time has been explored. Its longevity can be explained by several factors. First, the SP could rely on preexisting networks to develop. Second, it seems that the long period that the party managed to persist as an organization outside parliament before its national breakthrough has made it very robust. At the same time, its purifier status makes the SP dependent on its own ideological positioning as well as that of its main competitor, the PvdA. Furthermore, the party has been led by both charismatic as well as

less charismatic leaders, yet good internal leadership has created a well-organized mass party with almost 50,000 members. Finally, the SP has not suffered from ostracism so far and has joined coalitions at the local level.

Notes

- 1 In turn, the KENml is a splinter party of the Communistische Partij Nederland (Communist Party Netherlands, CPN). While the CPN adhered to the communism of the Soviet Union, the KENml was inspired by Maoism.
- 2 For this analysis, nonvoters were ignored. Another analysis shows that 30 per cent of the SP voters were people who did not vote in 2003 while 24 per cent had voted for the PvdA (Van Holsteyn, 2006)
- 3 'Ze beloven in Den Haag van alles, maar maken er een potje van en zorgen vooral goed voor elkaar en zichzelf' (cited in Voerman, 2009).
- 4 www.rug.nl/dnpp/themas/lt/index

AuQ4

References

- Aarts, K., van der Kolk, H., & Kamp, M. (1999). Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 1998. Enschede: NIWI/Steinmetz Archive.
- Kagie, R. (2006). *De Socialisten: Achter de Schermen van de SP*. Amsterdam: Mets & Schilt.
- March, L. (2011). Left-Wing Populism: Populist Socialists and Social Populists. In *Radical Left Parties in Europe* (pp. 118–148). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Schumacher, G., & Rooduijn, M. (2013). Sympathy for the 'Devil'? Voting for Populists in the 2006 and 2010 Dutch General Elections. *Electoral Studies*, 32(1), 124–133.
- SP. (1998). Tegengas.
- SP. (2002). Eerste Weg Links.
- Van der Steen, P. (1994). De Doorbraak van de 'Gewone Mensen' Partij: De SP en de Tweede-Kamerverkiezingen van 1994. In *DNNP Jaarboek* (pp. 172–189). Groningen: DNNP.
- Van Holsteyn, J. (2006). Na de Imposie, de Inspiratie: Hoe Intens Was de Rode Stem? *Socialisme & Democratie*, 63(12), 14–19.
- Van Kessel, S. (2010). Election Briefing No. 54: The Dutch General Election of June 2010. Sussex European Institute.
- Voerman, G. (1987). De 'Rode Jehova's': Een Geschiedenis van de Socialistische Partij. In *Jaarboek DNNP 1986* (pp. 124–150). Groningen: DNNP.
- Voerman, G. (2009). Van Mao tot Marketing: Over het Populisme van de SP. *Socialisme & Democratie*, 9, 26–32.
- Vossen, K. (2010). *Different Flavours of Populism in the Netherlands: Four Case-Studies*. Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions, Munster.

10 Wahltag ist protesttag! The PDS/DL in Germany

The origins and development of the PDS/DL

On 16 June 2007 the German party Die Linke (DL) emerged as a result of the merger between the Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism, PDS) and the Wahlalternative: Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit (The Electoral Alternative for Work and Social Justice, WASG). The PDS, in turn, was the successor of the communist and authoritarian Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany, SED). The SED was the governing party in the former Deutsche Demokratische Republik (German Democratic Republic, DDR). As one of the most dogmatic communist parties, it had massively violated human and civil rights. When Gorbachev announced perestroika and Glasnost and the Berlin Wall fell on 9 November 1989, the SED was hence forced to change drastically. With German citizens now being able to articulate their thoughts freely and a range of political alternatives available, the future for the SED looked dramatic. The 900,000 members giving back their party books at the end of 1989 was a clear indication (Hough, Koss and Olsen, 2007).

At an extraordinary congress in December 1989, some delegates suggested disbanding the party altogether to break with the past. The majority chose, however, to reform the party to the democratic standards of unified Germany and adopted the transitional name SED/PDS. A transformation process enabled the party to maintain its networks and immense resources. The charismatic Gregor Gysi was chosen as the new party leader of the SED/PDS. In February 1990, the party renamed itself again to PDS making the breach with the past more visible. Most observers considered the PDS as a reluctantly democratic party, however, and it was expected that it would disappear from the political map once free and fair elections had taken place. In the first German election in 1990, the PDS nonetheless gained 11.1 per cent in the eastern states and a mere 0.3 per cent in western Germany. While the overall vote share was only 2.4 per cent, the party managed to enter Parliament, as 5 per cent in either of the two parts of Germany was sufficient for representation.

Despite its survival in Parliament, the PDS went through a very difficult period in the early 1990s. First, most established parties tried to ostracize the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD) as it was allegedly still undemocratic. Second, the party became increasingly scrutinized by the Treuhandanstalt (an agency responsible for restructuring and selling former state-owned enterprises in the DDR). At one point the agency took control

of all the real estate that the PDS owned in Berlin and Brandenburg. Third, the party had to keep together a very broad church of different factions ranging from outright communists (such as the Communist Platform, KPF) to more moderated groupings that favoured a less confrontational style. The party also lacked a coherent programme and was in search for a new *raison d'être* (Hough et al., 2007).

It is likely that the PDS would have withered away if Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl had been able to realize his promise in turning eastern Germany into a flourishing economic landscape. Yet the perceived arrogance of Western politicians and the increasing disillusion with the lack of economic progress provided the PDS with an unexpected electoral potential. Gradually, the PDS became the party through which dissatisfaction of eastern German citizens could be voiced. With the slogan 'Election Day is Protest Day', the party obtained an acceptable 4.4 per cent of the votes in 1994. From 1994 to 1998 the PDS further consolidated and became accepted as a democratic party. The 1998 federal election was again successful as the party polled 5 per cent (21.6 per cent in the east and 1.2 per cent in western Germany).

Despite a process of consolidation the PDS faced various difficulties with the turn of the century. First, the party remained heterogeneous and suffered from radical groupings inside the party. At a party conference in April 2000, two thirds of the delegates voted against a motion envisioning the German troops being stationed abroad under a UN mandate. Instead it called for the dissolution of NATO while denouncing the militarization of the EU. This made the party look increasingly dogmatic again. Furthermore, the strong triumvirate of Gysi, Lothar Bisky and André Brie decided to step down as party leaders. After ten years at the head of the party, they felt that it was time to give new people a chance. Yet it appeared that Gysi was more difficult to replace than expected. The new leader, Gabriele Zimmer, was unable to formulate clear strategic goals and position herself prominently in the media. All of this affected the electoral appeal of the PDS, which only gained 4 per cent of the vote in the 2002 federal elections (Hough et al., 2007).

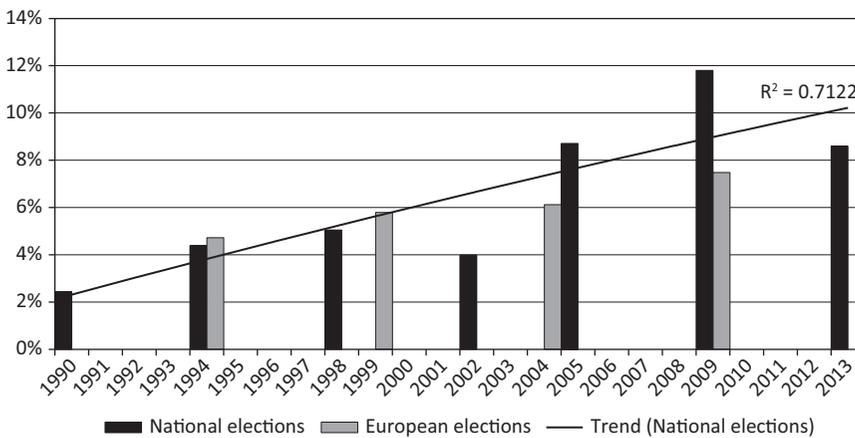


Figure 10.1 Vote share of PDS/DL over time

Source: www.nsd.uib.no/european_election_database/

New opportunities for the PDS emerged when Chancellor Schröder announced the so-called Hartz reforms after the 2002 election. The Hartz IV reform envisioned, among other things, the restricting of entitlements, deregulation of the labour market and a restructuring of pensions and healthcare. A melting pot of disillusioned SPD members (including former SPD Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine), unionists and left-wing intellectuals opposed these measures and established the WASG. While the WASG was originally an interest group rather than a political party, its growing membership – some 5,000 people by the end of 2004 – motivated electoral participation. As both the WASG and the PDS failed to achieve any meaningful result in the *Land* election in North-Rhine Westphalia, it became clear that collaboration was the only realistic strategy to challenge the SPD from the left. In 2005 both parties agreed upon an electoral alliance called DIE LINKSPARTEI.PDS to participate together in the upcoming elections. ‘The Left Party.PDS campaigned against [. . .] the neo-liberal direction of the established parties. It promised to roll back the Hartz IV reforms; introduce a minimum wage, increase taxes on the wealthy; and stimulate domestic consumption through public spending’ (Patton, 2006: 222). Under the leadership of the popular Lafontaine (WASG) and the returning Gysi (PDS), the left alliance obtained a surprising 8.7 per cent of the votes.

Despite several conflicts between the PDS and the WASG, notably in Berlin, both parties continued their cooperation and eventually found enough common ground to form a merger. ‘From March until May 2007, delegates of both parties voted and confirmed the merger in several steps, with 82.6 percent (PDS) and 83.9 per cent (WASG) at respective ballots’ (Coffé and Plassa, 2010: 725). In June 2007 the merger was completed and DL became officially established. The young party achieved an impressive electoral victory at the 2009 national elections as it polled 12 per cent. Without Lafontaine, who retired from politics due to health problems, DL experienced a setback in 2013 as the party gained only 8 per cent of the votes.

The ideology of the PDS/DL

A number of issues such as social justice, ecology, equality, peace and democracy are recurring in the party literature of DL. The overall analysis is that all of these values are threatened by the hegemony of neoliberalism. First, the ‘concentrated power of capital’ and the ‘primacy of the international financial markets’ have jeopardized principles of solidarity and replaced them with competition, insecurity and exploitation. Second, the blind struggle for profit maximization has had a devastating impact on the environment (*Motor der Klimakatastrophe*). War is also linked to capitalism as the access to resources and energy is allegedly an important motive for the imperial United States to invade other countries. Finally, it is argued that ‘neo-liberal capitalism means dismantling democracy’ (Die Linke, 2007: 4). By accusing the established parties of colluding with transnational corporations at the expense of the common people, DL also qualifies as populist.

DL considers democratic socialism as an alternative for the neoliberal zeitgeist. Although the party now condemns the socialist experience in the DDR, it also

rejects anti-communist prejudices and argues that important lessons can be drawn from the experiences in eastern Germany. DL remains hence a fairly radical party in its argumentation that only by drastically transforming the capitalist system is it possible to realize social justice, equality and democracy in Germany. Its party literature frequently refers to the need for 'another world', a 'comprehensive social restructuring' and overcoming capitalism through 'a transformational process'. The party is also not afraid to cite classical socialists such as Karl Marx in its 2009 manifesto.

In practical terms, democratic socialism means restoring social justice by increasing income equality. According to DL this can be achieved at the upper end by raising the tax share for the highest incomes to 53 per cent. The party also mentions a *Millionär* tax as a measure to deal with the financial crisis. Tax loopholes and white-collar crime should be punished severely. The financial sector should be scrutinized much more while speculation should be limited. At the lower end, DL proposes a ten-Euro per-hour minimum wage to provide a decent living. Publicly sponsored employment programs with cooperative elements should benefit groups that find it difficult to access the conventional labour market. DL also calls for the coming to an end of income inequalities between men and women and East and West German citizens.

The social populist party also focuses on better working conditions for all Germans. This will be achieved by demanding shorter working hours and a higher degree of protection for workers. A strengthening of the power of trade unions is considered necessary to present a counterweight against the concentrated power of capital. Concerning pensions DL strives for retirement from the age of sixty without exceptions.

DL furthermore favours an ecological transformation of society (*Gesellschaft ökologisch umbauen*). The party calls for an immediate and irreversible exit from nuclear energy. Instead the focus should be on renewable energy sources, drawing on new technologies. In general, the party is sceptical on individualized car and air traffic. Speed limits of 120 kph should be imposed on the roads and aircraft fuel should be taxed more. To limit the environmental damage linked to mobility, DL proposes to invest more in public transport.

Populism is also present in the party literature of DL. The argument goes that neoliberalism thwarts democracy. Big corporations pay lip service to democratic values but in fact profit is the only thing that is of interest to them. While the financial elite is speculating with the money of the ordinary people, lobbyists are trying to gain influence over political decisions. DL suggests that the distance between economic and political elites has significantly narrowed over time. As *all* mainstream parties serve the interests of big capital, they are also held responsible for the financial crisis. To cite the 2009 party programme: 'The deep social gap in Germany is not a destiny but rather the consequence of politics: the Greens, Liberals, Social Democrats, Conservatives. They are responsible for the laws that made all of this possible'.¹

The analysis of DL (2009: 2) is clear: 'Financial capitalism has failed. Likewise, the political system, which is responsible for it, has failed'.² DL, in contrast, 'takes the fear of the people to lose their jobs, for further exclusion and