

Harm Kaal

Constructing a Socialist Constituency

The Social Democratic Language of Politics in the Netherlands,
c. 1890–1950*

In 1894 the Dutch equivalent of the »Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands« (SPD) was founded: the »Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij« (SDAP). The party's foundation resulted from a debate within the Dutch socialist movement about its political strategy. Whereas the movement's first leader, Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, disappointed after a short spell as Member of Parliament in the 1880s, embraced anarchism, the »parliamentary socialists« argued that political action was necessary in order to better the cause of the working class, although they still acknowledged the necessity and inevitability of a revolution.¹ The SDAP first participated in parliamentary elections in 1897 and managed to claim two seats: one for a rural district in the north of the Netherlands, the heartland of the early socialist movement, and one in the industrial city of Enschede in the east. In the following elections, the SDAP managed to expand its electorate, claiming 18 seats in 1913. The party had its strongest turnout in the urban districts in the west of the country. The introduction of general male suffrage did not bring the SDAP the huge victory it had hoped for; in 1918 the SDAP emerged as the second biggest party in Parliament after the Catholic Party, a status they managed to maintain up until 1952 when they surpassed the Catholics for the first time. After many revolutionary Marxists had left the party in 1909, the SDAP seemed ready to participate in a coalition government, but it was not until 1939 when the first socialist ministers were sworn in by the Queen. After the war, however, the Social Democrats would be included in a coalition government continuously up until 1959.

The dominant narrative explaining the history of Dutch Social Democratic politics in the first half of the twentieth century is the narrative of pillarisation. This implies a vertical division of society along religious and ideological lines which resulted in the establishment of four distinct, closely-knit networks of political, social, religious and economic organisations: the socialist pillar, the Catholic pillar, the Reformed-Protestant pillar – which consisted of different, predominantly anti-modernist organisations affiliated to the Dutch Reformed Church and the more orthodox Reformed Churches in the Netherlands – and the neutral or liberal pillar. From this follows that political parties represented the interests of the members of their pillar: the SDAP catered to the needs of the secularised working class, the »Rooms-Katholieke Staatspartij« (RKSP) represented the interests of Dutch Catholics, the »Anti-Revolutionaire Partij« (ARP) and »Christelijk-Historische Unie« (CHU) represented different sections of the Dutch Protestant Churches and the liberal parties appealed to the votes of the remaining – secular and liberal-Protestant sections of society. The pillarisation of Dutch society is usually dated between the late nine-

* The research for this paper was funded by a VENI-fellowship of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research: Constructing Constituencies. Dutch Political Parties and the Language of Politics, 1880 to the present (275-52-009). All translations in this article are by the author.

¹ *Derk Johan Wansink*, *Het socialisme op de tweesprong. De geboorte van de S.D.A.P.*, Haarlem 1939, pp. 123–125.

teenth century and the 1960s when the self-evident relation between political parties and particular groups of voters finally evaporated.²

This narrative of pillarisation, which – despite the fierce scholarly criticism it has met in recent years – still dominates the representation of modern Dutch political history, has led to a misinterpretation of the nature of elections.³ Parliamentary elections have been characterised as mere censuses, with each party mobilising its ›own‹ supporters, rather than as true contests between parties fighting for the support of overlapping constituencies.⁴ By treating political constituencies as the result of existing cleavages in society, pillarisation historiography has tended to ignore the constructed nature of political constituencies.⁵ After all, political stability in terms of the distribution of seats in Parliament does not necessarily imply that political parties during their election campaigns were merely focused on mobilising ›their‹ grassroots supporters. Since in most studies on the SDAP and the »Partij van de Arbeid« (PvdA) elections are only discussed in terms of the results, we, nonetheless, still know very little about the way in which the Social Democrats approached voters, how they tried to include them in their political constituency.⁶

Furthermore, the pillarisation narrative has been accompanied by a historiographical focus on the (isolated) histories of the various political parties that represented the pillars politically. The key issues within this historiography are the parties' ideological reorientation, and their institutional and parliamentary history.⁷ In the case of the SDAP, the first decades of its existence have been thoroughly researched by scholars focusing on the debate within the party about the preferred course somewhere between reformism and revolution.⁸ This has resulted in a rather progressive narrative with regard to the history

2 *Arend Lijphart*, *Verzuiling, pacificatie en kentering in de Nederlandse politiek*, Amsterdam 1968. For a critical recent overview of pillarisation historiography see: *Peter van Dam*, *Staat van verzuiling. Over een Nederlandse mythe*, Amsterdam 2011.

3 Van Dam's study is the latest in a range of critical investigations into the usefulness of the concept of pillarisation for Dutch political history writing. See also: *Piet de Rooy*, *Voorbij de verzuiling?*, in: *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (BMGN) 116, 2001, pp. 45–57.

4 *Rudy B. Andeweg*, *De burger in de Nederlandse politiek*, in: *Rudy B. Andeweg/Andries Hoogerwerf/Jacques J. A. Thomassen* (eds.), *Politiek in Nederland*, Alphen aan den Rijn/Brussel 1981, pp. 79–103.

5 See the critical review by Peter van Rooden of several studies on Dutch pillarised society: *Peter van Rooden*, *Studies naar verzuiling als toegang tot de geschiedenis van de constructie van religieuze verschillen in Nederland*, *Theoretische Geschiedenis* 20, 1993, pp. 439–454. In his history of political representation, the French social scientists Bernard Manin also hints at the stability of political constituencies. In the »era of party democracy« political representation is based upon existing cleavages in society. As long as these cleavages were »real«, political representation was self-evident. *Bernard Manin*, *The Principles of Representative Government*, Cambridge/New York etc. 1997, p. 223.

6 *Henny Buiting*, *Richtingen- en partijstrijd in de SDAP. Het ontstaan van de Sociaal-Democratische Partij in Nederland*, Amsterdam 1989; *Hendrik Floris Cohen*, *Om de vernieuwing van het socialisme. De politieke oriëntatie van de Nederlandse sociaal-democratie, 1919–1930*, Leiden 1974; *Annemieke Klijn*, *Arbeiders- of volkspartij. Een vergelijkende studie van het Belgisch en Nederlands socialisme, 1933–1946*, Maastricht 1990; *Peter Jan Knegtmans*, *De jaren 1919–1946*, in: *Maarten Brinkman/Madelon de Keizer/Maarten van Rossem* et al. (eds.), *Honderd jaar sociaal-democratie in Nederland, 1894–1994*, Amsterdam 1994, pp. 62–117; *Jos Perry*, *Roamsche kinine tegen roode koorts. Arbeidersbeweging en katholieke kerk in Maastricht 1880–1920*, Amsterdam 1983.

7 *Gerrit Voerman*, *De stand van de geschiedschrijving van de Nederlandse politieke partijen*, in: *BMGN* 120, 2005, pp. 226–269, there: p. 235.

8 *Cohen*, *Om de vernieuwing van het socialisme*; *Rob Hartmans*, *Vijandige broeders? De Nederlandse sociaal-democratie en het nationaal-socialisme, 1922–1940*, Amsterdam 2012; *Peter Jan*

of Dutch Social Democracy that moves ever closer to the pragmatic reformism of the postwar PvdA, which enabled the party to play a key role in postwar politics.⁹ Moreover, a focus on the party's internal debate, which reached its climax in the mid 1930s, only serves to confirm the idea that political parties were inward looking. In fact, pillarisation historiography has portrayed the interwar years as years of ›consolidation‹ when the Netherlands was dominated by a ›defensive‹ party system, with parties chiefly being immersed in the preservation of their constituency.¹⁰ However, it remains to be seen if this view can be maintained when we leave the perspective of internal party affairs and focus on the party's external communication with voters.¹¹

Some progress has been made by the cultural turn in political history, which has promoted the exploration of party cultures and the »meaning of a party for its supporters«.¹² Although such an approach is promising – political alliances, after all, are also forged through the cultural and »social form of politics«¹³ – it still tends to ignore the importance of political discourse for the construction of political constituencies.¹⁴ Moreover, a focus on party culture still bears the risk of treating political movements as closed off communities and as such would fail to put the narrative of pillarisation seriously to the test.¹⁵ An exploration of the party's electoral language of politics offers a way out of this pillarisation paradigm.

Up until now, the electoral history of the SDAP – i.e. its electioneering, the media, slogans and appeals used during election campaigns – has largely been ignored by scholars.

Knegtmans, Socialisme en democratie. De SDAP tussen klasse en natie, 1929–1939, Amsterdam 1989; *Johan S. Wijne*, Tussen dogma en werkelijkheid. De ideologische gijzeling van de sociaal-democratie in Nederland als bijdrage tot haar isolement tijdens het Interbellum, Amsterdam 1992; *Klijn*, Arbeiders- of volkspartij; *Buiting*, Richtingen- en partijstrijd in de SDAP; *Bas van Dongen*, Revolutie of integratie. De Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij in Nederland (SDAP) tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog, Amsterdam 1992.

- 9 *Dietrich Orlow*, The Paradoxes of Success. Dutch Social Democracy and its Historiography, in: *BMGN* 110, 1995, pp. 40–51, there: p. 40.
- 10 *Henk te Velde*, De spiegel van de negentiende eeuw. Partij, representatie en geschiedenis, in: *Jaarboek DNPP* 2000, pp. 19–40, there: p. 29; *Hermann Walther von der Dunk*, De partijen en de parlementaire democratie in het interbellum, in: *Ruud A. Koole* (ed.), *Het belang van politieke partijen*, Groningen 1984, pp. 41–61; *Lijphart*, Verzuiling, pacificatie en kentering in de Nederlandse politiek.
- 11 See also: *Bernard Rulof*, Hoe het Plan van de Arbeid te verkopen? Reclame en ›massapsychologische actie‹ van de SDAP, in: *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 2, 2005, pp. 84–104, there: p. 86.
- 12 *Henk te Velde*, Het wij-gevoel van een morele gemeenschap. Een politiek-culturele benadering van partijgeschiedenis, in: *Jaarboek DNPP* 2004, pp. 106–123; *Gerrit Voerman*, Partijcultuur in Nederland. Naar nieuwe invalshoeken in de studie van de politieke partij, in: *Gerrit Voerman/Dirk Jan Wolffram* (eds.), *Kossmann Instituut. Benaderingen van de geschiedenis van politiek*, Groningen 2006, pp. 43–49, there: p. 44.
- 13 *Jon Lawrence*, Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880–1914, in: *English Historical Review* 108, 1993, pp. 629–652, there: p. 631. Rulof's investigation of the SDAP as an interwar mass movement is a case in point: *Bernard Rulof*, ›Een leger van priesters voor een heilige zaak‹. SDAP, politieke manifestaties en massapolitiek, 1918–1940, Amsterdam 2007.
- 14 *Piet de Rooy*, Begeerten en idealen. Een eeuw sociaal-democratie in Nederland, in: *Piet de Rooy/Nico Markus/Tom van der Meer* et al. (eds.), *De rode droom. Een eeuw sociaal-democratie in Nederland. Een essay en een beeldverhaal*, Nijmegen 1995; *Bernard Rulof*, Selling Social Democracy in the Netherlands. Activism and its Sources of Inspiration during the 1930s, in: *Contemporary European History* 18, 2009, pp. 475–497; *Dennis Bos*, *Waarachtige volksvrienden. De vroege socialistische beweging in Amsterdam, 1848–1894*, Amsterdam 2001.
- 15 Studies on party culture are as yet scarcely available. At Leiden University Adriaan van Veldhuizen is preparing a dissertation on the party culture of the SDAP.

In an article on the »white spots in the historiography of Dutch social democracy« published in 1994 Isaac Lipschits included »the electoral business in all its bearings« as one of the historiographical *terra incognita*.¹⁶ Since then, not much has changed.¹⁷ Lipschits' interpretation of electoral research is predominantly social scientific – he calls for studies on electoral geography and sociology. Such investigations start from what one could call the »voter perspective«: the characteristics of voters are at the focus of interest. This, then, brings us back to the pillarisation narrative because it tends to result in straightforward interpretations of the relationship between politicians and voters that consider political affiliation to be chiefly determined by voter characteristics such as religion and social and economic interests. In this case, political parties are treated as the »passive beneficiaries of structural divisions within society, rather than as dynamic organizations actively involved in the definition of political interests and the construction of political alliances«.¹⁸

This article therefore starts from the »party perspective«: the ways in which political parties have approached elections and how they have communicated with the electorate.¹⁹ Studying the language of this type of political communication enables us to identify to what kind of voters the Social Democrats appealed to, and how they tried to include them in their political constituency.²⁰ Research on the construction of political constituencies through political discourse has a long tradition in Britain, starting with Gareth Stedman Jones famous work on Chartism.²¹ Along similar lines, Jon Lawrence has investigated the language of Labour in the late Victorian and Edwardian era, highlighting its use of a non-class based language of politics that centred around male virtues.²² The German political historian Thomas Welskopp also pays attention to the discursive construction of political identity in his study on the early decades of the German Social Democratic movement. Meanwhile, Thomas Mergel has explored the *Sprache des Wahlkampfes* in a more general

16 Isaac Lipschits, Witte plekken in de geschiedschrijving van de Nederlandse sociaaldemocratie, in: *Socialisme en democratie* 51, 1994, p. 372.

17 The studies by Ron de Jong on Dutch electoral culture form a favourable exception: *Ron de Jong*, *Electoral culture en politieke oriëntatie. Verkiezingen in Gelderland, 1888–1940*, Hilversum 2005; id., *Verkiezingen in Nederland 1888–1917. Een strijd om de kiezers of rituele volkstellingen?*, in: *De negentiende eeuw* 29, 2005, pp. 115–134.

18 Lawrence, *Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism*, p. 630.

19 Up until now, studies on the parties' electoral culture and strategy have been in short supply. Flip Kramer is preparing a dissertation on the electoral culture in the interwar years and the political scientist Philip van Praag has published a book on the internal debate about the party's electoral strategy in the decade following the emergence of the New Left-movement. *Flip Kramer*, *De »rituele census« van 1925. Verkiezingsstrijd in verzuimd Nederland*, in: *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 119, 2006, pp. 218–229; *Philip van Praag Jr.*, *Strategie en illusie. Elf jaar intern debat in de PvdA (1966–1977)*, Amsterdam 1990.

20 Recent investigations have shown the importance of the language of politics for our understanding of the distribution of political power in general and the way in which political alliances are forged or contested more in particular: Willibald Steinmetz (ed.), *Political Languages in the Age of Extremes*, Oxford/New York etc. 2011; Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People. Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867–1914*, Cambridge/New York etc. 1998; Thomas Mergel, *Propaganda nach Hitler. Eine Kulturgeschichte des Wahlkampfes in der Bundesrepublik 1949–1990*, Göttingen 2010. The *Sonderforschungsbereich »The Political as Communicative Space in History«* at the University of Bielefeld is also a case in point: URL: <<http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/geschichte/forschung/sfb584/>> [21.12.2012].

21 Gareth Stedman Jones, *The Language of Chartism*, in: James Epstein/Dorothy Thompson (eds.), *The Chartist Experience. Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830–60*, London 1982, pp. 3–58; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class. Studies in English Working Class History*, Cambridge/New York etc. 1983.

22 Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, pp. 151–158.

sense as part of his wider investigation of the electoral culture in postwar Western Germany.²³ Finally, this article also answers the call, perhaps rather belatedly, for a comparative perspective on the ›social vocabulary of political discourse‹ issued by Thomas Childers in his article on the language of politics in Weimar-Germany.²⁴ Although Childers focuses on the language of the bourgeois parties, his analysis of election propaganda draws attention to the importance of occupation as an indicator of social self-imagining in electoral discourse.²⁵

To these recent investigations of (socialist) political discourse this article adds an exploration of the electoral language of politics of the SDAP and its postwar successor, the PvdA, against the background of the internal debates about the party's ideology. Research is based on election brochures, pamphlets, newspaper ads, speeches and radio broadcasts used in election campaigns between the late nineteenth century and 1948. The article will show how Dutch Social Democrats have tried to expand their electoral base to include non-working class voters, women, who were granted suffrage in 1919, and confessional voters, while maintaining their credibility as a socialist party.

I. A CONCISE PARTY HISTORY

Although August Bebel, in a letter to a prominent Dutch trade unionist, had urged the Dutch Social Democrats not to simply copy the SPD, the SDAP was largely modelled after its German sister party.²⁶ The party's programme was based on the ›Erfurt Programme‹ of the SPD and the party's structure soon came to resemble the highly-centralised set-up of the SPD. During the first decades of its existence, the party's political agenda was dominated by two issues: the fight for general (male) suffrage and social legislation such as the introduction of a state pension. The early years of the SDAP were characterised by a battle between the Marxist and ›revisionist‹ wings within the party which led to in the schism of 1909 when a group of Marxists left the party to form the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Up until 1913, the SDAP could not win more than six or seven seats in Dutch Parliament. The 1913 elections, nevertheless, brought an astonishing victory when the party managed to clinch 18 seats. The SDAP was offered several ministerial posts, but declined the offer fearing that participation in government would weaken its credibility as a socialist party and would cause another exodus of revolutionary Marxists. The general elections of 1918, the first according to the system of proportional representation and with general male suffrage, did not bring what the SDAP had hoped for, winning 22 of the 100 seats. In the tumultuous days after the German capitulation in November 1918, party leader Troelstra fell under the spell of revolution and delivered a speech in parliament in which he urged the established parties to hand over power to the Social Democrats. However, he soon had to acknowledge that he had misinterpreted revolutionary sentiments in the Netherlands. Although his ›mistake‹ had no immediate effects – Troelstra remained party leader and the SDAP was not outlawed – the party lost much of its credibility as a trustworthy parliamentary force.

23 *Thomas Welskopp*, *Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vom Vormärz bis zum Sozialistengesetz*, Bonn 2000, pp. 257–333.

24 *Thomas Childers*, *The Social Language of Politics in Germany. The Sociology of Political Discourse in the Weimar Republic*, in: *The American Historical Review* 95, 1990, pp. 331–358, there: p. 357.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 359.

26 *Jos Perry*, *De jaren 1894–1919*, in: *Brinkman/de Keizer/van Rossem*, *Honderd jaar sociaal-democratie in Nederland*, p. 26.

During the interwar years, the SDAP remained stable with slightly less than one quarter of the seats in Parliament, far away from a parliamentary majority and also from participation in government after the 1918 debacle. The party's main issues in the 1920s were socialisation and demilitarisation. In the 1930s, the party promoted a solution to the economic crisis in the form of its »Plan van de Arbeid« (Labour Plan) that stressed the need to invest in public works to raise employment. Meanwhile, party membership steadily grew from about 20,000 in 1916 to 37,000 in 1918 and 89,000 in 1937. Moreover, the party could count on the support of the »modern« trade union »Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen« – with a membership of 300,000 the biggest in the Netherlands – an own publishing house that, among others, printed the socialist flagship newspaper »Het Volk« (The People) and founded a radio broadcasting corporation, called »VARA«. ²⁷ Although the party was excluded from coalition governments up until 1939, on the local level, in cities like Den Haag, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, socialist aldermen were able to implement parts of the party's political agenda, for instance in terms of conditions of employment, employee participation and public housing. ²⁸

II. IDEOLOGICAL VERSUS ELECTORAL LANGUAGE OF POLITICS

In 1895, a year after its foundation, the SDAP issued its first Political Manifesto. It was based on the »Erfurt Programme« of the German SPD; the Marxist nature of the party was beyond doubt. ²⁹ The party's position in the political landscape was based on a rivalry with various other political organisations. First of all, the SDAP met competition from the anti-parliamentarian »Sociaal-Democratische Bond« (SDB) from which it had defected. The SDB remained very influential in cities in the western part of the Netherlands where workers were at first reluctant to accept the SDAP as a force in parliamentary politics. Towards the turn of the century, however, the SDB fell apart and the SDAP managed to turn cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam into one of their electoral strongholds. Second, through its Marxist ideology of class struggle, the SDAP positioned itself against other »bourgeois« left-leaning and progressive liberal parties. Third, the SDAP competed with confessional political parties the two most prominent of which were the ARP, which aimed for the vote of Orthodox-Protestants, and the less well-organised Catholic Party. ³⁰ The constituencies of these confessional parties did not show any overlap, but they competed with the SDAP and the progressive liberals for the support of the workers' vote.

The SDAP emerged at a time when a mere 11 % of the Dutch population had been granted suffrage. Votes were casted according to a direct majority voting system based on single constituencies, with a run-off election if no candidate acquired 50 % of the votes in the first round. ³¹ These circumstances contributed to the adoption of an inclusive socialist language of politics. Although the party's 1895 manifesto hinted at an exclusive focus on workers, in (electoral) practice the party tried to appeal to a much broader constituency in order to stand a chance of winning a few seats. In party leader Pieter Jelles Troelstra's speeches and publications tenant farmers, shopkeepers and small employers were includ-

²⁷ *Knegtmans*, *De jaren 1919–1946*, p. 64.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 75f.

²⁹ *Bart Tromp*, *Het sociaal-democratisch programma. De beginselprogramma's van SDB, SDAP en PvdA, 1878–1977. Een onderzoek naar de ontwikkeling van een politieke stroming*, Amsterdam 2002, pp. 76–81.

³⁰ Officially, the RKSP was only established in 1926. Up until that year, the Catholic Party was a federation of Roman Catholic electoral associations.

³¹ Up until 1896, some districts, particularly in the big cities in the west of the Netherlands, sent more than one candidate to Parliament.

ed in the socialist constituency. Their interests were framed in class terms; they represented labour in its struggle against capitalism.³² In 1905 the prominent socialist Johan Hendrik Schaper argued for the inclusive nature of the concept of »arbeiders« (working men). Although the »klasse van proletariërs« (proletarian class) formed the heart of the SDAP, the Social Democrats according to Schaper represented the »gewone werkman« (common workman) and the »kleine man in het algemeen« (common man in general).³³ The use of this rather bourgeois phraseology indicates the ambition of the SDAP to broaden the scope of their constituency outside the confines of the »socialist working class« and to include sections of the lower middle classes like lower clerks and small shop owners who did not identify themselves as working class. Troelsta's and Schaper's language was in line with the electoral language used by early Socialists. In 1888, Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, the first Socialist elected to Parliament, had argued that workers and petty bourgeois represented »labour« in its battle against capital.³⁴ Domela's inclusion of the petty bourgeoisie had also been a matter of electoral strategy since most workers still lacked the right to vote.

Henny Buiting has shown that the obvious tensions between the electoral language of politics and the core tenets of the party's Marxist ideology were fiercely debated. The party's appeal to tenant farmers in particular was heavily contested.³⁵ In the end, Troelstra's pragmatic approach prevailed; many determined Marxists left the party in the 1909 schism.³⁶ This debate shows that, on the one hand, the party ideology *limits* the range of discourses and concepts available in electoral politics, because parties consider their ideology to be a mobilising force and because they tend to see discrepancies between ideology and the electoral language of politics as hypocritical and deceiving.³⁷ On the other hand, the context of electoral politics asks for a specific language of politics. The nature of the electorate combined with a party's wish to win votes will often result in an electoral language that stretches beyond the boundaries of the ideological linguistic framework. The fact that the SDAP chose to draw up electoral programmes for each parliamentary election underlines the marginal role of the political manifesto in the party's electoral propaganda.³⁸ Seen from this perspective, the introduction of a new political manifesto, as done by the SDAP in 1912 and 1937, was not merely the result of an internal debate about the party's ideology, but also catalysed by the existence of an electoral language of politics that has lost touch with the core of the party's official ideology. This article, however, does not aim to »judge« the electoral propaganda for consistency with the party's ideology. Instead it explores the electoral language as a distinct and flexible set of discourses that is linked to the party's ideology, but is not necessarily completely consistent with it, and is used by politicians to win over voters for their party and their political ideas.

32 *Buiting*, Richtingen- en partijstrijd in de SDAP, pp. 65–67. See: *Johan Hendrik Schaper*, *De sociaaldemokratie en wat er van gezegd wordt*, Amsterdam 1905; *Het socialisme komt*, in: *Het Tweede District. Verkiezingsblad van de Arbeiders-Kiesvereniging Amsterdam II*, 6.1905, International Institute of Social History (Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, IISG), SDAP-Amsterdam Archive, Reg. 267.

33 *Schaper*, *De sociaaldemokratie*; see also: *Zijn de sociaaldemokraten vijanden van den godsdienst?*, IISG, SDAP-Amsterdam Archive, Reg. 267.

34 *Sociaal politiek overzicht*, in: *Recht voor allen*, 5.3.1888.

35 *Buiting*, *Richtingen- en partijstrijd in de SDAP*, pp. 81f. and 118–120.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 69; *Gerrit Voerman*, *De meridiaan van Moskou. De CPN en de Communistische Internationale (1919–1930)*, Amsterdam 2001, p. 26.

37 *Tromp*, *Het sociaal-democratisch programma*, p. 104; Wijne has shown that in the 1920s forced adherence to socialist dogma stood in the way of a broader appeal of the SDAP. *Wijne*, *Tussen dogma en werkelijkheid*, pp. 117f.

38 *Tromp*, *Het sociaal-democratisch programma*, pp. 102f. and 146.

III. DISCOURSES OF RELIGION, DUTY AND EDUCATION IN THE SOCIALIST LANGUAGE OF POLITICS

In his seminal work on the political manifestos of the Dutch Social Democrats, Tromp argues that based on the first manifesto of 1895, socialism cannot be described as a *Weltanschauung*. Not only were no references made to religion, but also the party's materialism was not elaborated in terms of an all-encompassing world view.³⁹ When one compares this ideological language with the electoral language of politics of the SDAP the differences are striking. A key feature of the early Socialist electoral propaganda is the abundant use of religious discourse. For one, socialists and others portrayed the rise of the socialist movement in religious terms.⁴⁰ The founders of the SDAP were called the »twelve apostles« and many prominent Socialists have described their entrance in the socialist movement as a »conversion«. Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis and Pieter Jelles Troelstra were characterised as the preachers of the socialist faith. When Domela competed for a seat in Parliament in several districts across the Netherlands in the 1880s he described his speeches across the country as »preaching the Gospel of Dissatisfaction« and referred to the »blood of the martyrs who had suffered and fought for the cause of the workers«. ⁴¹ In his campaign in May 1891 Domela spoke of socialism as »our Pentecostal Gospel« and urged his followers to consider themselves to be the »apostles of the Gospel of the Future« and convince others to »join our ranks«. ⁴²

One could argue that this religious rhetoric was an obvious element in Domela's language of politics because of his background as a former Dutch-Reformed minister. However, as we have seen, other socialist politicians used a religious repertoire as well. In 1902, long after Domela's departure from the spotlight of politics, Troelstra argued that socialists saw Jesus as the »broeder aller kleinen en verdrukten« (brother of the common men and the oppressed). ⁴³ In order to persuade confessional voters to join the SDAP Social Democratic politicians argued that the Bible contained an »anti-capitalist and democratic spirit« and referred to ancient Christian philosophers as »Christian-Socialists«. ⁴⁴ Moreover, in a brochure for the 1905 elections, the SDAP rejected the claim that Socialists were by definition anti-religious. ⁴⁵ Troelstra clarified his stance by condemning the liberals for their use of the antithesis of reason versus religion; the Social Democrats did not want to fight against religion, but against capitalism. ⁴⁶ Not religion was the enemy, but elites

39 Ibid., p. 89.

40 *Henk te Velde*, *The Religious Side of Democracy. Early Socialism, 21st-century Populism and the Sacralization of Politics*, in: *Joost Augusteyn/Patrick G. C. Dassen/Maartje J. Janse* (eds.), *Political Religion Beyond Totalitarianism. The Sacralization of Politics in the Age of Democracy*, Basingstoke/New York 2013; *Adriaan van Veldhuizen*, *A Grassroots Sacred Socialist History. Dutch Social Democrats (1894–1920)*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 115–136; see also: *Te Velde*, *Het wij-gevoel van een morele gemeenschap*, pp. 111–116.

41 *Aan alle arbeiders!*, in: *Recht voor Allen*, 2.1.1888.

42 *Ons Pinksterevangelie*, in: *Recht voor Allen*, 16.–17.5.1891.

43 *Pieter Jelles Troelstra*, *Sociaal christendom. Bijdrage tot den strijd over de verhouding van christendom en socialisme*, Amsterdam 1902.

44 *Schaper*, *De sociaaldemokratie*.

45 One of the pamphlets used in the 1905 elections opened with the rhetorical question: »Are Social Democrats enemies of religion?«. *Zijn de sociaaldemokraten vijanden van den godsdienst?*, IISG, SDAP-Amsterdam Archive, Reg. 267; *Schaper*, *De sociaaldemokratie*.

46 *Pieter Jelles Troelstra*, *Voorwaarts, marsch! Ons standpunt bij de verkiezingen. Rede gehouden op het kongres der SDAP op den Eersten Paaschdag 1905*, Amsterdam 1905.

who used it to oppress the people.⁴⁷ Christian politicians were therefore often described as »so-called Christians«. Where they failed to put their faith into practice, the SDAP framed Socialism as the political translation of the mission of Christ.⁴⁸

Although the religious discourse of the SDAP was often targeted at specific groups of voters in districts with a high degree of confessional voters, it would be wrong to interpret it solely as an effort to win over confessional voters for the SDAP.⁴⁹ As the authors of a recent volume on political religion have made clear, »politics and religion are very much interwoven and cannot be clearly separated«. ⁵⁰ Politics in general, across all parties, was phrased in religious terms because religion, despite a slowly growing rate of secularisation, was still a dominant force in society. Many organisations were connected to the church or otherwise affiliated with religion, such as schools, trade unions and sports clubs. Against this background, religious terms and phrases formed the obvious vocabulary with which to describe the new phenomenon of mass political parties. Also in scholarly works of the early twentieth century religious language was used to explain the operations of political parties, which were explicitly compared with the church.⁵¹

It is, anyhow, precisely this religious discourse that probably hampered the Social Democrats in appealing to the confessional vote. In his investigation of internal debates about the tensions between socialist doctrines and political ›reality‹ in the interwar years, Johan S. Wijne convincingly argues that the party's lack of success in extending its constituency cannot be solely blamed on forces outside the party, like the ability of the clergy to keep its hold on the confessional electorate.⁵² While Wijne focuses on ideology by arguing that fear to act contrary to their socialist principles hampered their appeal to a broader public, also the nature of socialist discourse needs to be taken into consideration. Through its political discourse and its public manifestations, socialism was presented to the public as a political religion and although many Social Democrats were keen not to present themselves as anti-religious, this religious nature of socialism turned it into a competitor of Protestantism and Catholicism. Since supporting the socialist cause was often framed in terms of a conversion, confessional voters were left to ponder the question if such a conversion would be reconcilable with their faith. As we will see, leading Social Democrats addressed this issue in the 1930s as they urged for the formulation of Social Democracy as a political doctrine instead of a quasi-religious political philosophy.

47 See also: *Perry*, *Roomsche kinine tegen roode koorts*, p. 270. The SDAP often shied away from portraying their enemies as religious or confessional parties and labelled them instead as »clerical parties«. »Clericalism« was a pejorative term that referred to the inappropriate involvement of members of the clergy in another domain, the domain of politics. SDAP Amsterdam I, IISG, SDAP-Amsterdam Archive, 1905, Reg. 267; see also: Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij, Amsterdam I en VI, *ibid.*

48 *Johan Hendrik Schaper*, *De vrouw in den strijd. Een woord aan de vrouwen*, Amsterdam 1922; *Troelstra*, *Sociaal christendom*.

49 See: *Henk M. T. M. Giebels*, *Katholicisme en socialisme. Het zelfbeeld van de Eindhovense christen-socialisten in het spanningsveld tussen traditie en moderniteit, 1885–1920*, Tilburg 1994.

50 *Joost Augusteijn/Patrick G. C. Dassen/Maartje J. Janse*, Concluding Remarks, in: *eid.*, *Political Religion Beyond Totalitarianism*, pp. 225–260; see also: *Te Velde*, *De spiegel van de negentiende eeuw*, pp. 19–40, there: p. 23. In 1938 the German political philosopher Eric Voegelin argued that a political community per definition was also a religious order. *Eric Voegelin*, *Die politischen Religionen*, Vienna 1938. The book was published shortly before Voegelin's emigration to the USA.

51 *Te Velde*, *Het wij-gevoel van een morele gemeenschap*, pp. 106–123, there: p. 112; for the debate on a similar process in Germany see: *Wolfgang Hardtwig*, *Political Religion in Modern Germany. Reflections on Nationalism, Socialism, and National Socialism*, in: *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 28, 2001.

52 *Wijne*, *Tussen dogma en werkelijkheid*, p. 12.

In the early decades of its existence, however, religious discourse seemed to fit well with a movement that presented socialism to the public as a principle, as a doctrine that required the workers to study socialist texts – much like reading the Bible – in order to be able to convert others to become a member of the socialist movement. This task of studying and converting was phrased as a »duty« of all members of the socialist movement: it was a labourer's »highest duty« to help »free society of the pressing load of capitalism«. ⁵³ Disobeying this duty was described as an act of betrayal: as a »lapse of virtue«. ⁵⁴ This discourse of virtue and duty was also evident in the electoral language of politics. Since party membership was presented as a holy alliance, voters were reminded of the electoral obligations that resulted from their membership of the socialist movement: »comrades, beware of your duty« and vote for the party »of your fellow class members«. ⁵⁵ This language of politics responded to still very dominant patriarchal and paternalistic notions of good moral and ethical behaviour that characterised nineteenth century Dutch society. While trying to free the working class from the shackles of a patriarchal society, the SDAP therefore used similar discourses as those which underpinned it.

The discourse of duty often went hand in hand with the use of a discourse of education. Socialist electoral politics in essence came down to making people aware of their political identity, to teach them what their interests actually were and which party served them best. ⁵⁶ Voters who were still ignorant of the »real« situation of oppression, in which they were held captive, needed to be made aware of their fate and were urged to take matters into their own hands. ⁵⁷ Election pamphlets for instance incited workers to »think for themselves«, instead of simply following instructions from the media or the clergy. ⁵⁸ In fact, it was, of course, the SDAP that instructed voters how to think.

Finally, the discourse of duty and education was also evident in the portrayal of voters as »indifferent«. ⁵⁹ Voters were warned that those who considered their own misery to be a good excuse to ignore politics were to blame for the fact that capitalism still ruled. Bourgeois parties benefited from their »ignorance and gullibility«. ⁶⁰ On numerous occasions voters who remained »indifferent« to the cause of the SDAP were accused of committing a »crime against themselves and against their class«. ⁶¹ Those who did vote for the Social Democrats did so because they »wanted to show that they understand the power of the ballot«, rather than being ignorant or indifferent. ⁶² Paradoxically, the SDAP, in order

53 *Schaper*, De sociaaldemokratie.

54 Lijst van wenschen, in: *Recht voor Allen*, 22.2.1888.

55 Pamphlet, Een ernstig woord tot de Arbeiders-kiezers, 1918, IISG, SDAP Archive, Reg. 2185.

56 *Te Velde*, De spiegel van de negentiende eeuw, pp. 19–40, there: p. 24; see also: *Welskopp*, Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit, pp. 579–584; *Margaret Anderson*, Lehrjahre der Demokratie. Wahlen und politische Kultur im Deutschen Kaiserreich, Stuttgart 2009, p. 443; and *Mergel*, Propaganda nach Hitler, pp. 41–62.

57 Kiezers van Schoterland, in: *Recht voor Allen*, 30.3.1888; Het socialisme komt, in: Het Tweede District. Verkiezingsblad van de Arbeiders-Kiesvereniging Amsterdam II, 6.1905, IISG, SDAP-Amsterdam Archive, Reg. 267.

58 SDAP. Amsterdam I, [1905], IISG, SDAP-Amsterdam Archive, Reg. 267.

59 Pamphlet, Aan het arbeidende volk van Nederland, 1918, IISG, SDAP Archive, Reg. 2185.

60 Verkiezingsmanifest van de Federatie Amsterdam van de SDAP, Nu is het uw beurt. Een ernstig woord aan de Amsterdamsche arbeiders, 1918, IISG, SDAP Archive, Reg. 2185; *Troelstra*, Voorwaarts, marsch!; Such voters were also called »stubborn and forgetful«: SDAP Amsterdam I, 1905, IISG, Arch. SDAP-Amsterdam Archive, Reg. 267.

61 *Pieter Hiemstra*, De landarbeiders en de politieke strijd, Amsterdam 1913, p. 5; De stembus en het rijkspersoneel. Opgepast!, in: *Het Volk*, 4.7.1922.

62 De militairen stemmen rood, in: *De Reveille*. Orgaan van den Bond van Nederlandsche Dienstplichtigen, [1918], IISG, SDAP Archive, Reg. 2185.

to free the workers from the duties and obligations of a paternalistic, capitalist society, also showed itself to be a paternalistic organisation that used discourses of indifference, awakening, education and duty to attract voters to their party.

IV. ELECTIONS IN THE INTERWAR YEARS

The effects of the new electoral system on the socialist language of politics

In July 1918, parliamentary elections were for the first time conducted based on a nationwide system of proportional representation. The abolishment of the district voting system went hand in hand with the introduction of universal male suffrage, which nearly doubled the electorate. Women were included in the suffrage a year later and casted their first ballots in the 1922 general election. These changes had a profound influence on the language and culture of electoral politics.

As a result of the introduction of a nationwide constituency, the central offices of political parties started to strengthen their grip on the election campaign. Local branches of the parties were still involved: they were, among others, expected to mobilise party members for canvassing neighbourhoods and were responsible for the organisation of local meetings, but their room for manoeuvre diminished. The central offices issued guidelines for election propaganda, designed brochures and pamphlets and assigned prominent members of the party to speaking engagements across the country. Not all of this was new: the SDAP headquarters had already distributed guidelines on canvassing and instructions for speakers before the 1918 elections, but the abolishment of the district voting system did force parties to reconsider their propaganda strategies and would result in a professionalisation of the election campaigns from the mid-1920s onwards.⁶³ That said, parties still tailored their propaganda to specific regions. The person heading the list of candidates varied per region in order to benefit from the popularity of a local or regional politician. Moreover, local and regional branches of the parties were still allowed to also issue their own brochures, which appealed to the specific nature of the local electorate.

In the past, the district voting system had forced parties to forge temporary alliances with other political parties to win a majority of the votes. In 1903, Troelstra for instance had been elected for the seat of Amsterdam's third district in the run-off election thanks to support from confessional voters, who favoured Troelstra over a representative of the liberal party.⁶⁴ Confessional voters were willing to support the Social Democrats because the SDAP had agreed to back their fight for the equal state funding of state and private (confessional) schools.⁶⁵ From 1918 onwards, these often rather awkward coalitions belonged to the past. In turn, parties now aimed to maximise their following across the country. Whereas the district voting system had caused ›lost votes‹ – after all, votes casted for those who eventually lost the election had been of no value – in the system of proportional representation every vote counted.

To maximise their following, the SDAP used at least two strategies. Neither of these strategies was entirely new, but the introduction of proportional representation forced the SDAP to explicitly contemplate its electoral operations. First of all, the party tried to win over confessional workers for the SDAP. As a result, the Catholic south of the Nether-

63 *Kramer*, *De ›rituele census‹ van 1925*, pp. 218–229.

64 *Gert van Klinken*, *Actieve burgers. Nederlanders en hun politieke partijen 1870–1918*, Amsterdam 2003, p. 428.

65 The party was willing to do so, hoping that the realisation of this key issue would leave the confessional parties without a mobilising issue that would appeal to the confessional voters. *Ibid.*, p. 411.

lands, which for long had been the exclusive domain of politicians of the Catholic Party – who had been often elected unopposed – was turned into a socialist ›missionary area‹. Much like the religious discourse discussed earlier, the SDAP issued brochures in the southern, Catholic part of the Netherlands that evoked images of Jesus and the Bible and described socialism as a ›lighting sun‹ that brought ›hope to mankind in the dark night of despair‹. The SDAP identified itself with Jesus, who had also fought for ›unity among all people‹ and, like the Social Democrats, had been denounced as ›the enemy of faith and religion‹.⁶⁶ Class discourse played a minor role. Voters were still addressed as workers, but also in religious terms as ›de misdeelden, de verdrukten, de hongerlijders‹ (the underprivileged, the oppressed, the starvelings) for whom Jesus had cared so deeply.⁶⁷ The brochures, however, also explicitly stated that Social Democrats focused on life on earth and not in the hereafter, and cherished the freedom of religion.⁶⁸

Second, the SDAP tried to turn the concept of the working class into a more inclusive notion, which also encompassed non-manual workers, shopkeepers, farmers and small employers. Much like the German electoral discourse studied by Childers, occupational categories were used to stress the fact that the SDAP not only represented the ›traditional‹ working class. In the 1918 campaign the SDAP appealed to the vote of ›arbeiders met hoofd of handen, tot de kleine baasjes, tot de kleinpachters, tot de ambtenaren. Tot allen die moeten leven van hun arbeid [...]. Tot de werkers op kantoren en in de winkels, op het veld, in werkplaats of fabriek.‹⁶⁹

In the 1922 campaign the SDAP appealed to the interests of all ›sociaal voelende elementen in ons volk‹ (all social elements among our people) versus ›kleine winzuchtige groepen‹ (small, greedy sections of the population) and described itself as the ›volkspartij bij uitnemendheid‹ (people's party par excellence).⁷⁰ The use of this more inclusive discourse had much to do with the fact that the SDAP now appealed to a *national* audience of voters, rather than a local, district-based constituency. Again, it also reflects the party's attempt to tap into middle class voters through the use of a language that centred on occupational status and ›the people‹ rather than class. In addition, the party also needed an inclusive discourse to appeal to women who had been granted suffrage in 1919.⁷¹

Female suffrage and the socialist language of politics

The influence of the introduction of female suffrage on the socialist language of politics has been underrated. Ulla Jansz has argued that the socialist language of politics in general was a male discourse, even after women were included in the suffrage. Concepts such as ›the people‹, small farmers, shopkeepers, intellectuals and civil servants were and

66 Stemt rood! Verkiezingsorgaan van de SDAP voor de kieskringen 's-Hertogenbosch, Tilburg en Zeeland, No. 4, 1918, IISG, SDAP Archive, Reg. 2185.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., No. 1, 1918.

69 Translation: ›White and blue-collar workers, small entrepreneurs, small tenant farmers, and civil servants [...]. office and shop workers, field, workshop and factory workers.‹ Ibid., No. 4, IISG, SDAP Archive, Reg. 2185. Ellipsis mine.

70 Verkiezingsmanifest der SDAP, in: Het Volk, 3.6.1922; Speech by Troelstra: De betekenis van den komenden strijd, 1922, IISG, Troelstra Archive, Reg. 868; De strijd van 5 juli. Verkiezingsblad van de Gewestelijke Federaties Groningen en Drente der SDAP, 1922, IISG, SDAP-Groningen Archive, Reg. 114; *Pieter Jelles Troelstra*, De verkiezingen van 1922, Amsterdam 1922, p. 8.

71 Speech by Troelstra, report in the Middelburgsche Courant, d.d. 18 april 1922, IISG, Troelstra Archive, Reg. 868.

remained to be male categories.⁷² As far as the language of politics of the early years of the SDAP is concerned, Jansz is right. In the early years of the twentieth century women figured in the socialist language of politics chiefly as the wives of labourers, who were assigned the task to support their husbands in their fight against capitalism, instead of ›pestering them‹ for their socialist sympathies.⁷³ In order to keep women away from the bourgeois feminist movement that pitted women against men, they were reminded of the fact that they were the »natuurlijke bondgenooten« (natural allies) of their »mannelijke klasse-genooten« (male class-members).⁷⁴ The political fight against capitalism, nonetheless, was an almost exclusively male cause.

The introduction of female suffrage forced parties to reconsider their approach of women. Although the electoral language shows that the SDAP wholeheartedly tried to include women in their constituency, the discourses directed at them reveal that they were not treated on the same par as men. In brochures aimed at women the SDAP started to denounce capitalism through the use of language that evoked the male oppression of women.⁷⁵ Men were referred to as »de meesters« (masters) who limited the freedom of women and capitalism was described as »haar opperste meester« (her supreme master):

»Gelukkige moeders, blijde kinderen, had het kapitalisme ook niet nodig. Het had alleen vrouwen nodig, die kinderen kregen en die zoo verzorgden, dat ze later geschikt werden voor arbeid in dienst van het kapitaal.«⁷⁶

In a brochure aimed at women, Schaper pitted women against male law-makers in order to argue that a woman »zich niet mag onttrekken aan den strijd« (cannot refuse battle).⁷⁷

Moreover, much like the language of politics that had been used by late nineteenth century Social Democrats to awaken the (male) working class, the SDAP expressed its attempts to win over female voters for the party through discourses of duty and education. The party feared that women would still shy away from politics. According to Schaper, if women read a newspaper at all, they tended to ignore the political coverage and only read serialised stories.⁷⁸ This indifference to politics would turn them into putty in the hands of shrewd politicians. The SDAP therefore started to denounce female non-involvement in politics as despondent and selfish behaviour: »you are a nobody, if you do not vote.«⁷⁹ Women were reminded of their »duty« to get involved and to encourage their husbands

72 Ulla Jansz, *De vernieuwing in de SDAP en het vrouwenvraagstuk. Humanisme, socialisme en democratie in het interbellum*, in: Peter Derkx (ed.), *Voor menselijkheid of tegen godsdienst? Humanisme in Nederland, 1850–1960*, Hilversum 1998, pp. 116–131, there: p. 120; see also: Childers who argues that women were expected to identify themselves in terms of their husbands' profession: *Childers, The Social Language*, p. 340.

73 Schaper, *De sociaaldemokratie*. See also: *Suze Groeneweg, Welk belang heeft de arbeidersvrouw bij het werken der SDAP?*, Rotterdam 1906, p. 13. Within the German social democratic movement women were also expected not to obstruct their husbands' activities. *Welskopp, Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit*, p. 483.

74 *Henriette Roland Holst-van der Schalk, Een woord aan de vrouwen der arbeidende klasse naar aanleiding der nat. tentoonstelling van vrouwen-arbeid*, Amsterdam 1898, p. 16.

75 *Mathilde Wibaut-Berdenis van Berlekom, De gouden boot. Een woord aan de vrouwen*, Amsterdam 1922.

76 Translation: »Capitalism did not need happy mothers, happy children. It only needed women who conceived and raised children in such a way that they were fit for labour in service of capitalism.«, *ibid.*

77 Schaper, *De vrouw in den strijd*.

78 *Ibid.*

79 *Aan de vrouwen der arbeidersklasse!*, 1918, IISG, SDAP-Amsterdam Archive, Reg. 328. For a similar treatment of women voters in Germany see: *Welskopp, Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit*, p. 734.

to fulfil their »duty« as members of the working class as well. It was »women's duty« to care for the »less privileged« and their »duty before God« to take matters into their own hands – and not to leave politics to men.⁸⁰ When the turnout of the women's vote turned out to be disappointing, the SDAP described the behaviour of female voters as »wrong« and argued that in the future they should be better »informed how to vote«.⁸¹

Another prominent feature of the language directed at women was a focus on immaterial issues. Although material issues were not the exclusive domain of men – women were, after all, as housewives and mothers also confronted with the tough material conditions of the working class – they did not dominate the propaganda that was aimed at women.⁸² Disarmament did. Already in the 1918 electoral campaign, when the introduction of female suffrage was just a matter of time, pamphlets aimed at women started with a description of the horrors of war in which the »sons of mothers« had fallen victim to »capitalistic Murder«.⁸³ According to Adriaan Gerhard, one of the founders of the SDAP and a Member of Parliament from 1913 until 1931, women, »because of their femininity, would be more ruthless, more severe« enemies of militarism, referring to the harm war had done to family life, when women had lost their husbands, and mothers their sons. The fact that women had been granted suffrage was therefore described as the »biggest blow to militarism«.⁸⁴ Moreover, together with capitalism, militarism was framed as the enemy of female, immaterial issues such as »motherhood care«.⁸⁵ Casting their vote, women had to choose between either the destructive powers of war, or youth, child and motherhood care.⁸⁶ The focus on Dutch disarmament found resonance among socialist women: the women's association within the party remained fiercely antimilitaristic, even when the party itself changed its stance in the 1930s in response to the growing threat of National Socialism.

All in all, this language of politics suggests that the SDAP abided by a traditional role pattern that assigned women specific tasks and a particular position in society that was based on their gender.⁸⁷ This, nonetheless, does not alter the fact that the introduction of female suffrage had a profound impact on the socialist language of politics. The fact that women were now included in the franchise was also mirrored in the internal discussions of the 1920s and 1930s about the reformulation of socialism in terms of »community« and »the people« rather than class and in the party's attention for moral issues besides its economic agenda.

80 Pamphlet, Verkiezingen voor de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. Aan de vrouwen, 1922, IISG, SDAP-Groningen Archive, Reg. 114; *Asser Benjamin Kleerekoper*, Aan de vrouwen, 1922, IISG, SDAP-Groningen Archive, Reg. 114.

81 Report of the Election Campaign of 1922, Termunten, 11.1922, IISG, SDAP Archive, Reg. 2198a.

82 Speech by Adriaan Gerhard: Onze eerste verkiezingsvergadering, in: *Het Volk*, 22.5.1922. The importance of immaterial issues for the post-1918 SDAP has been acknowledged by Peter Jan Knegtmans, but he does not relate this focus on non-economical, moral issues to the introduction of female suffrage. *Knegtmans*, *Socialisme en democratie*, p. 32.

83 Aan de vrouwen der arbeidersklasse!, 1918, IISG, SDAP-Amsterdam Archive, Reg. 328.

84 Speech by Adriaan Gerhard: Onze eerste verkiezingsvergadering, in: *Het Volk*, 22.5.1922.

85 *Ibid.*

86 *Ibid.*; see also: *Wibaut-Berdenis van Berlekom*, *De gouden boot*; *Kleerekoper*, Aan de vrouwen, 1922, IISG, SDAP-Groningen Archive, Reg. 114; Pamphlet, Voor moeder de vrouw, 1922, IISG, SDAP-Groningen Archive, Reg. 114.

87 *Agneta Fischer/Katja van Vliet*, *Geslachtsverschillen. Idealen en ideologieën*, in: *Jaap van Ginneken/Jeroen Jansz* (eds.), *Psychologische praktijken. Een twintigste-eeuwse geschiedenis*, Amsterdam 1986, pp. 116–155, there: pp. 119–121; *Dennis Bos*, *De echte mannen van het socialisme*, in: *Groniek* 158/159, 2002, pp. 119–130.

Democratic socialism: The socialist language of politics in the 1930s

The first election results after the introduction of general suffrage and proportional representation were disappointing. Not the SDAP, but the RKSP emerged as the biggest force in parliament. The party also suffered from a failed attempt at a revolution by party leader Troelstra. In November 1918, during a parliamentary session just days after the German emperor had sought refuge in the Netherlands, Troelstra called for a revolution. Soon, however, he had to acknowledge the fact that he had overestimated revolutionary sentiment in the Netherlands. Troelstra's ›mistake‹ was a big blow for the SDAP. When in the 1920s the party tried to convince the RKSP to form a coalition government, the Catholics refused to cooperate with a party that found it hard to renounce its revolutionary aims.

The Troelstra debacle and the party's failure to expand its electorate resulted in an internal debate about a new interpretation of socialism. In the 1920s party ideologists such as the religious socialist Willem Banning and Koos Vorrink, leader of the party's youth movement ›Arbeiders Jeugd Centrale‹, opened the debate on the ultimate goal of socialism: the realisation of a new society. Although both acknowledged the need to overcome class differences, Marxist ideas were not at the heart of their political ideal. Instead, they advocated the construction of a new ›mentality‹ based on socialist norms and values. It took until the 1930s before their value-centred approach would strike a sympathetic cord within the party at large.⁸⁸ The disappointing result of the 1933 elections, which saw the party lose two seats, catalysed a debate about the party's course.⁸⁹ By then, also members of the board of the SDAP started to argue for a focus on the ›moral nature‹ of socialism, as opposed to the ›revolutionary romanticism‹ which had dominated socialist discourse before, in order to appeal to female and middle class voters like clerks, intellectuals and shopkeepers.⁹⁰ Other party officials also acknowledged the need to revitalise socialism by both adding immaterial ideals to the socialist agenda and stressing the differences between socialism and communism. These discussions about the interpretation of socialism resulted in the use in socialist discourse of inclusive concepts like ›volksgemeenschap‹ (people's community) instead of ›de arbeidersklasse‹ (the working class).⁹¹ In the 1930s, the brochures no longer exclusively addressed ›de arbeidersklasse‹ or equivalent phrases, but also spoke ›aan het Nederlandsche volk‹ (to the people of the Netherlands).⁹² Moreover, socialist language was enriched with a new, more inclusive key concept: ›democratisch socialisme‹.⁹³ In 1936, a major (non-socialist) Dutch newspaper called it the ›newest buzzword‹ in politics.⁹⁴ In the new Political Manifesto, adopted by the party in 1937, the concept was defined as ›a society characterised by collective ownership of the means of production and collective management of industries in which religious and political freedom is guaranteed‹.⁹⁵ By adding the adjective ›democratic‹ the SDAP wanted to reassure voters that its socialist agenda was to be carried out within the framework of a parliamentary democracy. Moreover, since the concept of socialism had been hijacked by various non-democratic political movements, adding the adjective dem-

88 Cohen, *Om de vernieuwing van het socialisme*, pp. 224f.

89 Tromp, *Het sociaal-democratisch programma*, p. 155.

90 Knegtmans, *De jaren 1919–1946*, pp. 62–117, there: pp. 94–97.

91 See for instance: *Democratie*, in: *Het Volk*, 14.12.1933, evening paper (e).

92 Pamphlet, *Aan het Nederlandsche volk!*, 1933, Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism, ARP Archive (052), Reg. 30.

93 Knegtmans, *Socialisme en democratie*, pp. 89–91.

94 *Democratisch socialisme*, in: *Leeuwarder nieuwsblad*, 27.8.1936, which refers to the ›Algemeen Handelsblad‹ which had called democratic socialism the ›newest buzzword‹.

95 Political manifesto of the SDAP, 1937, see: URL: <<http://pubnpp.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/root/beginselprogramma/sdap1937/>> [7.2.2013].

ocratic was necessary to distinguish the party's socialism from communism and National Socialism.

The concept of democratic socialism had popped up for the first time in the early twentieth century in intellectual debates among Dutch Socialists where it was used as an alternative for state socialism. The latter referred to a situation in which the state controlled production, while under *democratic* socialism not the state, but the »gemeenschap« (community) of labourers itself, for instance through their trade union organisations, would be in charge of the companies.⁹⁶ After the First World War the Second International adopted the concept to refer to her battle against »the slavery of capitalism on the one side, and the tyrannical dictatorship of bolshevism on the other side«.⁹⁷ The concept, however, only rose to prominence in the 1930s when socialist newspaper »Het Volk« started to use it to clearly demarcate the (*democratic*) socialism of the SDAP from the so-called socialism of the Communist Party and the Nazis.⁹⁸ In the mid-1930s the party presented a Labour Plan (»Plan van de Arbeid«) as one of the steppingstones towards achieving a democratic socialist society. The plan offered a socio-economic agenda in response to the economic crisis of the 1930s and was used in political propaganda in order to appeal to non-working class voters who also suffered badly from the crisis.⁹⁹ Using techniques borrowed from advertising and insights derived from mass psychology, the SDAP tried to »sell« the plan to the public.¹⁰⁰ With a minimum of socialist rhetoric the plan was presented as a practical solution to the difficulties of the time.¹⁰¹

In socialist discourse democratic socialism, however, was not chiefly clarified in economic terms; the resonance of the concept was much broader. »Democratic socialism«, according to Vorrink, was a »shining ideal« that called for »equal rights« for all members of the »people's community«.¹⁰² Vorrink referred to the French socialist leader Jean Jaurès who had defined socialism as the »social realization of moral value«, in this case: democracy. Vorrink also linked other values to it, such as respect and freedom.¹⁰³ Although for much of the 1930s the concept's use remained limited to ideological discourse – democratic socialism for instance did not appear in the election programme of 1937 – its connotations were clearly evident in the party's electoral language of politics, particularly through the use of the discourse of community and the framing of the SDAP as the main guardian of democracy.

The latter approach was potentially very powerful in a time of crisis. Since democracy was obviously under threat in the 1930s, the party could hope to attract the vote of those who feared that democracy might not prevail. The SDAP portrayed itself as the protector of the Dutch against »foreign« threats of communism and National Socialism, hoping that this would also help to convince voters that the party had abandoned its revolutionary Marxist legacy. Moreover, supporters of democracy were reminded of the fact that

96 *Daan van der Zee*, Het gevaar van staatsocialisme, in: *De Beweging* 5, 1909, pp. 79–84.

97 *De Tweede Internationale*, in: *Leidsch Dagblad*, 8.11.1920.

98 Steeds verder, in: *Het Volk*, 20.2.1931, (e); *R. Kuijper*, Istrati en Marion over Sovjet-Rusland, in: *Het Volk*, 12.6.1931, morning paper (m). See also: Rede van den leider der SDAP te Groningen, in: *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 25.1.1934.

99 *Ruud Abma*, Het Plan van de Arbeid en de SDAP, in: *BMGN* 92, 1977, pp. 37–68, there: p. 54.

100 *Rulof*, Hoe het Plan van de Arbeid te verkopen?, pp. 84–104; see also: *Rulof*, Selling Social Democracy in the Netherlands, pp. 475–497.

101 *Abma*, Het Plan van de Arbeid en de SDAP, p. 66.

102 De manifestatie op het Arsenaalplein, in: *Het Volk*, 31.7.1933, (e); Na honderd jaar, in: *Het Volk*, 19.7.1932, (m).

103 *Ibid.* The concept was also used by the Belgian social democrats Herman de Man and Emile Vandervelde: Woodbrookersdagen te Bentveld, in: *Het Volk*, 24.1.1933, (e); Staatskapitalisme is dictatuur, in: *Het Volk*, 24.4.1933, (e). See also *Knegtmans*, Socialisme en democratie, p. 99.

democracy presupposed the notion of solidarity and therefore could only be achieved in a socialist society.¹⁰⁴ Parliamentary democracy, however, was not uncontested in the Netherlands. Prime Minister Hendrikus Colijn had flirted with fascism in the 1920s and successfully presented himself as a powerful leader in the 1930s.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, democratic socialism was only one of several interpretations of democracy that were put forward by Dutch political movements in the 1930s.¹⁰⁶

Another prominent feature of the socialist language of politics, particularly in the 1937 elections, was its inclusive nature. Inspired by the campaign for the »Plan van de Arbeid«, socialist propaganda was tailored to the background and interests of different groups of voters.¹⁰⁷ The party issued brochures that were specifically aimed at the unemployed, young people, intellectuals, shopkeepers, entrepreneurs, small farmers, tenant farmers, market gardeners, teachers and mothers.¹⁰⁸ In order to unite these disparate groups as members of its constituency, the SDAP used concepts such as »ons volksgeheel« (the whole of the people) and »onze volksgemeenschap, in haar rijke schakering van groepen« (our people's community with its rich variety of groups).¹⁰⁹ The 1937 Election Manifesto opened with the claim that the SDAP would defend democracy against the threat of fascism and communism:

»[V]rijheid van geweten is van ouds een der belangrijkste kenmerken van de Nederlandse volksgemeenschap. Het sterk bewogen en verscheiden geestesleven van ons volk op godsdienstig en staatkundig gebied is slechts denkbaar in een atmosfeer van verdraagzaamheid en eerbied voor de medemens.«¹¹⁰

The focus on notions such as »the people« and the emphasis put on tolerance evoked an image of the SDAP as a party that no longer focused on division in terms of working class versus bourgeoisie, but instead breathed unity. Election brochures were illustrated with pictures that represented the socialist community as a coming together of workers, the middle class and women. The party even claimed to defend »het algemeen belang« (the public interest) – a term which used to be associated with liberal political discourse.¹¹¹ This trajectory of the Dutch Social Democrats to a certain extent corresponds with the history of the SPD in Germany. Albeit much earlier than their Dutch counterpart, the SPD, too, had »made important steps towards becoming a catch-all party (*Volkspartei*)«.¹¹²

104 Het roer moet om, 1937, IISG, SDAP Archive, Reg. 2221; Vrije mensen in een vrij land, 1937, IISG, SDAP, Reg. 2221.

105 *Herman Langeveld*, *Schipper naast God. Hendrikus Colijn, 1933–1944*, Amsterdam 2004.

106 A corporatist alternative was particularly well received among Dutch Catholics; *Stefan Couperus*, *Fixing Democracy? Political Representation and the Crisis of Democracy in Inter-war Europe and the Netherlands*, in: *Joris Gijsenbergh/Saskia Hollander/Tim Houwen et al.* (eds.), *Creative Crises of Democracy*, Bruxeles/Bern etc. 2012, pp. 269–290.

107 *Rulof*, *Hoe het Plan van de Arbeid te verkopen?*, pp. 92, 93 and 100.

108 Colijn verdedigt zich ... maar hoe?, 1937, IISG, SDAP Archive, Reg. 2221; see also: *Waarom?*, [1937], National Archive (NA), Drees Archive, Reg. 287.

109 Het roer moet om, 1937, IISG, SDAP Archive, Reg. 2221; see also: *Vrije mensen in een vrij land*, 1937, IISG, SDAP Archive, Reg. 2221; see also: *Verkiezingsprogramma 1937*, NA, Drees Archive, Reg. 287; *Rulof*, *Hoe het Plan van de Arbeid te verkopen?*, p. 101.

110 Translation: »[F]reedom of conscience is traditionally one of the most important characteristics of the Dutch people's community. The very dynamic and diverse cultural life of our people on the field of religion and the state is only conceivable in an atmosphere of tolerance and respect for our fellow man.« *Verkiezingsprogramma 1937*, NA, Drees Archive, Reg. 287.

111 Het roer moet om, 1937, IISG, SDAP Archive, Reg. 2221.

112 *Stefan Berger*, *Social Democracy and the Working Class in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Germany*, Harlow 2000, pp. 117 and 119.

In the 1930s, the SDAP also still aimed to attract confessional voters. With a focus on moral issues and (social) justice Banning and others hoped to convince them to join the ranks of the party. This approach was, however, hardly uncontested within the party. Some feared that the use of a quasi-religious or progressive-humanistic language would estrange members of religious groups from the SDAP.¹¹³ Moreover, the use of religious discourse clashed with the party's efforts to appeal to middle class voters through its economic agenda. In the 1937 campaign, the SDAP therefore stressed its nature as a »political party« that did not want to interfere with the »religious and philosophical issues« of its supporters, hoping that this could also convince confessional voters to give their vote to the SDAP.¹¹⁴

The debate about the party's strategy to gain the support of confessional voters continued in the late 1930s. In line with the new manifesto of 1937, in which socialism was presented as a »political doctrine« and not as a *Weltanschauung*¹¹⁵, party leader Johan Willem Albarda resisted the tendency to adopt a religious-socialist discourse. Instead of resorting to language in order to present the SDAP as a party for both non-religious and religious voters, Albarda fought for the inclusion of the SDAP in a coalition government. Only then, he argued, the SDAP could truly show the voters that it was able to defend the interests of the entire people of the Netherlands. In September 1939 two socialist ministers – Albarda was one of them – were sworn into office, but the debate about the revitalisation of socialism and the party's relationship towards confessional voters was far from over yet.¹¹⁶

V. THE »PARTIJ VAN DE ARBEID« AND THE IMMEDIATE POSTWAR SOCIALIST LANGUAGE OF POLITICS

A new political party

In the early months of the German occupation of the Netherlands, Reich Commissioner Arthur Seyss-Inquart tried to Nazify the SDAP, but failed to do so, because the party leadership had instructed party members to give up their membership.¹¹⁷ Many prominent social democrats were subsequently held hostage by the Germans in internment camps in Germany and the Netherlands where they were accompanied by intellectuals and politicians from other political movements. During their imprisonment, they started to discuss the postwar political order. One of the key issues was the perceived need to overcome the prewar »hokjesgeest«: the division of society along ideological and religious lines – the term pillarisation was not yet commonly used. Eventually this resulted in the foundation of the Dutch People's Movement (»Nederlandse Volksbeweging«, NVB) immediately after the liberation of the Netherlands.¹¹⁸ The NVB aimed to cut across party lines and end the antithesis between confessional and non-confessional parties that had dominated prewar Dutch politics. The movement, in which some prominent Social Democrats were involved, promoted the formation of a broad-based progressive political party that should replace the SDAP and also include progressive Protestants and Catholics. In the end, after the NVB

113 *Knegtmans*, *Socialisme en democratie*, pp. 90, 182 and 192.

114 *Vrije mensen in een vrij land, 1937*, IISG, SDAP Archive, Reg. 2221.

115 *Tromp*, *Het sociaal-democratisch programma*, pp. 184, 193 and 345.

116 *Knegtmans*, *Socialisme en democratie*, pp. 232 and 255.

117 *Tromp*, *Het sociaal-democratisch programma*, p. 189.

118 *Madelon de Keizer*, *De gijzelaars van St. Michielsgestel. Een eliteberaad in oorlogstijd*, Alphen aan den Rijn 1979; *Jan Th. M. Bank*, *Opkomst en ondergang van de Nederlandse Volksbeweging (NVB)*, Deventer 1978.

had failed to get the RKSP on board because it refused to accept the new party's socialist ideology, the SDAP agreed to merge with the progressive liberal »Vrijzinnig Democratische Bond« and the Christian-Democratic Union to form the »Partij van de Arbeid«. ¹¹⁹

Despite the failure to win over the Catholics, the PvdA continued trying to realise the so-called »doorbraak« by luring progressive confessional voters away from the confessional political parties. ¹²⁰ Much like the disappointment that had followed the first elections under general suffrage, the results of the first postwar elections turned out to be a bitter pill to swallow. Again the RKSP, which had changed its name into Catholic People's Party (»Katholieke Volkspartij«, KVP), emerged as the biggest force in parliament. The PvdA, however, could find some consolation in the fact that it was now generally accepted as a trustworthy coalition partner. The KVP even allowed the PvdA to supply the Prime Minister. Social Democratic party leader Willem Drees gained great popularity as the sober leader of four coalition cabinets in the years 1948–1958. In this respect, the Second World War and the subsequent foundation of the PvdA definitely formed a turning point in the history of Dutch social democracy. In other respects the PvdA appeared to be a postwar manifestation of the SDAP. After all, the SDAP had also tried to win over confessional voters. Moreover, the main ideologists of the PvdA were the same as those who had been responsible for rebranding the SDAP in the 1930s: Willem Banning and Koos Vorrink, the first party chairman of the PvdA. This section will discuss the electoral language used by the PvdA in the 1946 and 1948 general elections and will explore the similarities and differences with the language used by the prewar SDAP.

Breaking with the past?

In the postwar propaganda of the PvdA, the Second World War was framed as a major break with the past. The defeat of National Socialism was characterised as a defeat of capitalism: the occupation had laid bare the degrading nature of the capitalist system. In addition, the work of the resistance movement had clearly shown that the antithesis between confessional and secular political parties had run out of date; people of different denominations had worked together to fight the enemy: ¹²¹ »in dat gemeenschappelijk strijden en lijden en sterven hebben zij geleerd buiten de confessioneel-politieke scheidslijnen te treden«. ¹²² »Radicale hervorming in socialistische geest« (radical reform in a socialist spirit) was framed as the opposite of the prewar »bitter en diep teleurstellende« years of »kapitalistische chaos«. ¹²³ »Democratisch socialisme« (democratic socialism)

119 *Hendrik Marinus Ruitenbeek*, *Het ontstaan van de Partij van de Arbeid*, Amsterdam 1955.

120 Mellink shows that the »doorbraakgedachte« – the effort to separate religion and politics – despite the disappointing election results, formed the rudiment of social democratic political strategy up until the 1970s. *Bram Mellink*, *Tweedracht maakt macht. De PvdA, de doorbraak en de ontluikende polarisatiestrategie (1946–1966)*, in: *BMGN* 126, 2011, pp. 30–53, there: p. 33.

121 *Johan H. Scheps*, *Doorbraak*. Verkiezingsuitgave no. 1, [1948], NA, Drees Archive, Reg. 352; *Gijs*, *Een Christen-Arbeider spreekt tot christelijke arbeiders*, in: *idem*. See also: Radio broadcast, Corry Tendeloo, *Voor de vrouw. Vrouwen spreken mee*, 15.5.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766; *Marinus A. Reinalda*, *Waarheid en waardigheid, ook in de verkiezingsactie*, 11.5.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766.

122 Translation: »Their common fighting, suffering and dying has taught them to look beyond confessional-political demarcations.« *Aan het Nederlandse volk!*, 1946, Catholic Documentation Centre (KDC), KVP Archive (266), Reg. 1493.

123 Translation: »dreadful and extremely disappointing (years of) capitalist chaos«. Radio broadcast A. J. Otte-Arnolli, »Voor de huisvrouw«, 15.5.1946. IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766; *Boeren en tuinders van Nederland*, 1946, KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 92; see also: *Aan den Nederlandschen middenstand*, 1946, KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 92.

would help to bring about a »nieuw begin« (new beginning) and was therefore often framed as the opposite of »dictatuur« (dictatorship).¹²⁴ The concept was more widely used in political propaganda than before the war. Social Democrats were convinced that, compared to the prewar socialism of the SDAP, which had had an »uitgesproken arbeiderskarakter« (explicit disposition towards the working class), democratic socialism was a broader concept with a wider appeal.¹²⁵

By identifying itself with postwar change and renewal, the PvdA framed the elections as a choice between a better future or the return to the horrors of recent history. Voters were warned that, while the PvdA looked ahead, supporting other parties would amount to the return of the prewar situation of crisis, unemployment and instability.¹²⁶ Conservative politics would take the Netherlands back to »April 1940«, to a situation of »egoïsme, klein partij-gedoe, enghartig conservatisme en benepen winstbejag«.¹²⁷ According to the first postwar Prime Minister Willem Schermerhorn – one of the founding fathers of the PvdA – time was running out: the next five years were decisive in bringing about a »betere maatschappij« (better society) – and socialism offered the only road to a new and better world.¹²⁸ The call for renewal seemed to be consistent with the nature of the PvdA as a *new* political party. Despite the obvious similarities with the prewar SDAP, like the adoption of socialist symbols, the PvdA claimed to embody the dawn of a new era, symbolised by the repeated use in political images of a sunrise at the horizon.¹²⁹

Framing the political system as in urgent need of fundamental reform is a recurring discourse in Dutch politics. The American historian James C. Kennedy has referred to it as the »metanarrative of obsolescence« and pointed at its dominance in Dutch debates about political reform since the Second World War.¹³⁰ The metanarrative of obsolescence went hand in hand with a tendency to discuss political reality in passive terms.¹³¹ In the campaigns of 1946 and 1948 the PvdA for instance argued that »het politieke leven« (political life) needed to be adjusted to the »noodzakelijke vorm van deze tijd« (necessary shape of this era).¹³² The social revolution »klopt aan de deur van onze tijd« (was knocking at the door of our time)¹³³ and the »tijd« therefore asked for a different approach

124 M. A. *Reinalda*, Waarheid en waardigheid, ook in de verkiezingsactie, 11.5.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766; Irene *Vorrink*, Voor de Vrouw. Voor 't eerst ter stembus, 6.11.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766; Vrouwen!, [1946], IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 2087; Stalin betaalt naar verdienste [1946], NA, Drees Archive, Reg. 350.

125 Stand van zaken. Documentatiemateriaal voor sprekers, No. 1, 3.4.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1720.

126 Radio broadcast, A. J. Otte-Arnolli, Voor de huisvrouw, 15.5.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766; Radio broadcast, Irene *Vorrink*, Voor de Vrouw. Voor 't eerst ter stembus, 6.5.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766; A. J. Otte-Arnolli, Voor de huisvrouw. Wat verwacht de huisvrouw van de overheid?, 26.4.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766.

127 Radio broadcast by Geert *Ruygers*, Partij van de Arbeid, 1946, KDC, *Ruygers Archive*, Reg. 95; Translation: »egoism, petty politics, narrow-minded conservatism and profit seeking«. Brochure, »De spanne tijds, die ons is toegemeten om de wereld te redden van chaos en ongelooft, lijkt mij vrij kort, [...] vijf jaren«. Een boodschap van Prof. W. Schermerhorn, Minister-President, [1946], KDC, *Ruygers Archive*, Reg. 92.

128 Ibid.

129 Pamphlet, Kiest een nieuwe koers, KDC, KVP Archive, Reg. 1494; Pamphlet, Wij boeren kunnen erover meepraten, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 2087.

130 James C. *Kennedy*, Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw. Nederland in de jaren zestig. Amsterdam/Meppel 1995, pp. 27f.

131 James C. *Kennedy*, Crisis en vernieuwing, in: Raad voor het openbaar bestuur (ed.), Verslag van de eerste Rob-lezing, Den Haag 2003, pp. 11–27, there: p. 17.

132 *Scheps*, Doorbraak.

133 Zaandam, Noordwijk, Voorburg, Hilversum, 11.5.1946, KDC, *Ruygers Archive*, Reg. 93.

to politics.¹³⁴ Kennedy argues that such »rhetoric of political reform« was very powerful, because it was hard to resist and refute.¹³⁵ It was, after all, not very attractive to characterise oneself as an old-fashioned, stubborn voter who did not want to acknowledge that times were changing. By connecting the necessity of political renewal to the »vision of a new Holland« for which the resistance movement had fought, the PvdA even claimed the moral high ground: »Het visioen van het nieuwe Nederland [...] zij voor ieder een dure verplichting.«¹³⁶

A people's party?

Framing the war as a major break, with democratic socialism offering the only way towards a better future, remained very powerful up until the 1950s.¹³⁷ It was used to convince voters who had been known as staunch enemies of socialism that the PvdA nonetheless served their interests best. Farmers and shopkeepers, traditionally not very fond of the Social Democrats' etatism, were told that a planned economy would help to create a society characterised by social justice, freedom, peace and prosperity. The prewar negligent state and its politics of »total freedom« had left them to fend for themselves. After the war, however, the famous Social Democratic Minister for Agriculture Sicco Mansholt, for instance, soon had managed to revitalise farming through a policy of »efficiency«.¹³⁸

The effort to include farmers and shopkeepers was part of the continuing mission of the Social Democrats to stretch the boundaries of their constituency beyond that of the working class. The PvdA continued along the lines of the SDAP with its self-description as a »people's party« as opposed to other parties that represented »sectional interests«.¹³⁹ Through this discourse of unity the PvdA tapped into nationalist sentiments which were of course widespread in the immediate postwar years. Adverts claimed that the PvdA acted »in dienst van het gehele volk« (at the service of the whole of the people).¹⁴⁰ In the 1946 campaign, the PvdA also used the inclusive concept of »de kleine man« (the common man) to define its own constituency.¹⁴¹ The concept was again used to broaden the party's appeal outside the (industrial) working class and to struck a sympathetic cord among workers, farmers and small shop owners, in short the »arbeidende massa's« (working masses).¹⁴²

134 *Scheps*, Doorbraak.

135 *Kennedy*, Crisis en vernieuwing, p. 18.

136 Translation: »let the vision of new Holland be a bounden duty for us all«. De Partij van de Arbeid richt zich tot het gehele Nederlandse volk met de volgende oproep, [1946], NA, Drees Archive, Reg. 350. Ellipsis mine.

137 Vrouwen weet gij nog wat de crisis van 1930 tot 1940 betekende?, 1948, NA, VVD Archive (2.19.022), Reg. 7; Nationale figuur vraagt uw vertrouwen, 1952, KDC, Cals Archive, Reg. 78.

138 Pamphlet, Wij boeren kunnen erover meepraten, [1948], IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 2087; Pamphlet, Middenstanders, [1948], *ibid.*

139 Brochure, Ontnuchterende en nuchtere feiten! Een verzameling feitenmateriaal uit het Nederlandse politieke leven; van groot belang voor allen, die op 7 Juli 1948 moeten kiezen in welke geest ons land de volgende vier jaren zal worden geregeerd!, Partij van de Arbeid, [1948], KDC, KVP Archive, Reg. 1494.

140 List of adverts, [1946], IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 2087.

141 »Het grote goed [...] onze grond«, in: De Katholiek in de Partij van de Arbeid, KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 92.

142 Radio broadcast by Geert Ruygers, Partij van de Arbeid, 1946, KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 95.

Illustrations I–IV



Appealing to different categories of voters: in the 1946 the PvdA issued posters aimed at different groups of voters, among others, shopkeepers, intellectuals, farmers and women. The caption at the top of the poster reads: »Labour, the source of all affluence«, followed by »Partij van de Arbeid, at the service of the whole of the people« at the bottom. Poster, 79.5 x 53.5 cm. Design: Studio Uschi Torens. Source: International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam.

Much like the 1937 campaign, different groups of voters were targeted with tailor-made brochures. The brochure directed at farmers for instance lacked any reference to socialism, because of their assumed natural aversion for it.¹⁴³ In general, occupational status was still the dominant way through which social democrats thought they could appeal to voters who would not identify themselves as working class. In socialist propaganda even the notion of »stand« (estate) popped up in an effort to tap into the pride of Dutch farmers,

143 Boeren en tuinders van Nederland, [1946], KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 92.

farm workers and market gardeners who were referred to as an »onmisbaar deel van het geheel, als een onvervangbaar bestanddeel van de Nederlandse volksgemeenschap«. ¹⁴⁴ References to occupational status were part of the PvdA's effort to make clear that the nature of their jobs turned these voters into the natural allies of the Social Democrats. After all, the PvdA was fighting on behalf of labour in its fight against capitalism. Farmers and market gardeners were referred to as »U, die dagelijks met de arbeid van Uw hoofd en handen de kost moet verdienen« while the »hard ploeterende en zwoegende Middenstander« was told that »Gij behoort bij ons!«. ¹⁴⁵

The appeal to confessional voters was also in line with the approach already advocated by Albarda in the late 1930s. Compared to the propaganda of the early interwar years, the postwar brochures contained far less religious rhetoric. Instead, politics was framed as a »practical« domain, where »social« issues were discussed. Discussions about religious principles were relegated to the domain of the church. ¹⁴⁶ According to Geert Ruygers, a Catholic who had joined the ranks of the PvdA and was elected vice chairman in 1946, socialism »no longer aimed to replace the Church« and instead focused on the solution of social problems. ¹⁴⁷ Where Marxism had been irreconcilable with Christianity, the PvdA's postwar socialism therefore was not. ¹⁴⁸ In order to win over the Catholics, the propaganda of the PvdA for instance focused on the »socialist« ideas of prominent Catholics. Ruygers implicitly compared himself and other Catholics within the PvdA with the late nineteenth century prominent Catholic politician Herman Schaepman whose progressive political views had contrasted sharply with the conservative Catholic elite. ¹⁴⁹ Moreover, the PvdA shied away from an outright confrontation with its main competitor, the KVP. ¹⁵⁰

Finally, also women were approached as a distinct group of voters. Much like prewar political discourse they were treated as politically ignorant creatures who often failed to acknowledge the importance of politics. Election brochures aimed at women were full of rather demeaning set-phrases about the nature of elections – »are you aware of the fact that through your vote you help to decide what our government will be like the next few years?«. ¹⁵¹ In radio broadcasts, the PvdA argued that women often only cared about »their own difficulties« and, as a result, had a wrong perception of the political issues at hand and the difficulties involved in governing the country. ¹⁵² If only women would pay as much attention to politics as to their wardrobe, a female socialist propagandist sighed. ¹⁵³

144 Translation: »indispensable part of the whole, an irreplaceable part of the Dutch people's community«. *Boeren en tuinders van Nederland*, [1946], KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 92. See also: *Aan de landarbeiders van Nederland*, KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 92.

145 Translation: »you, who earns a living by working with your brain and hands«. *Boeren en tuinders van Nederland*, [1946], KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 92. Translation: »hard working shopkeeper«, »you belong to us!«. *Aan den Nederlandschen middenstand*. KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 92.

146 *Stand van zaken*. Documentatiemateriaal voor sprekers, No. 1, 3.4.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1720; see also: Corry Tendeloo, *Voor de vrouw*. *Vrouwen spreken mee*, 15.5.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766; Radio broadcast, *Vara*, 15.5.1946, KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 95.

147 Radio broadcast, *Vara*, 15.5.1946, KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 95.

148 *Zaandam, Noordwijk, Voorburg, Hilversum*, 11.5.1946, KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 93.

149 Radio broadcast, *Waarom ik als katholiek socialist ben*, [1946], KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 95.

150 After the elections of 1948, the PvdA started to become more hostile towards its main competitor. *Mellink*, *Tweedracht maakt macht*, pp. 30–53 and 40–41.

151 *Vrouwen!*, [1946], IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 2087.

152 Radio broadcast, A. J. Otte-Arnolli, *Voor de huisvrouw*, 15.5.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766; see also: Irene Vorrink, *Voor de Vrouw*. *Voor 't eerst ter stembus*, 6.5.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766.

153 *Ibid.*

Simultaneously, however, socialist propaganda also framed the years of German occupation in educatory terms as a time when women »had learned to act more independently« which had made them »politiek bewuster« (more politically conscious).¹⁵⁴

When female involvement in politics was discussed, it was still often cloaked in ›motherhood‹ terms. Much like the propaganda that had been aimed at women in the aftermath of the First World War, election brochures reminded them of the horrors of war when they had had to comfort their kids while fighter planes were flying over their homes and their husbands and sons were enslaved by the enemy:

»nog eens zult U misschien aan hun bedjes de wacht moeten houden, terwijl de vliegtuigen ronken boven het dak' [...] 'nog eens uw mannen en zonen als slaven zien wegvoeren«.¹⁵⁵

Another brochure contained a picture of a housewife, with an apron and a broom. In the accompanying text the elections were framed as a »big cleaning day« when everything »petty, old and finished« would be swept away to make room for a »new and reborn Holland«.¹⁵⁶

Illustration V



»Big cleaning day«. This illustration was used in propaganda brochures of the PvdA for the 1946 general elections. The woman with the broom sweeps a couple of upper class figures from the floor. Drawing, 27.5 x 23 cm. By Studio Uschi Torens. Source: IISH, Amsterdam.

154 D. I-R, Bepaalde de Doorbraak zich uitsluitend tot de mannen?, in: Doorbraak. Verkiezingsuitgave no. 1., [1948], NA, Drees Archive, Reg. 352.

155 Translation: »Once again you might have to keep watch at their bedsides while fighter planes are flying over your home. [...] Once again you see your husbands and sons being enslaved.« De Christen-vrouw en de P.v.d.A. Protestants-Christelijke Werkgemeenschap in de Partij van de Arbeid. Vlugschrift nr. 3., KDC, KVP Archive, Reg. 1494. Ellipsis mine.

156 Brochure, Grote schoonmaak. De Katholiek in de Partij van de Arbeid, [1946], KDC, Ruymers Archive, Reg. 92.

In a radio broadcast, Irene Vorrink, daughter of party chairman Koos Vorrink, pointed out that women had to get involved in politics in order to be able to teach their children how to act as »goede leden van onze maatschappij« (good members of our society).¹⁵⁷ Casting their ballot, women could help to ensure their children a »better and happier world« and a »better future«.¹⁵⁸ The Social Democrats, nevertheless, also made it abundantly clear that women were – still – not to play a role on the centre stage of politics. The PvdA was presented as the joint effort of »zonen van één volk« who were to build a »rechtvaardige, nieuwe, socialistische maatschappij op democratische grondslag«.¹⁵⁹ In another pamphlet voters were asked to support »de mannen die ons vaderland leiden naar herstel en vernieuwing«.¹⁶⁰ In fact, in the 1946 election, only one of the 29 social democratic MPs was a woman: the former progressive-liberal politician Corry Tendeloo. In one of the party's radio broadcasts just days before the election, Tendeloo had argued that women had not to be represented by women. She, however, also encouraged women to join the party's women's club where they could get in touch with »their female representatives«.¹⁶¹ The political renewal promised by the PvdA therefore did not entail a new role for women; they were still largely excluded from the (re-)construction of the postwar political order.

VI. CONCLUSION

The metanarrative of pillarisation has hampered our view on elections in the first half of the twentieth century because it has ignored the momentum that the elections brought to efforts to broaden the party's appeal. This paper has not challenged existing views on the stability of Dutch pillarised society, but has argued that from early on, the SDAP transcended its own pillar by using an inclusive electoral rhetoric. Although more research, which should also include the language of politics of other major parties, needs to be done, an analysis of the electoral language of the Dutch social democrats shows that they did not adopt a »defensive« strategy that was merely aimed at the mobilisation of »their« grassroots supporters. In their electoral propaganda, Social Democrats used a range of discourses, aimed at various groups of voters. From the beginning, the SDAP challenged itself to balance its efforts to win over confessional voters and expand its electoral base towards farmers and the middle classes, with its ideology, traditional profile and culture as a socialist, working class party. The party's electoral language reveals that the ideology was interpreted in a flexible way, however, the tension between both languages resulted in a sometimes heated internal debate and hampered the party's efforts to construct a more inclusive political constituency.

Although re-branding the SDAP as a broad-based »people's party is commonly associated with post Second World War politics, the electoral rhetoric that was at the centre of this investigation reveals that already long before the notion of »volkspartij« had become the hallmark of electoral politics, Dutch Social Democrats tried to broaden their appeal.

157 Radio broadcast, Irene Vorrink, Voor de Vrouw. Voor 't eerst ter stembus, 6.5.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766.

158 Brochure, Grote schoonmaak. De Katholiek in de Partij van de Arbeid, [1946], KDC, Ruygers Archive, Reg. 92.

159 Translation: »the sons of one people« building »a just, new, socialist society on a democratic basis«. *C. Kleywegt*, *Waarom een Partij van de Arbeid*, 22.4.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766.

160 Translation: »the men who will lead our country to recovery and renewal«. *Een laatste woord aan de kiezers*, 16.5.1946, KDC, KVP Archive, Reg. 1493.

161 Radio broadcast, Corry Tendeloo, Voor de vrouw. Vrouwen spreken mee, 15.5.1946, IISG, PvdA Archive, Reg. 1766.

Much like Stefan Berger has shown for the German case – where Social Democrats tried to »reach out to the non-proletarian strata of society« in the 1920s – Dutch Social Democrats appealed to a middle class electorate.¹⁶² And much like Childers has shown for Weimar Germany as well, occupational categories played a key role in the electoral rhetoric.¹⁶³ Efforts to broaden the appeal of the SDAP beyond the working class amounted to the production of brochures aimed at particular occupational groups, such as farmers, shopkeepers and market gardeners. These brochures therefore indicate which groups were considered to be ›outside‹ the ›natural‹ constituency of the SDAP; after all, the party did not produce brochures aimed at specific groups of industrial workers. Occupation was a self-evident category to be used in electoral propaganda because it offered the Social Democrats the opportunity to argue that the SDAP was a party of labour in a more general sense, that it defended the interests of all those who were subject to the degrading forces of capitalism. Social Democrats even did not shy away from using a language of »stand« (estate) to tap into the pride of groups of voters like farmers and shopkeepers who would have found it hard to identify themselves as working class.

Another striking feature of the socialist language of politics is the prominence of religious discourse. In its early years, the party tended to present socialism as a political religion, using religious discourse to sing the praise of their ideology. Although the language of Domela Nieuwenhuis and the election campaigns of the SDAP exemplify that socialism offered enough leads for an appeal to confessional voters, the party's atheist Marxist ideology limited its attractiveness. After the First World War, the introduction of proportional representation and general (male and female) suffrage seemed to offer a new opportunity to expand the party's electoral base. Immaterial issues such as disarmament were moved to the forefront of politics in order to appeal to female voters. Their inclusion in the suffrage contributed to the adoption of more inclusive concepts such as ›people's community‹, which were also used to stretch the party's appeal beyond the working class. That said, women were mainly included in this community as ›mothers‹ and remained to be so for the time being. Social Democrats saw no role for them on the centre stage of politics.

In the 1930s, the moral and (quasi-)religious discourse, which was geared towards confessional voters, started to clash with attempts by the party to appeal to middle class voters through the promotion of a practical, socioeconomic agenda that promised to solve the crisis of the 1930s. Those within the party who favoured the latter approach feared that an overt use of religious discourse would scare such voters away. The adoption of a new manifesto in 1937 was a decisive moment. With the inclusion of concepts as democratic socialism and ›people's community‹, which had emerged in socialist political discourse after the First World War, the party aimed to broaden its appeal. In addition, the decision forced by Albarda in the late 1930s to treat socialism as a practical political ideology, rather than a political religion, would set the tone for the party's postwar electoral discourse. Tensions between the ideological and electoral language of the Social Democrats lessened. After the war, the party tried to create a breakthrough in the Dutch political landscape by using a practical, predominantly non-religious and non-Marxist, but nonetheless anti-capitalist language of politics that centred on the party's social-economic agenda and framed the elections as a choice between renewal and a return to chaos.

The lack of electoral volatility, however, shows that these efforts to broaden the party's electoral base were not very successful. The PvdA was not alone in this; the other two ›people's parties‹, the KVP and the liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (»Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie«), also failed to fundamentally expand their

162 *Berger*, *Social Democracy and the Working Class*, p. 117.

163 *Childers*, *The Social Language*, passim.

electoral base in the first postwar elections. This brings us back to the masternarrative of pillarisation, which argues that political allegiance often went hand in hand with the participation of voters in social and cultural organisations, which, together with the political party, formed a closely-knit network that spanned pretty much all aspects of life. Voting, in this case, was an expression of a political identity that also manifested itself outside the sphere of party politics. In their quest for the confessional vote, Social Democrats tried from the late 1930s onwards to overcome this by relegating religion to the private and personal sphere. A voter could remain active within the Catholic Church and yet vote for the PvdA because the party promised not to touch upon religious issues. Their attempt to shatter, among others, the automatism of Catholic voters voting for the KVP, nonetheless, failed. This failure cannot be solely attributed to the firm hold of the clergy over the electorate, but also resulted from the fact that, like Catholicism (and the Orthodox Protestantism of the ARP), socialism itself had developed into a way of life that transcended the sphere of party politics and impacted on the private, social and cultural sphere in many respects. Although research that starts from the voter perspective is needed, one could argue that this turned ›switching sides‹ into a complicated issue. Despite the lack of electoral success – after the introduction of general suffrage their share in Parliament continued to fluctuate around one quarter of the seats – Social Democrats, however, showed few signs of resignation.¹⁶⁴ Judging from their electoral language, their eagerness to expand their electoral base remained unabated.

164 The ›doorbraak‹ or ›breakthrough‹ strategy was used by the PvdA up until the 1960s. *Mellink, Tweedracht maakt macht*, pp. 30–53.

