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Allen de Fabriek in: The effects of the factory turn on Dutch Maoism (1962-1980)

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Allen de Fabriek in: The effects of the factory turn on Dutch
Maoism (1962-1980)

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Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Dennis Bos

Politics, Culture and National Identities, 1789 to the present

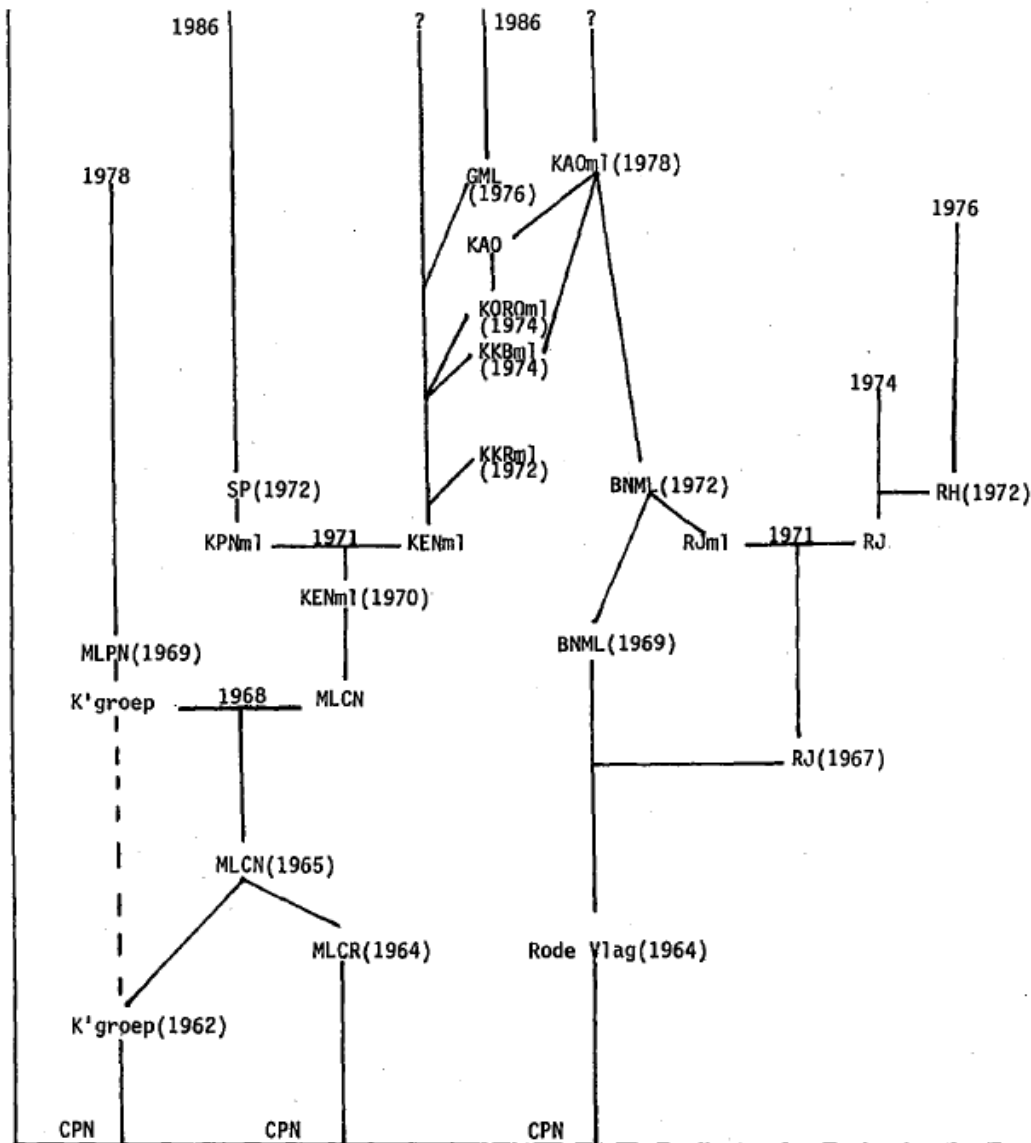
List of Abbreviations:

ML - Marxisme-Leninisme - Marxism-Leninism
CPN - Communistische Partij van Nederland - Communist Party of the Netherlands
MLC - Marxisties-Leninisties Centrum - Marxist-Leninist Center
MLCN - Marxisties-Leninisties Centrum Nederland - Marxist-Leninist Center of the Netherlands
KEN(ml) - Kommunitiese Eenheidsbeweging Nederland (marxisties-leninisties) - Communist Unity Movement of the Netherlands (Marxist-Leninist)
KPN(ml) - Kommunistiese Partij van Nederland (ml) - Communist Party of the Netherlands (ml)
SP - Socialistiese Partij - Socialist Party
GML - Groep Marxisten-Leninisten - Group of Marxist-Leninists
CCP - Chinese Communist Party
CPSU - Communist Party of the Soviet Union
BVD - Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst - Domestic Security Service
BNML - Bond van Nederlandse Marxisten-Leninististen - League of Dutch Marxist-Leninists
KKB - Kommunistenkring Breda - Communist Circle of Breda
KOROmI - Kommunistische Organisatie Rotterdam en Omstreken (ml) - Communist Organization of the Rotterdam Area (ml)
KKR(ml) - Kommunistenkring Rijnmond (ml) - Communist Circle of Rijnmond (ml)
MLPN - Marxisties-Leninistiese Partij van Nederland - Marxist-Leninist Party of the Netherlands
RJ - Rode Jeugd - Red Youth
RJml - Rode Jeugd (ml) - Red Youth (ml)
RH - Rode Hulp - Red Aid
KAO - Kommunistiese Arbeidersorganisatie - Communist Workers' Organization
AM - Arbeidersmacht - Workers' Power
BHW - Bond van Huurders en Woningzoekenden - League of Renters and home seekers
LVK - Landelijk Vietnam Kommittee - National Vietnam Committee
KSB - Kommunistiese Studentenbond - Communist Students League
MLS - Marxisties-Leninistiese Studentenbond - Marxist-Leninist Students League
MLJ - Marxisties-Leninistiese Jongerenbond - Marxist-Leninist Youth League
LK - Landelijk Komittee - National Committee (of KEN(ml))
UJC(ml) - Union des jeunesses communistes (ML) - Union of Communist Youth (ml)
KPD/ML - Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands/Marxisten-Leninisten - Communist Party of Germany/Marxists-Leninists
VMTM - Committee Van Mens Tot Mens - Committee From Person to Person

Table of Contents:

Introduction	5
Why Maoism?	8
Chapter One	15
Chapter Two	21
Chapter Three	35
Creating a new KEN(ml)	37
A new split and the formation of KKRml	38
Student Organizing	40
Labor Organizing	41
Tenant Organizing	49
Anti-Imperialist Activism	53
Conclusion	57
Bibliography	60

Genealogy of Dutch Maoist Organizations¹



¹ Gerrit Voerman, "De Rode Jehova's: Een Geschiedenis van de Socialistiese Partij," *Jaarboek 1986 Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen*, 1987, 124 - 150; 127.

Introduction

From the very beginning of the socialist movement there has been a controversy over the question of which group within society would be the force that would create a socialist society. As is well known, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels believed that the working class would be the force leading a socialist revolution, because the objective laws of historical materialism proved that they had both the ability and the motivation for revolution. Other socialists, derisively called 'utopian socialists' by Marx and Engels, believed otherwise. Prominent among them were the Russian Populists. They did not see the small Russian working class as key to socialist revolution. Instead, they saw the Russian peasantry as the main force behind a socialist revolution in Russia. The Populists idealized the Russian peasantry and believed that they were socialists by instinct, going to the tradition of the Russian (peasant commune) *mir*.

Despite Populist ideology being centered on the Russian peasantry; most Populist activists were members of Russia's urban educated class. Leading Populist authors such as Alexander Herzen and Nikolay Chernychevsky argued that what was needed to unleash the revolutionary energies of the Russian masses were urban intellectuals who through conviction and dedication could be the catalyst for revolution, so-called 'men of the new age'. This is a profoundly voluntarist belief in the will of a small number of intellectuals to change social reality. This apparent emphasis on the need for 'new men' to act as catalysts for revolution contradicted one of the elemental beliefs of the Populist movement, namely that socialist consciousness resided in the masses of Russian peasants. Populist revolutionaries attempted to resolve this tension by breaking the isolation of the Russian intelligentsia and 'merging' with the peasants. This attempt at merging found its most famous expression in the 'going to the people' movement of 1874, whereby revolutionaries would go to the countryside to live and work amongst the peasants in order to agitate for social revolution. This movement involved thousands of (former) students across much of the Russian empire, yet none were able to

foment revolts among the peasantry and the movement was quickly repressed by the Tsarist authorities. The failure of the 'going to the people' campaign left many revolutionaries disillusioned with the peasantry, many stopped organizing the peasants, gave up on politics or resorted to individual terrorism to incite revolution.²

This anecdote might at first seem unique to Russia, with its politically radical but socially isolated intelligentsia and underdeveloped peasant economy. But as observed by one of its participants, a similar phenomenon took shape nearly a century after the Russian 'going to the people' movement began.³ In 1968, after the failure of the student uprising of the previous May, a philosophy student at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure named Robert Linhart began working as an unqualified worker in a Citroen plant in the Paris suburb of Choisy. Linhart chose to forgo his privileges as a student in order to organize workers at the factory. He later summarized his experiences as a worker in his memoir *L'établi* (English title: *The Assembly Line*) which describes the hardships and dehumanizing conditions of Taylorist industrial labor.⁴ While the actions of Linhart may at first seem idiosyncratic and unusual, they were in reality informed by a broad ideological and political framework. Linhart learnt this ideological and political framework at the École Normale Supérieure, where he was a student of the famous Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. While a student, Linhart had been a member of the student wing of the French Communist Party (PCF). There he began criticizing the PCF's perceived revisionism.⁵ This eventually led to his own expulsion, after which he formed the pro-Chinese *Union des jeunesses communistes marxistes-léninistes* (UJCml) in December 1966. The group

² Avrahm Yarmonlinksy, *Road to Revolution: A Century of Russian Radicalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 182–211.

³ Robert Linhart, *Lénine, Les Paysans, Taylor* (Paris: éditions Du Seuil, 1976).

⁴ Robert Linhart, *The Assembly Line* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981).

⁵ In this context, revisionism means the abandonment of core aspects of Marxism-Leninism such as class struggle, proletarian revolution, internationalism, and anti-imperialism, while continuing to pay lip service to Marxism

judged the PCF too revisionist to lead a revolution in France and tasked itself with building a properly revolutionary communist party from scratch.⁶

Despite seeing the working class as the leading force of the revolution, most of the early members of the UJCml were students. The leaders of the UCJml judged that building a revolutionary mass party required contact with the working class at the point of production. Initially this took the form of workers' inquiries, but these only afforded limited contact with workers. When short term contact with workers was deemed insufficient, the UCJml developed a new approach called 'établissement' - sometimes rendered in English as 'settling down' - which involved UCJml members hiding their political affiliation and class background in order to get jobs at the large industrial complexes around Paris.

An internal document from the UCJml titled 'Sur l'établissement' explains the long term strategic aims of établissement. The authors describe établissement as a concrete response to a *universal* problem of the Communist movement, namely the fusion of revolutionary Marxist ideology and the workers' movement. The document contends that the most advanced revolutionary ideology has first taken root among students and intellectuals, while only the proletariat is capable of leading the revolution. The role of établis⁷ then was to act as intermediaries who would impart these ideas on the most combative workers.

From reading 'Sur l'établissement' it becomes clear that those engaged in établissement regarded ideology as crucially important to the building of a new communist movement. What were these 'advanced ideas'? 'Sur l'établissement' states that: "*[They] are the ideas of the mass line, of the strategy and tactics of popular war, of the development in stages of the uninterrupted revolutionary process, of the communist ideology of 'Serving the People' and of going to the school of the masses, the style of work that entails self-criticism and submitting to the criticism*

⁶ Jason E. Smith, "From Établissement to Lip: On the Turns Taken by French Maoism," *Viewpoint Magazine*, September 25, 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240325132138/https://viewpointmag.com/2013/09/25/from-etablissement-t-o-lip-on-the-turns-taken-by-french-maoism/>, .

⁷ Meaning the people engaged in *Établissement*

of the masses... In short, the thought of Mao Zedong, which has been spread once again, and been understood in a much more profound way, by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.”⁸

Why Maoism?

As the two previous examples have shown, the question of the role of intellectuals has plagued socialist movements ever since they emerged in the nineteenth century. However, there are a few factors that make Maoism the ideal communist tendency for studying this question and the range of possible answers to it. The first factor is that Maoism emerged as a distinct movement in conjunction with the enormous growth in the number of students worldwide. These students increasingly became involved in radical politics, and consequently questions around the role of students and intellectuals within the radical movement gained renewed interest.

The second factor is Maoist China's unique approach to the role of intellectuals within the revolutionary movement and their role in socialist construction. Mao put great emphasis on the need to 'remold' intellectuals to serve China's workers and peasants. Mao expressed his ideas on this question most succinctly in his speech to the Communist Party of China's (CCP) national conference on propaganda work in 1957. In this speech Mao claims that the principal task of Chinese intellectuals is to serve the workers and peasants. He noted that while most Chinese intellectuals supported the socialist system, their attitudes were still shaped by their pre-revolutionary bourgeois education.

Mao's solution to this question was to make intellectuals learn from the people, stating: *“Since they are to serve the masses of workers and peasants, intellectuals must, first and foremost, know them and be familiar with their life, work and ideas. We encourage intellectuals to go among the masses, to go to factories and villages. It is very bad if you never in all your life meet a worker or a peasant. Our state personnel, writers, artists, teachers and scientific*

⁸ UJCml, “On Établissement (1968),” *Viewpoint Magazine*, September 25, 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240325132529/https://viewpointmag.com/2013/09/25/on-etablissement-1968/>

*research workers should seize every opportunity to get close to the workers and peasants. Some can go to factories or villages just to look around; this may be called "looking at the flowers on horseback" and is better than doing nothing at all. Others can stay for a few months, conducting investigations and making friends; this may be called "dismounting to look at the flowers". Still others can stay and live there for a considerable time, say, two or three years or even longer; this may be called 'settling down' [French: s'établir].*⁹

The third and final factor is the internationalization of Maoism. While this speech was originally intended for a Chinese audience, Mao's conception of class struggle and the role of intellectuals within the communist movement was exported far beyond China. Following the Sino-Soviet split, China began to promote itself as the leader of the international communist movement. As a result, nearly every country had pro-Chinese Communist groups by the late 1960s. The attempted implementation of these ideas in parts of the world that differed radically from China allows us to engage with the question of intellectuals within the socialist movement - and Mao's response to it - in a more sustained and informed way.

In this thesis I want to show how *établissement* and the ideological motivations that underpinned it affected the broader political praxis of Maoist groups. I will use the question of *établissement* within the Dutch Maoist movement as my primary case study. I chose this specific movement as my case study for various reasons. The primary reason is that the Maoist movement in the Netherlands experienced a major organizational split over the question of membership criteria for intellectuals in the party. The two parties that formed in the aftermath of the split took different approaches to this question, and their disparate developments allow me to accurately ascertain the impact of these ideological differences on their later political praxis. The final reason is simply practical, I live in the Netherlands and as such Dutch sources are most accessible to me.

⁹ Mao Zedong, *Five Essays on Philosophy* (Paris: Foreign Languages Press, 2021), 168.

This thesis will contain three chapters. In the first chapter I will attempt to explain the conflict over the original anti-revisionist trend within Dutch Communism, and the effects that their expulsion from the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) had on the ideology of the new Maoist groups that emerged from it. This will involve attempting to document the tensions within the Communist Party of the Netherlands that ultimately led to the expulsion of pro-Chinese communists from the Party and the formation of new organizations. These tensions were intimately bound up with the international Communist movement and the widening differences within it following Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956. The text will show a range of international influences on the development of Dutch Maoism, including the Chinese Communist Party and its adversaries the American and Dutch intelligence services.

Chapter two will detail how the influx of a large number of students into pro-Chinese communist groups forced these groups to confront the question of the role of intellectuals within the movement. I will show differing interpretations of Marxist-Leninist doctrine and their assessment of the political situation caused divisions around the membership criteria, particularly those of non-worker intellectuals. I will show how these different approaches were influenced by international developments in the communist movement, and how these differences went on to influence their political practice.

Chapter three will analyze the effects of the ideological split on the political praxis¹⁰ of two Dutch Maoist organizations, the Socialist Party (SP) and Kommunistiese Eenheidsbeweging Nederland (marxisties-leninisties) (KEN(ml)). It will show how the differing interpretations of the mass line and the role of intellectuals in formulating said line went on to shape the practical activities of Maoists activists for years, until the Dutch Maoist movement went into decline in the aftermath of Mao Zedong's death.

In order to write this thesis I will rely on a wide variety of sources, from interviews with eye-witnesses and participants, primary documents from governments and political

¹⁰ Praxis being the conscious application of a political theory to practical political activity

organizations and individuals, as well as a large number of secondary sources. The scholarly literature used in this thesis can be divided into a number of different historiographical trends. And this thesis is intended as an intervention within these historiographies. The first historiographical trend is *Global Maoism*, itself part of the wider global turn within the history profession. This trend emerged only recently and differs from previous scholarship in that, whereas Mao-era China had previously often been treated as an eccentric sideshow, the new scholarship has recognized Maoist China's importance to global politics on its own terms. There are several books on Maoism written from a global perspective. Robert J. Alexander has written two books on Maoism outside China, *International Maoism in the Developing World*¹¹ and *Maoism in the Developed World*¹² which gives an encyclopedic overview of Maoist organizations in their respective countries, with entries usually a few pages long. Alexander's books remain useful as reference guides, but preclude more in-depth analysis. An influential work in the field which does provide such in-depth analysis is *Maoism: A Global History* by Julia Lovell, a specialist in Chinese history. The book makes for a highly-readable overview of Maoism's international diffusion and the reasons for it.¹³ However, the book has several flaws which are representative of broader tendencies in the writing on the Maoist movement in Western Europe.

Lovell's narrative routinely emphasizes the role of violence as key to understanding Maoism. While the issue of armed struggle and violent revolution was one of the main catalysts of the Sino-Soviet split, it is by no means the factor that distinguished Maoism from other movements. Violence is inherent to the exercise of political power, and no political systems have been more violent than capitalism and imperialism, Maoism's main antagonists. Additionally, most of the Western Maoist groups only engaged in non-violent organizing in preparation for revolution. They denounced organizations like the West-German Red Army Faction for its supposed adventurist actions detached from mass politics.

¹¹ Robert J. Alexander, *International Maoism in the Developing World* (New York: Praeger, 1999).

¹² Robert J. Alexander, *Maoism in the Developed World* (New York: Praeger, 2001).

¹³ Julia Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History* (London, Penguin Random House, 2019)

Related to the emphasis on violence is the persistent use of religious language to describe Maoist ideology. Lovell uses terms like ‘rural religion’ and ‘worshipful Western Maoists’. In a similar vein, Lovell begins her chapter on Western Maoism with an anecdote about a miniscule abusive cult run by Aravindan Balakrishnan.¹⁴ While there are cases where this language is justified, I argue that this approach obscures more than it reveals. The religious and cult-like comparisons serve to wave away a variety of Maoist-inspired politics as irrational and dogmatic. This characterization does not help one understand the reason an action was taken by a group. It also encourages scholars to not engage with the actual beliefs of Maoist movements, and leads them to fall back on tired anti-communist clichés that have since gone out of fashion in other academic fields.

The second historiographical trend is the literature on *établissement*. The most important book on *établissement* is Marnix Dressen’s *De l’ampli à l’établi* which covers the entire history of the phenomenon in France, covering a wide variety of individuals, organizations and localities.¹⁵ The research takes the individual as its primary subject of investigation covering their family backgrounds, personal reasons for entering factories and their experiences in those factories. Dressen has also authored a case-study on *établissement* which takes an appliance factory in Lyon as its principal subject of investigation, and follows the evolution of the *établissement* movement through that lens.¹⁶ While Dressen’s work is very valuable, I want to place less emphasis on the individual experience, and more on the collective efforts of parties and the ideological justifications for these efforts.

The third historiographic trend I will intervene in is the literature on Dutch Maoism. This literature can itself be subdivided into several categories. The main academic studies of Dutch

¹⁴ Lovell, *Maoism*, 266

¹⁵ Marnix Dressen, *De l’amphi à l’établi: Les étudiants maoïstes à l’usine (1967-1989)*, (Paris, Éditions Belin, 1999)

¹⁶ Marnix Dressen, *Les établis, la chaîne et le syndicat: Évolution des pratiques, mythes et croyances d’une population d’établis maoïstes 1968-1982 Monographie d’une usine Lyonnaise* (Paris, Editions L’Harmattan, 2000)

Maoism remain Gerrit Voerman's *De Rode Jehova's* and *Mao in de Polder* by Wouter Beekers. Both of these works study Dutch Maoism at the national or macro-level. *De Rode Jehova's* is the earliest academic article on the SP, and was written before that party's formal abandonment of Marxism-Leninism and entry into parliamentary politics. In Voerman's narrative ideology and political programs take center stage. Voerman considers them the leading cause of the splits in the Maoist movement, as well as the reason for the early successes of the SP. Voerman's article is right to place great emphasis on ideology but it is not without problems. When it comes to describing the implementation of a group's political line, Voerman's scholarship falls short. For instance, Voerman claims that *établis* acted out of a sense of guilt and asserts that most came from upper class backgrounds without reference to any empirical source.¹⁷ Though no equivalent study on the Netherlands exists, Dressen's study of French *établissement* shows that the family backgrounds of French *établis* were fairly representative of French society in general.¹⁸

Wouter Beekers' *Mao in de Polder* takes a significantly different approach from Voerman because of the great emphasis it places on the experiences of individual Maoists, making use of a large number of interviews with former Maoists. Beekers seeks to explain the rise and decline of Dutch Maoism using a historical-sociological approach, basing much of his methodology on the literature on sects. While there is some merit to this sectarian method, especially for the smaller and more isolated Maoist groups, it has severe limits as mentioned previously. Beekers' focus on the individual does however give new insights into the inner workings of Maoist groups that Voerman's more top down approach does not.

Aside from these national studies, there are two important local studies on the SP, focusing on Oss and Leiden respectively. *In Leiden moet het anders* by Bart van der Steen covers the first dozen years of the Leiden branch of the SP. Van der Steen criticizes Voerman's

¹⁷ The only source used by Voerman is the novel *De Witte Prins* by Koos van Zomeren.

¹⁸ Dressen, *De l'amphi*, 28-9

choice to focus on the national-level party organization, which he argues places undue emphasis on the party's ideology and neglects the interplay between the SP national politics and its implementation on a local level, as well as the experiences of individual SP members.¹⁹ Instead, Van der Steen argues that the organizational evolution of the SP can only be understood when bridging the gap between national and local politics and analyzing the ways in which both influenced one another.²⁰

Kees Slager's study on the SP in the factory town of Oss is perhaps one of the best known works on Dutch Maoism. Slager puts great focus on the ideological aspects of the SP, but in a way which would make the ideology more palatable to the general public. The SP's Maoism is reduced to a sort of populist activism in which the issues of workers in Oss are taken up by SP members who then challenge the authorities to address these concerns. There is an emphasis on continuity between the early SP and the party that would enter the Dutch Parliament decades later. Nonetheless Slager's book is an invaluable source on *établissement*, given that Oss was the center of the SP's *établissement* politics.²¹

Aside from secondary literature this study has made extensive use of primary archival sources. The archive I used most extensively was the archive of KEN(ml) at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. This archive is composed of several kinds of documents, including pamphlets, discussion guidelines, notes and minutes of meetings. These sources gave me the ability to examine both the internal and external developments in the party. Archival sources for the SP were more difficult to acquire, since the official SP archive is not accessible to the public. Instead I had to rely on a more limited number of archives, including the private archive of Gerard Harmes, and those of SP members at IISG. This relative lack of

¹⁹ Bart Van der Steen, *In Leiden Moet Het Anders: Geschiedenis van Een SP-Afdeling 1970-1982* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2019), 13.

²⁰ Van der Steen, 16.

²¹ Kees Slager, *Het Geheim van Oss: Een geschiedenis van de SP*, (Amsterdam, Uitgeverij Olympus, 2009)

archival sources makes it more difficult to explore the internal decision making process of SP. In order to bridge this gap in the sources I made use of a number of memoirs from participants.

One of the most important memoirs used in this thesis is *Maoïstische Memoires* by Hans Schoots. His memoirs give valuable insight into the inner workings of KEN(ml), of which Hans Schoots was a member for nearly a decade, occupying various positions of importance within the organization. His narrative is a combination of a chronological telling of events and Schoots' reflections on his social milieu and political developments, which have been useful analytically. In terms of SP, I have made use of the book *Die Stad, Dat Jaar* by Koos van Zomeren. Van Zomeren was a member of the SP's ruling triumvirate alongside Hans van Hoofd and Daan Monje, and as a former journalist he was responsible for the party's publications. The book focuses on the early period of SP before Van Zomeren's dramatic exit from SP.²² However, the book is novelized and makes use of pseudonyms, and has therefore only been used as background information. Additionally I've made use of *Kind van Maria en Mao* by Jos Palm. This memoir deals with Palm's conservative Catholic upbringing and how that influenced his decision to join and eventually leave SP. Palm was a party secretary in small towns like Doetinchem, which gave valuable insight into the functioning of SP's lesser known branches.²³

Chapter 1

Secretary-General of the Soviet Communist Party Nikita Khrushchev's speech entitled *On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences* at the 20th Soviet Party Congress in 1956 was one of the most impactful speeches in the history of the International Communist Movement. In denouncing the crimes of Josef Stalin he shook the foundations of the beliefs of millions of Communists around the world, who had held Stalin in high regard for years. The speech and its

²² Koos Van Zomeren, *Die Stad, Dat Jaar* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 2009).

²³ Jos Palm, *Kind van Maria En Mao: Het Verhaal van Een Generatie* (Amsterdam: Atlas Contact, 2023).

aftermath would divide the international communist movement for decades to come. The speech was so controversial among Dutch communists that when the US State Department first leaked the 'secret' portion of Khrushchev's speech, the CPN denounced the text as a forgery.²⁴ Only when it was proven that the text was genuine did the CPN begin to process what had occurred. Despite the grave misgivings that CPN leader Paul de Groot had about the speech, the CPN nonetheless stated that there was "*unanimity between the CPN and CPSU concerning the judgment of the questions surrounding the policies of J.W. Stalin.*"²⁵ The main priority for the CPN remained preserving the unity of the socialist camp.

From 1960 onwards China and the USSR began to criticize one another publicly, though still only implicitly. China began its open polemic against the Soviet Union when the journal *Hongqi* (Red Flag) published *Long Live Leninism* on the 40th anniversary of Lenin's birth. The article is dedicated to re-affirming the Leninist positions of imperialism, class struggle and proletarian revolution. The Chinese party insisted on the inevitability of imperialist war and the necessity of overthrowing the imperialist system through proletarian and third world nationalist revolution. Those marxists who argued that developments such as the atomic bomb had rendered these theses obsolete were not in fact marxists at all according to the CCP, but modern revisionists. Thus by 1960 the international communist movement was ideologically divided, but it had not yet split politically, as both countries tried to pursue detente for the sake of unity.²⁶

In spite of the growing signs of division within the socialist camp, the Dutch Communist Party and its organs continued to celebrate the supposed unity of international communism. The growing rift between China and the USSR was widely reported and speculated on in the Western press. Yet, CPN organs vigorously denied rumors of a split. Paul de Groot was

²⁴ Arthur Stam, *De CPN En Haar Buitenlandse Kameraden: Proletarisch Internationalisme in Nederland* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2004), 39.

²⁵ Stam, 61.

²⁶ Zhihua Shen, *A Short History of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1917-1991* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) 223–24.

sympathetic to the Chinese position and personally disliked Khrushchev, but the overall priority of the Party leadership remained preserving the unity of the socialist camp. As such, the CPN theoretical organ refused to publish any anti-Chinese polemics and coverage in *De Waarheid* tried to avoid addressing the split.²⁷

The Sino-Indian border dispute and the perceived capitulation of Khrushchev in the Cuban Missile Crisis strengthened Mao's perception of the CPSU as revisionist. By 1963 the differences between the two parties had become so large that avoiding a total split between China and the USSR was all but impossible. In light of these developments, the CCP began to reach out to 'leftist' or pro-Chinese groups within Communist parties worldwide.²⁸ Following Mao's views, the CCP began to position itself as the leader of the international communist movement, despite the fact that most of the world's Communist parties supported the Soviet position. The CCP could count only a handful of Communist parties among its allies but only one of these - the Party of Labor of Albania - held state power. Yet Mao remained confident in the popularity of the Chinese line.

In the face of growing public evidence of conflict between China and the USSR, the CPN began to inform its members of the split in 1963. The newspaper *De Waarheid* and the CPN theoretical organ *Politiek & Cultuur* began publishing both the Chinese and Soviet polemics, while not editorializing in favor of one party or the other. Given that CPN had downplayed the existence of the growing rift for years, it is unsurprising that a large number of CPN members were taken aback by the sudden news of the split and shocked by the vitriolic nature of the polemics.²⁹ In line with its emphasis on Communist unity, the CPN's response was to declare

²⁷ Stam, *Buitenlandse Kameraden*, 197.

²⁸ Li Danhui and Xia Yafeng, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1959-1973: A New History*. (London: Lexington Books, 2018) 74.

²⁹ Stam, *Buitenlandse Kameraden*, 181–82.

itself independent of either the Chinese or the Soviet camp, which had the additional effect of isolating the party internationally.

This declaration of political independence signaled to those CPN members who sympathized with the Chinese line that their party was increasingly inclined towards revisionism. Given that the formation of 'factions' is considered a great violation of Leninist party discipline, most CPN members who were inclined to support the Chinese and Albanian positions were initially organized on an individual basis. One of the first CPN members to do so was Chris Bisschot. He was expelled from the party in 1963 after he requested literature from the Chinese embassy and began handing it out to other party members around Amsterdam.³⁰ Foreign contacts were also involved in spreading anti-revisionist ideas among Dutch communists. The most prominent was Jacques Grippa. He was a leading figure in the Belgian Communist Party and a recognized hero of the anti-fascist resistance during the second world war. Following his expulsion from the Belgian Communist Party in 1962, he formed one of the first Maoist groups in Europe. It seems that he was tasked by the Chinese to propagate their line among European Communists. CPN district secretary Nico Schrevel was one of those Communists who came into contact with Grippa. Schrevel seems to have visited Grippa and his party in 1962 or 1963 in order to acquire Dutch-language Chinese propaganda materials, which he subsequently spread among his fellow Communists in Rotterdam. This earned him an expulsion from the CPN. Schrevel did not give up his political ambitions after his expulsion. He began organizing informal reading groups in Rotterdam and with the help of Grippa organized a trip to Albania in 1963.³¹

Towards the end of 1963 a number of informal groups with publications emerged which attempted to sway CPN members away from the perceived revisionist line of the CPN. The two most prominent of these publications were *De Rode Vlag* based out of Amsterdam and

³⁰ BVD Maandrapport May 1964 <https://stichtingargus.nl/bvd/1964-05.pdf>

³¹ BVD Maandrapport July/August 1964; <https://www.stichtingargus.nl/bvd/1964-07.pdf>

Spartacus (renamed *Rode Tribune* in 1965) based in Rotterdam. *Rode Tribune* was founded by Nico Schrevel, a former CPN district secretary in Rotterdam, while *De Rode Vlag* was founded by Chris Bisschot, who was also a former CPN district secretary.³²

At first glance, these two publications shared a number of basic assumptions and positions, such as support for the CCP's line and their characterization of the CPN as revisionist. The Dutch maoists accused the CPN leadership of wanting to turn the party into an ally of the social-democratic PvdA and of liquidating the party's work in factories and working class neighborhoods.³³ Leaving these similarities aside, upon closer reading one finds substantial differences in choice of topics, language and the general appearance of the papers.

The most immediately notable difference is the authorship of the papers. In the case of the *Spartacus* the publishers are identified as the *Marxistisch Leninistisch Centrum* (MLC) in Rotterdam, while in the case of *De Rode Vlag* they only identifying themselves as 'a group of marxist-leninists in and around the Communist Party of the Netherlands.' One was thus the organ of an organization independent of the CPN, while *De Rode Vlag* was supposedly published by a number of dissenting pro-Chinese CPN members.

This difference was the principal reason for the lack of cooperation between the two groups. Initially it seems that both groups were encouraged by the seemingly growing resistance to the CPN's general line. The fourth edition of *Rode Vlag* enthusiastically reported on the alleged cooperation between anti-revisionist groups in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. The authors promised a new jointly-edited publication which was to help them combat the revisionist politics of the CPN leadership. The anti-revisionists could count on a substantial number of CPN members, if not the majority, according to the *Rode Vlag* editors.³⁴

³² BVD Maandrapport July/August 1964; <https://www.stichtingargus.nl/bvd/1964-07.pdf>

³³ BVD Maandrapport July/August 1964; <https://www.stichtingargus.nl/bvd/1964-07.pdf>

³⁴ Groep Marxisten-Leninisten in en om de C.P. Nederland, "De Stroom Rijst al Meer En Meer," *De Rode Vlag*, July 1964.

This optimism was not shared by Schrevel and his comrades at the MLC. There seems to have been a meeting between the MLC and the *Rode Vlag* editors in the middle of 1964, which left the MLC deeply unimpressed with their comrades from Amsterdam. The *Rode Vlag* group is charged in *Spartacus* with being in close contact with the revisionist *De Brug* group, noting that their publication was printed by the same company as *De Brug*. The principal critique of *Rode Vlag* was its lack of contact with ‘the masses’, the editors were but a small group of men who carried out their activities among CPN members on an individual basis. This attitude, argued *Spartacus*, stemmed from an unwillingness to break with the revisionist CPN, which forced the *Rode Vlag* supporters to carry out revisionist policies that they themselves opposed.³⁵ The group around *De Rode Vlag* remained convinced that the CPN could be turned away from revisionism until 1969, when it formed the *Bond van Nederlandse Marxisten-Leninisten* (BNML).³⁶

While genuine political differences and personal enmity may help to explain the lack of unity and cooperation between these ostensibly similar groups, there is another factor that cannot go unmentioned in this context. The BVD had been monitoring the aforementioned developments from the beginning. In response, they began Operation Mongool with the aim of exacerbating the tensions between China and the USSR, as well as their supporters inside the CPN. The operation entailed creating a fake pro-Chinese group within the CPN. This sounds eerily similar to an FBI program aimed at the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA).³⁷ Given the overwhelming American influence over the Dutch intelligence services it is possible the FBI program served as an inspiration for Operation Mongool, though specific documentation is unavailable.³⁸ The BVD began its operation by using its pre-existing agents inside the CPN to

³⁵ Marxistisch-Leninistisch Centrum, “‘De Rode Vlag’: Fataal Abuis,” *Spartacus*, December 1964.

³⁶ Wouter Beekers, *Mao in de polder: Een historisch-sociologische benadering van het Nederlandse maoïsme 1964-1978* (Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2005), 22.

³⁷ Aaron Leonard and Conor Gallagher, *A Threat of the First Magnitude: FBI Counterintelligence & Infiltration from the Communist Party to the Revolutionary Union 1962-1974* (Washington: Repeater Books, 2018), 45.

³⁸ Tom-Jan Meeus, “Kameraden Onder Elkaar,” *NRC Handelsblad*, February 20, 1999.

contact the Chinese embassy and circulate a fake opposition letter. BVD agent Peter Boevé was the main contact between the Chinese embassy and the supposed Maoist opposition inside the CPN. There he continually overstated the influence of his opposition group, which did not exist in reality. The Chinese insisted that the Boevé's Kameraden group merge with the other Maoist groups, with which the Chinese already had contact, unbeknownst to the BVD. This suggestion to merge was opposed by the BVD who feared that their fake opposition group would be exposed. Chris Bisschot was also suspicious of the Kameraden group.³⁹ Peter Boevé did manage to infiltrate MLCN, but the underground nature of the BVD-led group caused a great deal of suspicion among MLCN members. Boevé's precise role in the organization remains unclear, until he left the group in 1969 to form the BVD-run *Marxisties-Leninistische Partij van Nederland* (MLPN).⁴⁰

Chapter 2

The year 1970 saw major events within the Dutch Maoist movement that reignited the question of what role students ought to play within the movement. In January of 1970, the MLCN believed itself to have developed to such an extent that it called its second congress in which the MLCN renamed itself the *Kommunistiese Eenheidsbeweging Nederland-(marxisties-leninisties)* (KEN(ml)). This name change was not just merely aesthetic, it reflected the way the group's members saw their organization's political development. The change in name was prompted by the Chinese insistence on unity among the splintered Dutch Maoists. Although the group's name paid lip service to this desire for unity, in practice KEN(ml) did little to advance it.⁴¹ The change from the term 'center' to 'movement' was supposed to signify the organization's development: "*Since our movement is no longer a freewheeling center,*

³⁹ Dick Engelen, *Frontdienst: De BVD En de Koude Oorlog* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2007), 95.

⁴⁰ Engelen, *Frontdienst*, 95–97.

⁴¹ Meeus, *Kameraden Onder Elkaar*

but a close-knit democratic-centralist organization".⁴² The organization's declaration of principles stated that the main short term aim of KEN(ml) was the formation of a revolutionary vanguard party although the members of KEN(ml) felt that their organization was not yet large enough to call itself a Communist party. It considered the mass line the principal means by which a new Communist party ought to be built, mainly in areas that they considered to be the most direct confrontation between labor and capital; in the workplace and the struggle over housing.⁴³ The mass line was an innovative concept conceived by Mao as a way of formulating CCP policies, by consulting the masses, interpreting their will, and implementing policies in their interest.⁴⁴

The KEN(ml) was in many ways the continuation of the MLCN, in practice most of the day-to-day activities remained the same. However, just as its attempt to unite with other maoists was initiated by Chinese pressure, the international situation also changed KEN(ml)'s program. KEN(ml)'s international orientation was strongly anchored in the Chinese Communist Party's positions. Following the Chinese party's line, the KEN(ml)'s analysis of the world situation reinforced its confidence in its own development as an organization. It considered the era to be a time of revolution and the eventual defeat of imperialism. In its analysis of the world situation, KEN(ml) defined both the US and the USSR as the main imperialist powers, which quarreled amongst each other for spheres of influence, but were ultimately united in their opposition to nations resisting imperialism. This characterization of the Soviet Union as imperialist - as opposed to merely revisionist - derived from China's own growing hostilities with the USSR. The KEN(ml) considered this fight against US and Soviet imperialism to be the main content of the current world revolution. Following this analysis the KEN(ml) defined the CPN alongside the

⁴² Linda Toorneman, "De Kommunistische Eenheidsbeweging Nederland (Marxistisch-Leninistisch) 1970-1985: Een reconstructie, analyse en plaatsing in de tijd" (Utrecht, Universiteit Utrecht, 2000), 33.

⁴³ "Beginselverklaring KEN(ml)," 1970.

⁴⁴ Christian Sorace, Ivan Franceschini, and Nicholas Loubere, eds., *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2018), 121.

other (center-)left parties as reformist and revisionist incapable of leading a socialist revolution. The KEN(ml) thus considered it necessary to form a new revolutionary vanguard party.⁴⁵

In line with this preoccupation with intellectuals and students, the second congress created the Marxisties-Leninistiese Jeugd (MLJ) and Marxisties-Leninistiese Studentenbond (MLS) as mass organizations for youth and students respectively. The aim of these organizations was to engage students in the KEN(ml)'s political campaigns in workplaces and working class neighborhoods. This aim stands in stark contrast with much of the student activism in the previous years - such as the occupation of Tilburg University and the University of Amsterdam - which organized students on the basis of being students and addressed grievances unique to students alone. The MLS formulated key differences between itself and the aforementioned student activism in the first edition of its magazine *Dien Het Volk* in an article called *Studenten moeten leren van Arbeiders*.⁴⁶ This article attempts to explain the MLS' activism by critiquing the Dutch higher education system and the class mentality that it produced. It describes university courses as highly theoretical, abstract and cut off from any practical application. The supposed emphasis on rote-learning was meant to inculcate obedience amongst the students, so that they could better serve their future employers and lord over the 'ordinary working folk' below them. In the view of MLS, this education was cut off from the lived realities of working class people and encouraged the students to focus solely on their future bourgeois career prospects. If students were aware of working class grievances, so argued *Dien Het Volk*, many of them would take the side of the workers and not the bourgeoisie.

Early on in the MLS' history the KEN(ml) leadership began encouraging student members to give up their privileged position as students and join the labor force.⁴⁷ The practice of students taking on factory jobs was thus posed as a solution to the problem of the overwhelmingly bourgeois nature of higher education. Students could learn about the daily

⁴⁵ "Beginselverklaring KEN(ml)." 1970

⁴⁶ "Studenten Moeten Leren van Arbeiders," *Dien Het Volk*, 1970.

⁴⁷ Voerman, *De Rode Jehova's*, 130.

struggles of workers and their desire for a better world, and in doing so would learn to give up their old attitude and develop into “*good communists with an unbreakable proletarian class point of view.*”⁴⁸ Using what they had learned from their experience as well as their ideological training from KEN(ml), the students-turned-workers would then help create organizations that would fight for their interests. *établissement* thus had a dual but seemingly contradictory purpose. One purpose was remolding the student radicals - who were seen as inescapably non-revolutionary in attitude - through contact with the working class. Yet the second purpose of sending students to the factories was to radicalize workers, whose main trade unions and political parties were deemed reformist and revisionist.

The contradictory nature of the factory turn was the catalyst for the growing rift within the KEN(ml) leadership. Only a few months after the second congress and the foundation of the MLS and MLJ the national leadership began quarreling amongst themselves over the questions of implementation of democratic-centralism, epistemology and the supposed economism of the organization’s political praxis. The precise dates and contents of these disagreements are difficult to ascertain, because they were kept entirely within the KEN(ml) politburo called *Landelijk Komitee* (LK) and were mostly done orally, with little documentary record of them available. This meant that the local branches had little to no insight into the growing rift within the leadership. These local branches also had little opportunity to discuss the organization’s decisions amongst themselves, as a result there was a growing gap between the way the directives from the LK were interpreted and carried out.

Members of KEN(ml) only became aware of the rift after a meeting of local branch secretaries and the national leadership on May 23rd. In this meeting the Tilburg MLS secretary Kees de Boer was criticized and the KEN(ml) branch in Tilburg was singled out for supposed faction-formation. After a response from the Tilburg branch it was decided that the entire national leadership would visit the Tilburg branch to discuss their differences. Only there did it

⁴⁸ Voerman, *De Rode Jehova's*, 130.

become apparent to ordinary members that the national leadership had essentially split into two camps, the LK majority and the LK minority. At the meeting of local branches (LSV) that same day it was decided that the nature of the split should be debated by the membership and in order to facilitate this LK member Hans van Hoofd and Nick Schrevel would write position papers for the LK majority and minority respectively.⁴⁹

The manner in which the debate was subsequently organized and carried out would have a profound impact on the split in KEN(ml). The initial meetings in Tilburg were characterized by a hostile atmosphere both towards the Tilburg branch and within the LK itself. In the midst of this mutual hostility the LK majority attempted to renege on its promises of an open debate. The LK majority refused to distribute the position papers to members for a full month, arguing that it needed more time to flesh out its positions and debunk those of Schrevel. The LK majority also limited visits by Schrevel and Van Hoofd to local branches and rebuked local branches that called for a more thorough debate. In the end the LK majority would limit the debate to the two position papers, as well as a summary of the positions of local branches compiled by the LK majority.

The position papers are by far the most informative sources on the growing rift within the LK. The papers give detailed insight into the real contents of the debate, as well as the conduct of the participants during those debates. Schrevel's aforementioned paper '*On our differences of opinion*' was the first paper, written only a few days after the row in Tilburg. It formed the basis of the subsequent discussion and addressed what he regarded as the main flaws in KEN(ml)'s conduct and detailed the theoretical commitments from which these mistakes originated.

Schrevel begins his paper with listing all of the parts of the questions which were in dispute, such as the KEN(ml)'s position on study and investigation, the group's strategy and tactics, the class position of intellectuals and their role in the organization, and conflicting

⁴⁹ Kommunisten Kring Rijnmond (M.L.), "Het Ontstaan van de Kommunisten Kring Rijnmond (M.L.)," 1973, 5.

interpretations of the principle of democratic-centralism. Before addressing any of these questions in depth, Schrevel argues that all these flawed questions share a common denominator, namely the growing subjectivism of the LK majority. In the marxist sense, subjectivism means an excessive focus on the ability of an individual or organization to change circumstances, disregarding objective factors outside of the subject. Schrevel identifies three forms of subjectivism within KEN(ml): practiciness, empiricism and apriorism. Schrevel defines practiciness as: “[a] growing tendency within the movement to replace political discussions with discussions on the purely practical work of the movement. It is complete dedication to practical work and contempt for theory.”⁵⁰ Related to this was empiricism, which Schrevel described as the notion that revolutionary theory can be developed from direct experience, without the interplay of further research or studying. Finally apriorism is used by Schrevel to describe the practice of assuming one has the correct political position, merely shouting slogans and criticizing without prior investigation or experience.⁵¹

Schrevel then goes on to describe the arguments of his opponents in the LK majority. They argued that subjectivism was not present in the organization and that combatting this supposed subjectivism would lead to organizational opportunism. However, he was quick to dismiss the accusation leveled at him by his opponents, arguing that organizational discipline was in fact too strict and that it made members overly reliant on guidance from the LK.⁵²

Schrevel then returns to the main points of discussion. He begins the section on investigation and study with ample quotes from Mao and Stalin in order to emphasize the need for marxist theory as a prerequisite for successful political action. Schrevel describes how this lack of investigation manifested itself in the KEN(ml)’s political praxis. Activists would engage in tenant or union organizing without investigating the specific circumstances of a particular workplace or neighborhood, such as the ownership structure, the prior degree of organization or

⁵⁰ Nico Schrevel, “Over Onze Meningsverschillen,” 1971, 1.

⁵¹ Schrevel, *Onze Meningsverschillen*, 1.

⁵² Schrevel, *Onze Meningsverschillen*, 1–2.

its position within the larger economic sector. They were usually satisfied with information provided by workers the KEN(ml) was already in contact with, for which Schrevel criticized them as not properly applying Mao's method of the mass line. The mass line called for gathering the scattered ideas of the masses - not just a select few workers, Schrevel says - and concretizing those ideas into political action, which Schrevel claimed was lacking due to inadequate investigation.⁵³

The section on the organization's strategy and tactics begins with Schrevel criticizing KEN(ml)'s economism, meaning the excessive focus on the immediate economic struggles of workers while ignoring the political question of revolution. Citing extensively from Vladimir Lenin's *What is to be done?* Schrevel argues that the task of the vanguard party isn't merely supporting the economic struggles of workers like KEN(ml)'s mass organizations, but exposing the inherent faults of the capitalist system and educating workers on the necessity of its overthrow. Exposing the capitalist system required investigation and working among all classes in society, argued Schrevel. Not doing so meant ceding several political questions to the bourgeoisie and giving up the KEN(ml)'s aim of becoming the vanguard party.⁵⁴

Schrevel's opponents on the LK argued that the opposite was the case. They believed that the growing number of intellectuals in the KEN(ml) was degrading the organization's proletarian character. The solution to this problem was proletarianizing the membership of KEN(ml) by convincing them to get factory jobs. Schrevel found this argument unconvincing, he argued that all KEN(ml) members regardless of their social background engaged in mass work and were thus familiar with the circumstances of the workers. Schrevel agreed with encouraging activists to take up factory jobs in principle, but was keen to distinguish between those who entered factories with the aim of reforming themselves by ridding themselves of their petit-bourgeois attitudes and those who entered the factory following directives from KEN(ml)

⁵³ Schrevel, *Onze Meningsverschillen*, 4.

⁵⁴ Schrevel, *Onze Meningsverschillen*, 6.

plans. The purpose of the factory policy was to grow the KEN(ml)'s influence in strategic industries such as metallurgy and not reforming the individual personality. *"We are a revolutionary organization with a scientific method, not a psychological institute with some sort of work-therapy."* argued Schrevel.⁵⁵

The paper ends with a short discussion of KEN(ml)'s approach to democratic centralism. Schrevel rejects his opponents' argument that the primary problem at hand is the membership's lack of discipline, instead arguing that many members were all too willing to submit to the LK guidance without any initiative of their own. This lack of initiative manifested itself in various ways: a lack of political debate within KEN(ml), a low level of ideological education among members and a lack of research and investigation across all levels of the organization. Schrevel found his opponents' argument for renewed organizational discipline unconvincing, given that it did not address the underlying issues causing the lack of initiative. He argued that a major discussion by all KEN(ml) branches of the most important questions facing the KEN(ml) would help reinvigorate the organization by raising the ideological level and the enthusiasm of its members.⁵⁶

The response to Schrevel's paper came from the LK majority mostly based in the Nijmegen branch, much later than it was supposed to be published. It differs from Schrevel's paper in the content of its arguments, as well as in its tone and vocabulary. Its title *"De dringendste opgaven van dit moment"* (The most urgent tasks of this moment) indicates the priorities of its authors; they sought to emphasize their prioritization of the working class. Its starting section on the KEN(ml)'s tactics begins: *"It has been one and a half years since KEN(ml) decided to go to the workers. In doing so we decided to unite socialism with the workers' movement [...] By going to the workers we lay the basis for a revolutionary party which leans on the workers' movement. Do we have a foothold in the working class already? No we do*

⁵⁵ Schrevel, *Onze Meningsverschillen*, 10.

⁵⁶ Schrevel, *Onze Meningsverschillen*, 12.

not. Then in the current situation or in this stage of the movement it is still our most important and urgent task to gain a foothold in the working class."⁵⁷ The authors, like Schrevel, go on to quote from Lenin's *What is to be done?* in order to argue that KEN(ml) had not yet reached sufficient size or influence to start organizing groups other than workers. Doing so would only sow confusion, they claimed.

The next section on theory attempts to explain the position of the LK majority as well as the origins of Schrevel's supposed mistakes. The authors do not ascribe these theoretical mistakes merely to a flawed interpretation of Marxism-Leninism as Schrevel does, instead they accuse Schrevel of rejecting dialectical materialism and its theory of knowledge in its entirety. They claim that Schrevel created his own theory of knowledge and describe it as a "*witty attempt to smuggle idealism into Marxism.*"⁵⁸ Consciously applying the mass line through the cycle of practice-knowledge-practice required research and investigation among the masses and proper investigation could only be carried out by taking up the standpoint of the proletariat.

After having stated its own positions, the LK majority went on to critique Schrevel's paper directly, arguing that it contained numerous mistakes and distortions of Marxism-Leninism. They begin by addressing Schrevel's critique of practicism, they deny that the discussions at branch meetings were concerned only with practical matters. Furthermore they claim that discussion of practical work is - when looked at dialectically - in itself political and that Schrevel's accusations of practicism only reveal his own contempt for political praxis. The authors also take issue with Schrevel's definition of empiricism and use it to claim he invented a new theory of knowledge different from dialectical materialism. Taking Schrevel's definition of empiricism as "*the belief that theory arises directly from practical experience, without the mediation of research and study*" the authors seize on the part "with the mediation of research and study" to accuse

⁵⁷ Landelijk Komitee Meerderheid, "De Dringendste Opgaven van Dit Moment," July 25, 1971, 1.

⁵⁸ Landelijk Komitee Meerderheid, 2.

Schrevel of placing research outside of the dialectical spiral of practice-knowledge-practice, in effect placing intellectuals above the party and the working class.⁵⁹ They connect this to Schrevel's supposed one-sided focus on organizing students and intellectuals, accusing him of idealism and believing that intellectuals are the revolutionary vanguard, as opposed to the working class. Finally they go on to address Schrevel's accusation of apriorism. The authors claim that his definition of the term is incorrect, and that the phenomenon Schrevel describes is merely the result of a lack of proper knowledge of the classics of Marxism-Leninism, not a single-minded preoccupation with one's own experience and a disregard for deeper investigation. This apparent mistaken use of apriorism by Schrevel is used by the authors to impugn his character; questioning whether the mistakes on Schrevel's side were the result of ignorance or malice.⁶⁰

The final half of the LK majority's paper is dedicated to contesting Schrevel's descriptions of the faults in the daily political praxis of the organization. They begin by addressing Schrevel's contention that there is a lack of proper study and investigation within the KEN(ml). Recalling their arguments earlier in the paper, the authors argue that many branches are working very hard to implement the mass line every day, the members try hard to make concrete analyses of concrete conditions. Schrevel's claim showed that he was either ignorant of the movement's political praxis or actively trying to steer them away from the right path. When it became clear from political praxis that there was the need for more study and investigation of a particular question, the authors argued that this need could only be satisfied by studying the classics of Marxism-Leninism, which was done extensively within the KEN(ml).

Secondly they argue against Schrevel's claim there is not a one-sided insistence on working among intellectuals. The LK-majority repeats its contention that Schrevel considered

⁵⁹ Landelijk Komitee Meerderheid, 6.

⁶⁰ Landelijk Komitee Meerderheid, 6.

intellectuals - and not the working class - were the vanguard of the revolution. In order to cement the impression of Schrevel as a condescending intellectual, the LK majority claim that Schrevel believes that there is a tendency for intellectuals to “wipe the floor for” workers within the movement, using the statement of a single MLS-secretary as evidence.⁶¹ They don’t deny the allegation, but instead quote from Mao’s *Serve the People* in order to argue that this was the proper communist attitude towards intellectuals and workers within the movement. This contrasts strongly Schrevel’s argument, quoting Lenin, that no distinction should be made between workers and intellectuals *within* the movement. The LK majority retorted that it was Schrevel who wanted some intellectuals to be excepted from mandatory mass work in order to conduct “further research” which entailed abandoning the mass line. They go on to claim that no distinction along class lines is made within the organization aside from the different work members are engaged in, and that *“only an idiot would walk up to a random worker and change one’s actions solely according to his declarations. Aside from that, what matters is that we must be students first, before we can become teachers.”*⁶² After quoting Mao’s famous dictum that ‘the masses are the real heroes’ the authors seemingly contradict themselves. They claim that *“[it] is the workers who have participated for years in the struggle for production and in the class struggle (the source of knowledge) and not the intellectuals who have acquired most of their ‘knowledge’ between four walls, even if they have participated in mass work for half a year to a year.”*⁶³ The only difference between the two statements is that one is a ‘random’ worker, while the other has experience in production and class struggle, but the authors don’t make effort to explain the distinction in detail, nor do they make clear when an intellectual has enough experience in mass work to make his judgements valuable to the organization.

⁶¹ Landelijk Komitee Meerderheid, 9.

⁶² Landelijk Komitee Meerderheid, 10.

⁶³ Landelijk Komitee Meerderheid, 10.

They then pivot to Schrevel's remarks about the organization's work in industry concerning the supposed lack of political discussion among members working in industry. They bring up Schrevel's examples of political questions that the working groups ought to discuss - such as position of a company in the market, the management's attitude to automation as well as the position of the unions - and dismiss them as a set of random questions raised by a petit-bourgeois intellectual unfamiliar with the work of KEN(ml). The LK majority claim that these questions are irrelevant to the work of the organization, but that the mass line - and not merely gathering 'random' data - could answer these questions either way. They use similar arguments in regard to Schrevel's attitude to labor unions; they dismiss his questions as someone unfamiliar with KEN(ml) praxis. While citing Stalin's *Principles of Leninism* they argue that one doesn't need higher theoretical arguments to prove that trade unions betray their workers, and that one can only use a worker's own personal experiences to help them understand the sell-out nature of the unions.⁶⁴

The LK majority concluded that the key differences between their ideology (scientific socialism) and Schrevel's 'reactionary' ideology was their approach to the theory of knowledge. The LK majority favored relying solely on Mao Zedong's mass line, which it considered "*[an] unprecedented advance in scientific socialism.*" Schrevel by contrast supported using the mass line *alongside* research, which the LK majority denounced as idealist for supposedly suggesting that knowledge preceded practice and experience, comparing it to the theories of Liu Shiaoqi. This view is also assumed to have a class origin, as Schrevel is attacked for believing "*[that] it is not the masses, but the researchers who are the true heroes.*"⁶⁵

Having established that the mass line is the sole correct method for informing political practice, the LK majority attempts to explain the poor implementation of the mass line by

⁶⁴ Landelijk Komitee Meerderheid, 10–11.

⁶⁵ Landelijk Komitee Meerderheid, 12.

KEN(ml). They begin by pointing out that KEN(ml) is a relatively inexperienced organization compared to the CCP and that the proper implementation of the mass line could only be evaluated by KEN(ml)'s ability to mobilize the masses. Pre-maturely abandoning the mass line in favor of more research would "[be] treason to the cause of the proletariat."⁶⁶ Schrevel argued that the poor implementation of the mass line came from a lack of research and data when concretising and systematizing the views of the masses. The LK majority dismiss this and argue that the mistakes in systemizing the masses' ideas came from an unsteady class point of view. This lack of a properly proletarian point of view came from the inadequate gathering of ideas from the masses and an inability to separate bad ideas from the good, as well as a lack of knowledge of the classics of Marxism-Leninism.⁶⁷

Staying on the point of class standpoints, the LK majority argued against Schrevel's proposal to work among all classes. They believe that working among groups other than workers would degrade the organization's class character and the class standpoint of its members. Both sides saw a need for the proletarianization of the movement, but they disagreed vigorously on the ways to do this. In Schrevel's view one could proletarianize the KEN(ml) by making the most combative workers class conscious and recruiting them to the organization. The LK majority saw this as folly and believed "[that] to proletarianize the movement we need in the first place to educate KEN(ml) members into becoming good Communists, with a strong proletarian class attitude and connected tightly to the masses."⁶⁸ They reiterated that only experience in mass work among workers could show the organization when and how it could work among other classes, to discuss this earlier would mean wasting time in debates unrelated to political praxis.

⁶⁶ Landelijk Komitee Meerderheid, 12.

⁶⁷ Landelijk Komitee Meerderheid, 12.

⁶⁸ Landelijk Komitee Meerderheid, 14.

Finally, the LK majority addresses Schrevel's point of view on the position of intellectuals within the movement. LK majority argue that since a large percentage of KEN(ml) members are intellectuals, the movement is itself not a proletarian movement and therefore it is impossible for non-proletarians to educate workers. They argue that while Lenin had believed that there ought not to be any class distinctions within the revolutionary movement, that did not mean that those distinctions did not exist in reality. While Schrevel had downplayed those distinctions, the LK majority argued that Schrevel wanted a special place for intellectuals to do research within the movement, and he thus implicitly did recognize that there were class distinctions within KEN(ml). They go even further and suggest that Schrevel believes workers to be incapable of conducting such research. The LK majority reiterate their position that research and studying could only be conducted through the application of Marxism-Leninism and the mass line, and that the correct application of these required a strong proletarian class attitude, an issue which Schrevel had tried his hardest to avoid.

Key to the differences between Schrevel's and the LK majority's positions was the concept of class attitude. Schrevel had made the distinction between a KEN(ml) member working in a factory to advance the group's organizing efforts and becoming a factory worker to rid oneself of their petit-bourgeois background and attitude. The LK majority claimed that ridding members of their petit-bourgeois attitude was a fundamental part of the organization's revolutionary work. Unlike Schrevel, the LK majority put a great deal of emphasis on one's class attitude, but without giving a precise definition. They saw joining the KEN(ml) not as the conclusion to the process of becoming a Communist, instead they believed that joining was merely the first step in ridding oneself of their petit-bourgeois attitude. This change could only be proven through political praxis among the masses. To emphasize their point, the LK majority cite from Mao's *Against Book Worship* and from the Little Red Book, in which Mao calls on cadres and high-level party functionaries to be among the masses and personally engage in

production. They sum up the section on intellectuals by stating: *“If one reasons like the political secretary [Schrevel] then one can call the entire People’s Republic of China ‘a psychological institute with a kind of labor therapy.’ The slogan ‘all into the factory’ is the correct summation of the most urgent tasks facing us. It is raising our members with an unbreakable proletarian class attitude. And it is conducting research and investigation through the mass line. All into the factory, meaning all amongst the masses, is the correct slogan to make end to the remnants of the separation of theory and praxis, i.e. subjectivism.”*⁶⁹

Chapter 3

This chapter will analyze the effects of the ideological split on the political praxis of SP and KEN(ml). Differing interpretations of the mass line and the role of intellectuals in formulating the mass line shaped their political praxis for years to come. The split in KEN(ml) in the summer of 1970 greatly reduced the ability of activists to carry out their political activities and damaged their reputation within the broader Left. In the months following the split of KEN(ml) both sides argued over the precise division of the organization’s membership, publications and other assets. The first thing to be divided was the organization's name; the LK faction took on the name *Kommunistiese Partij van Nederland (marxisties-leninisties) KPN(ml)*, but a year later changed its name to the simpler *Socialistiese Partij*.⁷⁰ The decision to call the new group a political party (as opposed to movement) indicated a confidence in the organization’s growth and ideological maturity, little more than a year after the original split in KEN(ml).⁷¹ The SP’s self-designation as a party was meant to claim its position as *the* Communist party of the Netherlands, to the exclusion of other groups. It also implied a much more centralist organization than KEN(ml) had previously been. In between party congresses, the leadership of

⁶⁹ Landelijk Komitee Meerderheid, 16.

⁷⁰ BVD Maandoverzicht October 1972; <https://stichtingargus.nl/bvd/1972-10.pdf>

⁷¹ BVD Maandoverzicht December 1972; <https://stichtingargus.nl/bvd/1972-12.pdf>

the SP lay in the elected Central Committee (LK), which in turn elected its three-man politburo. While Hans van Hoofd was its official head, in practice Daan Monje functioned as the party leader.

This confident attitude was reflected in the membership's enthusiasm in the immediate aftermath of the split. At the founding congress of KPN(ml) held on October 10th there were 120 members present from nearly all the branches of the old KEN(ml), who approved the resolutions of the congress' organizers nearly unanimously. This enthusiasm and ideological unity stands in contrast with the new KEN(ml). The main ideological leader of the 'theoretical' faction - Nico Schrevel - had quit the organization in the aftermath of the split. Without Schrevel, the main leaders of the new KEN(ml) became students from Tilburg and Rotterdam. Their congress was organized more than two weeks after KPN(ml)'s founding congress and attended by just 70 members.⁷² This gap in membership and activity was also reflected in the groups' newspapers. Despite the difficulties brought on by the split, the KPN managed to continue publishing their monthly newspaper - now renamed De Tribune - while KEN(ml)'s De Rode Tribune would not be published for several months afterwards.⁷³

The split in the movement was at once a tragic loss for KEN(ml), since it more than halved its membership and destroyed all of its influence over the affiliated mass organizations. However, it also proved to be an opportunity for the new leadership faction, which consisted mostly of university students from Tilburg. The split gave them a relatively clean slate, which allowed them to shape the new organization the way they saw it, an organization that would avoid the economist pitfalls of old KEN(ml).

The new leadership wanted to continue KEN(ml) as an 'organizational and ideological platform' with the intention of uniting into a communist party with other anti-revisionist groups such as BNML. At the new KEN(ml)'s founding congress the attendees had resolved to carry

⁷² BVD Maandoverzicht October 1971; <http://stichtingargus.nl/bvd/1971-10.pdf>

⁷³ BVD Maandoverzicht December 1972; <https://stichtingargus.nl/bvd/1972-12.pdf>

out these debates in a respectful and comradely manner. While this sentiment was likely inspired by the hostile environment in which the split with the SP occurred, the KEN(ml) nonetheless did not rule out uniting with the SP down the road.⁷⁴

The different conceptions of class consciousness and democratic-centralism that had led to the split inspired distinct modes of organization. The methods of SP largely remained in line with those of the old KEN(ml). The SP's interpretation of the mass line put greater emphasis on the existing political consciousness of workers, while downplaying the need for Communists to interpret the demands of the masses in light of Marxist theory, in order to stave workers away from prevailing bourgeois ideology. Following this analysis, the SP continued to view mass organizations as their main organizing method and controlled the mass organization formerly affiliated with KEN(ml). Depending on the circumstances the relationship of these organizations to the SP could be obscured or out in the open.

By contrast, the approach taken up by KEN(ml) put much greater emphasis on the need for a revolutionary organization to impart revolutionary consciousness unto workers. Now that the new KEN(ml) had lost its influence over the mass organizations, it needed a new form of organization which would allow the group to mobilize workers. The leadership's proposal to reorganize the group into a cell structure was intended to allow members to effectively organize workers, while avoiding the pitfalls of populism and economism which they regarded as the cause of the split in the old KEN(ml). The cell structure was thus intended to help provide the dialectical unity between investigation and organization.⁷⁵ The forms of organization proposed by the new KEN(ml) leaders were the cause of a significant disagreement that ultimately culminated in yet another split in the organization, less than a year after it was originally founded.

⁷⁴ "Congresstuk KEN" (KEN(ml), October 31, 1971).

⁷⁵ BVD Maandoverzicht July/August 1973; <http://stichtingargus.nl/bvd/1973-07.pdf>

Creating a new KEN(ml)

These changes in the new KEN(ml)'s approach to mass organizations, and the changes to the organizational structure of KEN(ml) that it implied, were unpopular with a significant portion of the group's membership, especially the Rotterdam branch. From the very first congress of the new KEN(ml) in October 1971 did the new leadership attempt to push through its vision of the organization. In the run up to the congress the new LK sent out preliminary discussion articles, which would form the basis for the final position papers to be debated at the congress. Opponents within KEN(ml) complained that these proposed changes were at odds with the views expressed during the split in the old KEN(ml).⁷⁶ The preliminary article on the proper functioning of democratic centralism placed a great deal of emphasis on the organization's ideological unity. The authors believed that a high degree of ideological and political knowledge was a prerequisite for proper ideological unity. This statement caused a great deal of consternation in the Rotterdam branch. Those critics believed that such an undue emphasis on theoretical knowledge effectively subordinated political praxis to theory. Instead, they argued that the movement's ideological unity ought to be based on the actual political praxis of the members and that practice ought to inform the organization's analysis.⁷⁷

There was an apparent contradiction between the desire for a high degree of commitment and ideological unity and the desire to form a new unified Communist party with the other small ML groups in the country. When this contradiction played out it became obvious that the KEN(ml) leadership valued ideological unity and their own positions within the organization over the possibility of merging with other Dutch Marxist Leninist groups. Despite inviting members of these other ML groups to the first congress of the new KEN(ml) - where they

⁷⁶ Kommunisten Kring Rijnmond (M.L.), "Ontstaan KKR," 14.

⁷⁷ Kommunisten Kring Rijnmond (M.L.), 14.

outnumbered actual KEN(ml) members - the organization went on to only have sporadic contact with Rode Jeugd (ml) and individuals in Nijmegen.⁷⁸

A new split and the formation of KKRml

As the previous section has shown, KEN(ml) came out of the split without a clearly agreed-upon vision for the future. This changed in February 1972 when a nationwide wildcat strike broke out in the metalworking sector. KEN(ml) responded in much the same way as the 1970 dockers strike. Many KEN(ml) members went to Rotterdam to support the strikers and agitate against the union leadership. The strike ended in an unsatisfying compromise between the workers and employees.⁷⁹

In March 1972 the Central Committee of KEN(ml) had declared Rotterdam to be the 'center for the construction of the party' because they believed the city to be the premier working class center of the country. In response to this call a large number of students from Tilburg moved to Rotterdam. This change implied a much larger transformation of inner-party culture and expectations for membership. Alongside the demand for a high degree of ideological unity came the call for a greater degree of unity of action. This implied a raising the criteria for full membership, potential members expected to devote a great deal of their time and resources to the party. These new demands proved too much for many non-intellectual workers in the organization.⁸⁰

The attempt to implement this plan led to renewed tensions within the organization, particularly in the Rotterdam branch. This branch differed from the rest of KEN(ml) because its members were to a large extent older former CPN members, while the other branches - especially Tilburg - were overwhelmingly made up of students and recent graduates who had

⁷⁸ Kommunisten Kring Rijnmond (M.L.), 18.

⁷⁹ Hans Schoots, *Maoïstische Memoires* (Amsterdam: SPP, 2018), 109–10.

⁸⁰ Wouter Beekers, "Mao in de polder: Een historisch-sociologische benadering van het Nederlandse maoïsme 1964-1978" (Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2005), 24.

little experience of industrial labor. The reorganization into cells implied a much more strictly disciplined inner-party culture, with the KEN(ml) leadership increasingly intervening in the political activities of its members. The most egregious example of this was the LK forbidding an older member of the Rotterdam branch Gerrit Sterkman from speaking to a gathering of left wing students in Nijmegen.⁸¹ Many members felt alienated by the behavior of the student-members and the leadership, who they accused of having a domineering and elitist attitude, much more concerned with book wisdom than the masses. This alienation finally came to the fore in 1972 when much of the Rotterdam branch broke from KEN(ml) and formed its own organization called Kommunistenkring Rijnmond (ml) KKR(ml). This group would however remain small for most of its existence, expanding little in terms of membership.⁸²

As shown in the previous chapter, the split was precipitated by disagreements over the practical implementation of the mass line. These diverging interpretations of the mass line translated into diverging attitudes to the role of mass organizations within the movement. In studying the practical application of these different attitudes, we can judge their conceptions of class consciousness and its effect on their political praxis.

Student Organizing

The most important mass organization in terms of recruitment of new members was the Marxisties-Leninistiese Studentenbond (MLS). It was also in this organization where the diverging interpretations of the mass line, epistemology and democratic-centralism translated into political praxis in the most visible way. From the beginning of the split both the new KEN(ml) and SP continued to put great effort into building their new student mass organizations. KEN(ml)'s approach to student politics derived from its view that the old KEN(ml) had failed in large part due to 'student radicalism' and its workerist interpretation of the mass line. As such,

⁸¹ Beekers, 49.

⁸² Kommunisten Kring Rijnmond (M.L.), 14.

members of the *Kommunistiese Studentenbond* (KSB) were not expected to take up factory jobs, but were expected still to orient their political activities to the working class. In addition the new KEN(ml) suggested to KSB members that they take on university courses that would enable them to 'serve the people' in a practical way, such as law or medicine. In light of the debate around democratic-centralism within the old KEN(ml), the new KEN(ml) leaders decided that KSB should be granted a degree of organizational autonomy while still being bound to follow the general political line of the KEN(ml) leadership. The official aim of the new KSB was not to merely advocate for student interest but to: "*Win over all progressive and socialist students and unite them in a single front against capitalist science.*"⁸³ The new KEN(ml) hoped to combine the theoretical knowledge of students with the practical political activity of workers, in order for marxist theory to be correctly applied. In an apparent reversal of the SP's policy, the new KEN(ml) hoped that it could support workers in taking time off of arduous labor, so that they could dedicate their free time to theoretical education.⁸⁴

The SP's attitude towards their student mass organization differed starkly from KEN(ml)'s. In line with the SP's centralist character, the new MLS was completely subject to decisions of the SP central committee. The party demanded the full commitment of potential members to their party work, which in the case of students meant leaving university and taking on a job in a factory. Failing to meet the expectations of the central leadership meant expulsion from the party.⁸⁵

Labor Organizing

Arbeidersmacht (AM), the organization set up haphazardly during the Rotterdam harbor strike, also saw major divergences between the two factions. Both KEN(ml) and SP had wanted to organize workers at the point of production. For the SP leadership this meant recreating

⁸³ BVD Maandoverzicht October 1971; <http://stichtingargus.nl/bvd/1971-10.pdf>

⁸⁴ BVD Maandoverzicht July 1972; <https://stichtingargus.nl/bvd/1972-07.pdf>

⁸⁵ BVD Maandoverzicht July 1972; <https://stichtingargus.nl/bvd/1972-07.pdf>

Arbeidersmacht as a fully-fledged trade union independent of the dominant social-democratic and confessional trade unions, which it considered treacherous to the working class. Implicit in this decision was the view that militancy among Dutch workers was growing and that the reformist unions played a vital role in mitigating this militant energy and channeling it into reformist causes. By setting AM up as a militant 'red union' the SP hoped to channel this perceived militancy into lasting organizational gains, both for the union as well as the party itself. By contrast the new KEN(ml) did not want to organize workers into a separate union, which it considered premature until the party had '*achieved* organized ideological influence over large sections of the working masses'.⁸⁶ Instead the new KEN(ml) wanted its members to join the existing reformist trade unions and to encourage the workers in the union to turn against its reformist leaders. To achieve this aim the new KEN(ml) hoped to establish Communist cells in factories, basing itself on classic texts of the Comintern.

The SP's labor organizing strategy was implemented most successfully in the industrial town of Oss in South-Brabant. Like much of the Catholic South of the Netherlands, neither the social-democrats nor the CPN had had much influence with the town's workers. The town's politics were dominated by the Catholic Church and the employers, who enjoyed an almost feudal relationship with their subjects.⁸⁷ Most of the jobs in the town were in low-paying carpet factories or in food-processing, for which a growing number of workers were brought in from Turkey.

KEN(ml) established a branch right before the rift in the organization, consisting of half a dozen people. In the wake of the split the Oss branch chose to join KPNml, because of its workerist atmosphere and growing contacts with Nijmegen.⁸⁸ In line with the rest of KPNml the young Maoists in Oss put great emphasis on building up contacts with the working class. At first the party's mass work focussed heavily on tenant organizing via *Bond voor Huurders - en*

⁸⁶ BVD Maandoverzicht Oktober 1971; <http://stichtingargus.nl/bvd/1971-10-3.pdf>

⁸⁷ Slager, *Geheim van Oss*, 23.

⁸⁸ Slager, 76.

Woningzoekenden (BHW) a national tenants' rights organization. Its first campaign was an attempted rent strike against the expected national rent hikes. The rhetoric used during the campaign reflected the workerist prevailing through much of the branch, with radical slogans like *"the enemies of the workers do not stand still"* and *"we must have our cannons ready by April"* being out of tune with the views of local residents.⁸⁹ The disappointing result came in April when only 150 of the expected 1100 residents actually took part in the rent strike. While reflecting on the defeat the Oss branch came to the conclusion that the cause of the failure was its inability to grasp what kind of actions workers actually wanted.⁹⁰

Shortly after the failed rent strike the members of the Oss branch began to get jobs in the town's factories, reasoning that it was important to have a similar social background as to be able to speak to workers.⁹¹ The members all got jobs at different companies and sectors, where they initially kept a low profile. Some had trouble getting jobs because managers were confused why the better educated youth wanted to work in the factories.⁹² The aim of the SP members was to gather information on the factories and gain contacts with workers there. Using its entry into the factories as well as the contacts gained through BHW the SP systematically gathered information on the working conditions in the town's factories as well as the attitudes of individual workers, which they stored in an extensive collection of index-cards.⁹³

The effectiveness of this new strategy came to be tested in early 1973, when dissatisfaction started growing among the workers at the Bergoss carpet factory. There the official union had negotiated wage increases that were far lower than those at competing nearby firms. In response SP members at the factory established 'Komitee Arbeidersmacht Bergoss' to challenge both the union and the employers. Through large meetings in the factory cafeteria new demands were formulated, namely closing the gap between the lowest and highest paid

⁸⁹ Slager, 84.

⁹⁰ Slager, 86.

⁹¹ Slager, 111.

⁹² Slager, 112.

⁹³ Slager, 114.

workers and a general wage hike. The preparatory work had paid off during the strike, allowing Arbeidersmacht to maintain unity among the striking workforce. Through the building up of contacts Arbeidersmacht managed to get the Turkish workers at the factory to join, since they were often the lowest-paid workers. In their attempt to reach Turkish workers they went as far as to publish many of its pamphlets in Turkish under the name İşçiler Kuvveti.⁹⁴

While Arbeidersmacht had succeeded in its aim of establishing a 'red union' in Oss that fought the employers and the established union, it was not yet in a position to win the strike's main demands. Of particular concern was the lack of a strike fund, given that it was a wildcat strike. For this purpose the whole Oss branch was mobilized, with SP members Jan Marijnissen and Paul Peters both quitting their own factory jobs to work full time agitating for the strike and raising money for the strike fund.⁹⁵ This indicates that - at least in Oss - the conception of établissement had not been focussed on individual transformation. Instead, it was subordinate to the larger political aims of the party.

Ten days into the strike, meetings took place between the official union and management, who began to make small concessions to the striking workers. Soon after, cracks began to show in the unity of the workers, while the majority still wished to continue the strike a substantial number of strikers wanted to begin work again. In response to this the SP members leading the strike made the decision to accept the concessions, despite not fulfilling the strike's original demands. In spite of not meeting their full demands, the SP nonetheless decided to portray the wildcat strike as a victory, a view shared by many Bergoss workers.⁹⁶

Just a few days after the strike ended the Central Committee of SP issued a new directive on prospective student-workers. The central committee decided that students were no longer required to quit studying and enter factories. They no longer believed that the factory floor was the best place to propagate its politics. The new line on student-workers was more

⁹⁴ Slager, 116.

⁹⁵ Slager, 117.

⁹⁶ Slager, 123.

lenient, stating: “*They can re-enter university or find that different job that matches their skill-set. Perhaps they, and thus also the Party, will acquire more financial means, but more importantly it will give them more time to dedicate to party work.*”⁹⁷

While the SP and many Bergoss workers saw the strike as a victory and gave the SP much prestige in Oss, there was nonetheless backlash. The Arbeidersmacht strike leader Ton Bouwens was fired from his job at Bergoss, and suspected sympathizers were isolated from other workers on the factory floor. Eventually a blacklist of known SP sympathizers was made in Oss and the surrounding towns,⁹⁸ not helped by much of the media portraying Arbeidersmacht as a ‘*left wing extremist maoist group*’.⁹⁹

While it might seem strange to cancel a policy that worked effectively in Oss, this was not the case for the other branches. Oss was considered a model branch by the leadership.¹⁰⁰ Those other branches had far fewer contacts in industry and were thus unable to systematically study the living conditions and attitudes of workers in their respective localities. When discussions arose over the question of entering the factories, it was most often discussed in terms of gaining experience from the working class and using it to transform oneself. Because the primary reason for the factory turn was individual transformation, students began working in industry in a haphazard way. For example, Jos Palm began working at a factory, but quit after just three days, shocked by the injuries of the employees.¹⁰¹ Little thought was put into selecting which factories and workplaces the Maoists would enter. Factors such as unionization or previous strikes were not taken into consideration. Instead the young radicals would often be the only communist at a factory, and found it difficult to organize. In addition to their isolation from other radicals, the long hours of factory work often made activism more difficult, with much

⁹⁷ Slager, 125.

⁹⁸ Slager, *Geheim van Oss*, 129–30.

⁹⁹ Slager, 119.

¹⁰⁰ Palm, *Maria En Mao*, 188.

¹⁰¹ Palm, 202.

of the work around supporting striking workers often being left to other SP members or sympathizers who had more time to visit factories and spread pamphlets.

The policy of the new KEN(ml) mirrored that of the KPN(ml) in many ways. However, the way in which these jobs were chosen differed starkly and reflected a different approach to the practice than that of KPN(ml). By 1972 it was decided that all KEN(ml) members ought to move to Rotterdam in order to concentrate the movement's efforts in the Netherlands' largest industrial corridor. Members found work in strategic industries such as shipbuilding, metal working and in the port of Rotterdam itself. Reflecting its critique of the SP's economism, the KEN(ml) emphasized building an organization based on the Comintern model of factory cells.¹⁰²

Initially KEN(ml) found it more difficult to organize workers in the shipbuilding sector than dockworkers. Making contacts at the Wilton-Feijenoord shipyards had been difficult in the beginning, since the company grounds were inaccessible, meaning that workers could only be approached at the gates. This changed when KEN(ml) member Paul Donker managed to get a job at Wilton-Feijenoord. He was a charismatic figure and popular with his colleagues. When Donker used his popularity to organize a petition against the abolition of coffee breaks, he was quickly fired by management and removed from the NVV union. The KEN(ml) cell at Wilton-Feijenoord had been under surveillance by the BVD and Wilton-Feijenoord's parent company was in financial difficulties, which helps explain the harsh response.¹⁰³

Much like the SP's policy of making university students into factory workers, the KEN(ml) labor policy changed much over time. In the aftermath of the 1972 split in KEN(ml) - when most of the original Rotterdam workers left the group - most of the organization came to be made up of students from Tilburg. The Tilburg student faction carried over many unspoken attitudes from their radical student past into KEN(ml). Later critics from within the organization would state that

¹⁰² "De Bolsjewering van de Partij" (Kaderblad KEN(ml) no.4, March 1972).

¹⁰³ Schoots, *Maoistische Memoires*, 115–16.

these student-esque attitudes manifested into two political lines that undermined the effectiveness of the organization: intellectualism and the group's vanguard pretenses.¹⁰⁴

Intellectualism in this context meant that KEN(ml) leaders put undue emphasis on the theoretical writings of past foreign revolutionaries when formulating their political line. This intellectualism was very apparent in the group's labor organizing policy. There the KEN(ml) based its new organizational model on Comintern texts from the 1930s, rather than the practical experience of organizing workers in the contemporary Netherlands. In this intellectualism there was a contradiction between the KEN(ml)'s glorification of the old Comintern models, and the fact that a large number of CPN and Comintern veterans with organizational experience had just left the group.

This manifested itself in KEN(ml) company cells making radical sounding appeals to workers criticizing the union leadership and connecting them to the government. The rhetoric of these appeals focussed on generalized schemes about the functioning of capitalism, only interspersed with a few specific facts about workers' daily lives. This style of political work and its consequences was best exemplified during KEN(ml)'s campaign against the reforms of the Den Uyl government in 1973.¹⁰⁵ The cell at Wilton-Feijenoord shipyard called for a 'warning strike' on short notice by spreading a single pamphlet, while neglecting the long term work of convincing and organizing workers. The cell limited itself to spreading pamphlets and left the practical work of organizing to Wilton-Feijenoord workers themselves. Unsurprisingly the call for a strike was left unanswered, just as similar calls had failed previously. The only real practical result was the complete collapse of the KEN(ml) cell at Wilton-Feijenoord.¹⁰⁶

The failure of the campaign against the Den Uyl government prompted the organization to reexamine its previous efforts. In 1974 in *Rode Tribune* the leadership attempted to publicly expose the faults of the group's work, as they saw it. They blamed the failure of the Den Uyl

¹⁰⁴ "De Ideologiese Strijd in KEN(ml)," *Rode Tribune*, August 17, 1974.

¹⁰⁵ De Ideologiese Strijd in KEN(ml), *Rode Tribune*, August 17, 1974.

¹⁰⁶ KEN(ml), "Het extern functioneren van de WF-cel november '73 tot mei '74". 1975.

campaign on the lack of connection with the masses. This absence of contact had caused the group to make overly radical appeals that did not resonate with workers. This supposed radicalism was seen by KEN(ml) as an expression of sectarianism. KEN(ml) regarded itself as *the* Communist Party in construction, and was so convinced of the correctness of its own political line that they refused to broach or respond to any criticism, either from the masses or other parts of the organized left. In terms of practical political work this meant that the wants and needs of the masses were not the leading factor in formulating its political line - as the mass line required - but that instead the principles of the organization and the views of the cadres were determinant. In labor organizing this entailed KEN(ml) members attempting to politicize workers in a given workplace by making radical demands and vociferously criticizing the union leadership, but without investigating the concrete conditions necessary for the practical work of organizing struggle. They concluded that the organization's dogmatism had led it to confuse class struggle with the struggle over wages.¹⁰⁷

In order to rectify these mistakes, the KEN(ml) leadership promised to shift its activities away from workplace organizing into a wide variety of sectors such as working class youth, high school students, women and foreign workers. The essential theoretical background of this was a renewed emphasis on ideological struggle, which was conceived of as a struggle between 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian' ideologies, continuing into the period of socialist construction. The ideological influence of the Cultural Revolution and the German KPD/ML in this are evident.¹⁰⁸

Given that this ideological change was inspired by the Cultural Revolution and KPD/ml we can infer that the KEN(ml) leadership did not abandon its intellectualist and sectarian framework. This framework, because it emerged not from practical experience of organizing struggle, but from foreign theoretical texts, could not change the practices that had led to the ideological change in the first place. In line with its repudiation of economism, KEN(ml) created

¹⁰⁷ "De Ideologiese Strijd in KEN(ml)."

¹⁰⁸ Beekers, "Mao in de Polder," 55–56.

a new organizational model for workers in Rotterdam called *Aktiecomitee voor Progressieve Arbeiders*. These committees were mostly involved in smaller actions directly related to grievances of the shop floor, for instance the committee at the port of Rotterdam organized a small successful action aimed at improving holiday scheduling.¹⁰⁹

After half a year the KEN(ml) leadership became impatient with the apparent lack of major successes. Without consulting the membership, they formulated a new line which differed radically from the previous one. *Aktiecomitee voor Progressieve Arbeiders* were to be replaced with *Socialistische Arbeidersvereniging*, which were intended to organize workers primarily outside the workplace. Using the argument 'life begins after work' they organized activities outside the workplace, namely through outreach to foreign workers, as well as social and cultural activities. This development led to a decline in membership and activity of KEN(ml) and affiliated organizations.¹¹⁰

This episode illustrates how the KEN(ml) leadership had not abandoned its intellectualism and sectarianism. This fact disappointed many KEN(ml) members who had hoped that the previous faults of the group could be rectified. They had hoped that the criticism and self-criticism campaign could have helped the organization forge closer links to the working masses and to develop a new political line with their help. However, when it became apparent that this would not happen and that it was impossible to change the group from within, they left the organization.

Tenant Organizing

The attitudes of both factions towards the tenants' organization BHW mirrored their attitudes towards the other mass organizations. In the case of SP, the organization continued to function as it had before the split. This reflected its pre-occupation with praxis through contact

¹⁰⁹ Ex-KEN(ml) Leden, "Waarom Wij Uit de KEN(ml) Gingen: Kritiek van Een Groep van Ex-KEN(ml) Leden.," September 1975, 40.

¹¹⁰ Ex-KEN(ml) Leden, 41.

with the masses, which organizing for BHW and selling its newspaper door-to-door provided to the members. The position of the new KEN(ml) was radically different from SP. They abandoned the idea of using a tenants' rights mass organization to gain contact with and organize working class neighborhoods. Instead the new KEN(ml) advocated for a structure similar to that of its labor organizing efforts, namely organizing KEN(ml) members into neighborhood cells. These neighborhood cells would then use 'unity-front tactics' to make contact with existing organizations in a given neighborhood, and subsequently use these to make the neighborhood's residents acquainted with the area's problems, which had their origin in class conflict. The neighborhood cell would win a leading position in the area through its persistence, loyalty and attention to the residents' needs.

The political implications of these forms of organization and their underlying conceptions of class consciousness came to the fore quickly after the split in KEN(ml). In August 1972 the De Tribune published an article arguing for the total prohibition of migrant labor in the Netherlands. This article was published following a riot in the working class neighborhood Afrikaanderwijk in Rotterdam. These riots began when a Dutch woman got into an altercation with a Turkish landlord over alleged delayed rent payments and his decision to convert the home into a boarding house for immigrants. There had been simmering xenophobic tensions between the Dutch locals - many of whom worked in the port of Rotterdam - and the migrant workers from Turkey, whom many Dutch workers resented for supposedly stealing jobs and worsening the already poor housing situation. These tensions culminated in several days of rioting in the Afrikaanderwijk targeting boarding houses for Turkish immigrants with stones and fire bombs, invading homes and wrecking the Turkish inhabitants' furniture and other belongings. This caused many immigrants from Turkey to flee their homes fearing for their lives.

The reaction from most Dutch media and the broader Left was to denounce the riots, as well as the neighborhood's inhabitants, as racist and xenophobic. Some even went as far as to compare the riots to the German Kristalnacht of 1938. In this context the editors of De Tribune

wanted to de-emphasize the racist and xenophobic motives of the rioters and emphasize the growing socio-economic problems in the neighborhood as the principal cause. They emphasized the class character of the tensions, claiming that only the Turkish landlord's property was destroyed by Afrikaanderwijk locals, and that the subsequent riots were caused by people coming from outside the neighborhood. They then come to the conclusion that it is wrong to call the neighborhood racist.¹¹¹

Instead, the SP leadership described the role of migrant labor in the international capitalist economy. They argued that foreign workers had been invited into the country by Dutch employers in order to push down wages, despite the growing number of Dutch unemployed. Additionally immigrant workers were more obedient and dependent on their employers, particularly in weaker industries such as mining or textiles, which made organizing workers in these enterprises much more difficult. From this the authors drew the simple conclusion that the use of migrant labor was "to the benefit of the capitalists, and a burden for the workers."¹¹²

Having established that the migrant worker policy was organized by Dutch employers against the interests of Dutch workers, the article goes on to attack much of the response from the government and the bourgeois press. They state that racism was not the fundamental cause of the riots, but failed policy. The authors acknowledge that racism and xenophobia was present among Dutch workers, but emphasized that these sentiments were the result of the bourgeoisie encouraging the division among the workers in order to play them off against each other. The response of the Rotterdam municipal government was to propose a plan to segregate migrant workers into separate neighborhoods, which *De Tribune* denounced for merely furthering the exploitation of migrants. In this context accusations of racism only served to demonize Dutch workers and draw attention away from the real causes of the riots. The real solution remained banning migrant labor, as this would strengthen the position of Dutch workers in political and

¹¹¹ "Gastarbeid Moet Verboden Worden," *De Tribune*, September 1972.

¹¹² "Gastarbeid Moet Verboden Worden," 3.

economic struggles, while migrant workers were encouraged to fight for socialism in their home countries.¹¹³

This characterization of migrant labor and the proposed solution to it were highly controversial on the Dutch Left. By demanding that the Dutch bourgeois government exclude and deport foreign workers the SP implicitly sided with the Dutch capitalist class and abandoned the cause of their fellow workers, claimed KEN(ml) in *Rode Tribune*.¹¹⁴ The campaign to ban migrant labor would only direct the frustration of local Dutch workers unto their fellow workers. Experience has shown that illegal migrant labor is even more advantageous to employers, since their lack of legal protections makes migrants more vulnerable to exploitation as the SP themselves admitted.¹¹⁵ Even in the unlikely case that the capitalist government would agree to such a measure, labor migration would still take place.

After having explained why they believed that SP's proposed ban on migrant labor was incorrect and bound to fail, KEN(ml) sought to uncover the theoretical and ideological background of the proposal. KEN(ml) traced the ideological origins of the proposed migrant ban back to the origin split in KEN(ml). They referred to the SP's economism and in particular to its economic interpretations of the mass line. In the case of neighborhood organizing this entailed going from door-to-door selling BHW newspapers and speaking to residents about general issues in the neighborhood that would appeal to the widest number of supporters, while avoiding issues that might be controversial or divisive. This was seen by KEN(ml) as merely appealing to the lowest common denominator, which could only create the most surface-level class consciousness or political unity. The SP refused to address what Mao called a '*contradiction among the people*', such as the division between Dutch and foreign workers. They only engaged in the first and final steps of the mass line: collecting the views of the masses and

¹¹³ "Gastarbeid Moet Verboden Worden."

¹¹⁴ "Hoe Economisme En Kringengedoe Tenslotte Eindigen in Reformisme," *Rode Tribune*, December 1972, 8–10.

¹¹⁵ Politiek Buro van de Socialistiese Partij and Centraal Komitee van de Kommunistiese Eenheidsbeweging Nederland (ml), "Diskussie," 1975.

coming back to them with proposals. In the view of SP Dutch workers were already capable of organizing for revolution by virtue of their working class attitude. There was not as much need for the middle step of the mass line, namely analyzing and summarizing the views of the masses in light of Marxist ideology, as little political or ideological education was thought necessary. In the opinion of the KEN(ml) leadership the SP thus did not take on the difficult task of forging unity among the working class.

Anti-Imperialist Activism

The year 1972 also was a major escalation of the Vietnam war by the United States. In response there was a new wave of anti-imperialist sentiment in the Netherlands that the Maoists wanted to garner and organize. In the case of KEN(ml) their organizing strategy was different from those they ordinarily used in other kinds of activism. Anti-imperialism and solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle was widespread among progressives in the country. In light of this fact anti-imperialism became the area in which KEN(ml) was most willing and able to cooperate with other radical groups. The Landelijk Vietnam Komitee (LVK) was established by KEN(ml) alongside BNML, with members of both organizations taking key leadership roles within LVK. The organization primarily spread its message through giving out pamphlets, hosting film viewings and through organization mass demonstrations. What most set the LVK apart from the anti-imperialist campaigns of SP was its international political line. In keeping with the rapidly evolving foreign policy of China and the theoretical line of the CCP, the LVK blamed both United States imperialism and Soviet 'social-imperialism' for the prolongation of the Vietnam war. In addition the LVK criticized the SP Vietnam campaign for supposedly tailing the sentiments of the masses, and thus not properly educating them politically and organizing them on a more permanent basis.

The SP's approach stands in stark contrast to the LVK because of its emphasis on the mass character of its anti-imperialist campaign. The SP set up a mass organization for its Vietnam campaign called *Comite Van Mens Tot Mens* (VMTM). This organization had no public relationship with the SP, but all of the leadership positions were occupied by members of the socialist party. By doing so the SP hoped to organize those who supported the Vietnamese liberation struggle but who did not necessarily support the whole SP program. Many of the VMTM activities were similar to those of LVK, like distributing pamphlets and holding public meetings, but the greatest difference was VMTM's attempt to confront the American public with the crimes of its government in Vietnam. To do this VMTM printed a large number of postcards bearing images of Vietnamese people mutilated by American bombing campaigns. The postcards were bundled with stamps and random American addresses, and subsequently sold at cost. This campaign was successful, the organizers had managed to involve a large number of people in the campaign and an even larger number of postcards were sent.¹¹⁶

In the aftermath of the Paris Peace Accords, which pulled American troops out of South Vietnam, both KEN(ml) and SP were forced to look for new avenues for their anti-imperialist activism. Support for the Vietnamese struggle against US imperialism had been a unifying factor within the Marxist-Leninist movement and the broader Left. Once US troops had definitively left South Vietnam that factor also disappeared. Consequently the various anti-imperialist groups in the country began to take conflicting positions on international issues, especially in the context of the escalating Sino-Soviet split. By the 1970s China increasingly began to see the Soviet Union - and not the United States - as its main geopolitical threat. Alongside increasingly hostile rhetoric aimed at the USSR the Chinese began trying to improve relations with the United States, beginning with several US puppet regimes. At the tenth Party congress in August 1973 premier Zhou Enlai put forth an attempt at a theoretical justification for this policy of rapprochement with the US called the 'Theory of Three Worlds'. It overturned the traditional

¹¹⁶ Socialistiese Partij, "Wat Dan? De SP Antwoordt KEN(MI)," 1974, 24–31.

Communist view of the world divided between a socialist bloc and an imperialist bloc. This theory posited that the world was made up of three camps, based on the degree of political power countries had in the international arena. The first camp consisted of the two superpowers, the US and USSR, who attempted to divide the world between themselves, with the Soviet Union being the power most likely to start a third world war. The second camp was made up of the industrialized states of Western-Europe and Japan, and the third camp consisted of what is traditionally considered the 'third world' which would play the leading role in the world proletarian revolution by revolting against the imperialist exploitation of the first world. China posited itself as the leader of the third world within this framework, while the position of the second world in this theory was ambiguous.¹¹⁷ The second world was in economic competition with the US, and was subservient to it politically, but unlike the third world they were not exploited economically by the US. Because of this fact the second world was unlikely to start another world war, but unlikely to rise up and prevent one either, that task would be accomplished by the third world.

This change in international orientation by the Chinese Communists did not initially lead to major changes within the Dutch Maoist movement. Following the American withdrawal from Vietnam KEN(ml) began to increasingly shift its coverage of international events in *Rode Tribune* away from South-East Asia, and started to focus more on revolutionary efforts in Africa. The organization's policy only underwent dramatic change after Kees de Boer and other members of the Central Committee visited China as part of an official delegation in December 1975. The leadership returned to Rotterdam even more convinced of the righteousness of the theory of three worlds and its categorization of the Soviet Union as the principal threat to world peace. In January 1976 KEN(ml)'s priority became combatting this supposed Soviet threat, and this entailed the reversal of several long-held positions of the organization. KEN(ml) now began supporting a stronger NATO and endorsed membership in the European Economic Community

¹¹⁷ Toorneman, *De KEN*, 69–70.

(EEC). The organization also began to moderate its wage demands in the unions, as defense against the Soviet Union became the top priority. A new mass organization was established in order to propagate the new line, called the Bond voor Vrijheid en Onafhankelijkheid. Curiously its task was no longer to mobilize progressive young people - as it had done previously - but to mobilize both left wing and right wing forces in the country.¹¹⁸

The turn towards supporting some of Europe's most influential anti-Communist institutions in the name of defending true communism would ultimately signal the beginning of the end for KEN(ml) as a revolutionary organization. KEN(ml)'s stance had shifted away from organizing revolution, wherein the Dutch state and the capitalists were considered the main enemy to be confronted. Instead, the KEN(ml)'s stance became mainly defensive, the priority of the organization was defense against a potential invasion from the Soviet Union, while the Dutch state and ruling class were to be considered tactical allies in the coming war.¹¹⁹ The KEN(ml) gave a theoretical explanation for this stance that mirrored those given by Communists for allying with the Western allies during WW2.

This dramatic shift in political line helped to delegitimize KEN(ml) on the broader left, and the decision itself was extremely controversial within the group. Fierce debates had erupted inside KEN(ml)'s Amsterdam and Rotterdam branches, with those opposing the new line leaving in small groups. These groups would eventually coalesce into a new organization called Groep Marxisten-Leninisten (GML), better known by the title of its publication Rode Morgen. This group would continue to operate in much the same way KEN(ml) had before 1976. GML had accepted the theory of three worlds and its categorization of the Soviet Union as social-imperialist, but it did not accept the KEN(ml)'s support for the EEC and NATO as necessary to defend against the USSR. Instead, the GML continued to emphasize organizing workers in the port of Rotterdam, and by doing this they managed to win over many workers formerly in KEN(ml). This emphasis

¹¹⁸ Toorneman, 75.

¹¹⁹ Toorneman, 75.

on workplace organizing went so far that the group eventually reintroduced the policy of sending student members into the factories. This strategy bore some fruit during the Rotterdam dockworkers' strike in 1979, where a GML student-turned-worker named Paul Rosenmüller became the spokesman of the strike.¹²⁰

Conclusion

Beginning in the mid-1970s Dutch Maoist entered a period of decline. To a large extent this decline was precipitated by international factors which Dutch Maoists were unable to influence. So while the declining prestige of Global Maoist may be explained by broad international factors, the way in which this decline took place among the different Maoist groups in the Netherlands must be explained by local factors and the agency activists themselves.

In the case of KEN(ml) this decline was bound intimately with the organization's sectarian character. Since the split of the original working class members from the Rotterdam KEN(ml) section in 1972, the group had struggled to attract new members, especially those from the working class. Owing to the sectarian and intellectualist character of KEN(ml), the requirements for potential new members were high, which deterred potentially interested people from joining.¹²¹ However, the organization's full decline began after Kees de Boer and other members of the leadership visited mainland China in late 1975 and returned fully convinced of the righteousness of the CCP's new three worlds theory.¹²²

This new political line placed KEN(ml) in ever greater isolation from the broader Left. Part of the theory of three worlds entailed participating in the 1977 Dutch parliamentary elections. KEN(ml) began its campaign focussed on creating a European bulwark against Soviet

¹²⁰ Toorneman, 76.

¹²¹ Schoots, *Maoistische Memoires*, 101.

¹²² Toorneman, *De KEN*, 72.

'social-imperialism'. The results of the elections were disappointing for KEN(ml), which only received 2.722 votes, but the leadership was nonetheless able to spin the results as a win, because the campaign had garnered about a hundred new members for the group.¹²³ In the same election SP received 24.425 votes, but was unable to gain a seat in parliament. In line with its sectarian outlook, the Rode Tribune described the SP's election results as '*a sharp electoral defeat*'.¹²⁴ The final part of the organization's decline took place in 1980, when Kees de Boer decided that all of KEN(ml)'s members in Rotterdam ought to live together in a 'political collective', other branches soon followed. These communes experimented with De Boer's theories on sexuality and family life, until in 1985 the last commune in Rotterdam was raided by the police for alleged child abuse. In the end, this final episode in the history of KEN(ml) can be seen as the most extreme expression of the group's sectarianism.¹²⁵

In the case of SP, maoism's decline occurred in a much different fashion. Just as in the case of KEN(ml) the foreign orientation of the CCP was decisive. The process of demaoisation began in 1975, when China - in line with its three worlds theory - began to support the South African-aligned UNITA against the pro-Soviet MPLA in the Angolan civil war. This caused the SP to distance itself from Chinese foreign policy.¹²⁶ Combined with the SP's populist or economist interpretation of the mass line, this made the SP derive less of its identity and political line from the CCP, in strong contrast to the development of KEN(ml). Instead, it doubled down on its populist analyses and began to slowly drop references to Marxism-Leninism in its materials. In 1977 the party began to loosen membership requirements, introducing a 'support membership' for those who could not be full-time cadres, which entailed a slow abandonment of democratic centralism.¹²⁷ The process of demaoisation also meant that SP doubled down on its much

¹²³ Toorneman, 84.

¹²⁴ Toorneman, 85.

¹²⁵ Puck Van der Land, *De Commune van Rotterdam: En Het Failliet van de Vrije Liefde* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2016).

¹²⁶ Beekers, *Mao in de Polder*, 58–59.

¹²⁷ Voerman, *De Rode Jehova's*, 141.

criticized position on immigration in the 1983 pamphlet *Gastarbeid en Kapitaal*. In spite of these developments the SP remained formally committed to Marxism-Leninism until the collapse of the USSR in 1991, when it also abolished the distinction between cadres and support members. Finally in 1999 the party published its new program called *Heel de Mens*, which made no reference to revolution or class struggle and described socialism as '*human dignity, equality and solidarity between people*'.¹²⁸ This gradual loss of ideological commitment is explained by the organization's populist interpretation of the mass line, which put great emphasis on the perceived views of working class Dutch people, and did not see much of a need for a vanguard party to lead them. When the views of workers were at odds with Marxism, SP chose to forgo the difficult task of convincing them. Its position on the 1971 anti-Turkish riots in Rotterdam being only the first example of SP's unwillingness to question the views of their perceived constituents.

In the end the debate surrounding the role of intellectuals served as a proxy for a broader debate on the origin of socialist consciousness. Those that would eventually form SP believed that intellectuals needed to be remolded through industrial labor. Implicit in this position is the belief that the experience of exploitation is enough to foster a socialist consciousness. Their opponents in KEN(ml) believed that only a disciplined organization with the correct *proletarian* line was capable of doing so. These polar opposite positions manifested in significant differences in political lines, neither of which was capable of answering a universal question of Communist politics, namely the the fusion of revolutionary Marxist ideology and the workers' movement. In the case of SP their glorification of Dutch workers led the party to slowly abandon aspects of revolutionary ideology when they were challenged. The SP's populism did eventually manage to win enough mass support to enter parliament, but it was only able to do so after it stopped being a revolutionary party. KEN(ml)'s insistence on a theoretically correct line manifested itself in a series of splits, constantly changing policies and high demands on

¹²⁸ Beekers, *Mao in de Polder*, 59.

party members which severely hampered their efforts at organizing workers. This eventually led the group to abandon their organizing efforts, instead focussing on reforming the self in a series of communes, after which KEN(ml) effectively ceased to exist.

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