

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF BELGIUM AND THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS OF 24 NOVEMBER 1946

A deceptive breakthrough

- Pascal Delwit -

On November 24, 1946, the first municipal elections in Belgium since the end of the Second World War were held. The Communist Party of Belgium (PCB-KPB), which had had relatively little presence in the municipalities until then, achieved what was to be its best electoral and political performance at this level. After the election, the communist leaders reported a significant electoral leap compared to the previous local elections – 1926, 1932 and 1938 – and they claimed that they had won twenty mayoral positions and that more than one hundred of their candidates had been elected as aldermen. Compared to pre-war elections, the result was an undeniable step forward and a potential lever for increased influence. But did this really turn out to be the case? This article tackles the question from two perspectives. The first concerns the data analysis of the election. What were the PCB-KPB's actual electoral and political results? This is a highly complex question as no database for the 1946 municipal elections exists. Furthermore, information about the communal councils is often patchy or even missing. The second perspective concerns the PCB-KPB itself, notably in terms of its ambitions: how did the PCB-KPB experience and analyse its results on November 24, 1946?

I. Municipal elections, a blind spot in research on Belgian political life and history

Recently, an increasing amount of studies have appeared dedicated to local elections in (contemporary) Belgium.¹ Researchers have identified them as playing a significant role in the Belgian political system and political life more generally, revealing a number of particularities. Recent elections have generated new and increasingly numerous research projects. The current interest in local elections is new. For a long time, elections at local and municipal levels received little attention, with the small number of studies often restricted to samples of communes, usually the most populous. Moreover, there is no official database, digital or paper, that contains the results of these elections. Such a database only exists for local elections after the merging of numerous municipalities in the 1970s.² For elections prior to that date, researchers can only refer to the pioneering work led by Chantal Kesteloot, Ann Mares and Claudine Marissal, but it is limited in scope: it was carried out only for municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants.³

The aim of this article is to move beyond this limited framework to focus on the significance of the local election of November 24, 1946 for the PCB-KPB. In order to go beyond the general conclusions drawn by José Gotovitch⁴ or Kris Deschouwer⁵, who have examined this election in a global

manner, data collection was as broad as possible. It remains unfinished due to the fact that some results are still very difficult, if not impossible, to find. However, it is important to note that the arguments presented in this article are based on data that is significantly broader in scope than what has been used in previous studies. Consequently, the breadth of the data collected allows us to present a highly detailed analysis of the dynamics of the election, communist participation in said election and the PCB-KPB's electoral and political results.

II. Institutional constraints at the local level

In order to understand the organisation of a political party involved in a Belgian municipal election, it is necessary to comprehend the basics of the Belgian municipal system and the institutional limitations associated with it. At the time of Belgian independence, the number of municipalities in the new state was considerable and totalled 2,450. Over time, two small parallel movements occurred that modified this number. Some localities merged while others were created by splitting from existing municipalities. The second dynamic was more frequent than the first, leading to an increase in the number of municipalities for more than a century. By the end of the 19th century, there were 2,617 communes and, after the Second World War, there were 2,670. At the time of the November

1. JÉRÉMY DODEIGNE, CAROLINE CLOSE, GEOFFROY MATAGNE (Eds), *Les élections locales du 14 octobre 2018 en Wallonie et à Bruxelles : une offre politique renouvelée?*, Genval, 2020; JEAN-BENOÎT PILET, RUTH DASSONNEVILLE, MARC HOOGHE, SOFIE MARIE (Eds), *L'électeur local. Le comportement électoral au scrutin communal de 2012*, Brussels, 2013; RÉGIS DANDROY, JÉRÉMY DODEIGNE, GEOFFROY MATAGNE, MIN REUCHAMPS (Eds), *Les élections communales de 2012 en Wallonie*, Brugge, 2013; JÉRÉMY DODEIGNE, MIN REUCHAMPS, KRISTOF STEYVERS, FERDINAND TEUBER, "Local voters have their reasons: mapping voting motives in local elections in Belgium", *Revue suisse de science politique*, 28(4), 2022, 624-652; ULRİK KJÆR, KRISTOF STEYVERS, "Second thoughts on second-order? Towards a second-tier model of local government elections and voting", in RICHARD KERLEY, JOYCE LIDDLE, PAMELA T. DUNNING (Eds), *The Routledge Handbook of international local government*, London, 2019, 405-417; PASCAL DELWIT, "La-N-VA et les élections d'octobre 2018: des aspirations contrariées", *Cahier du Cevipol/Brussels Working Papers*, 2, 2019, 1-34; PASCAL DELWIT, EMILIE VAN HAUTE, "Le scrutin communal du 14 octobre 2018 à Bruxelles: une élection détonante", *Cahier du Cevipol/Brussels Working Paper*, 1, 2019, 1-41.
2. <https://resultatselection.belgium.be/fr/search/conseils-communaux>. For the 2000, 2006, 2012 and 2018 elections, the results are online on the regions' websites.
3. CHANTAL KESTELOOT, ANN MARES, CLAUDINE MARISSAL (Eds), *Elections communales: 1890-1970: banque de données*, Brussels, 1996.
4. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, "Le parti communiste et les élections communales 1926-1952", in *Les élections communales et leur impact sur la politique belge (1890-1970)*, Brussels, 1994, 293-308.
5. KRIS DESCHOUWER, "Nationale partijen en gemeenteraadsverkiezingen", in JO BUELENS, KRIS DESCHOUWER (Eds), *De Dorpsstraat is de Wetstraat niet*, Brussels, 1996, 13-25.

1946 elections, 23,846 municipal councillors had to be elected and 5,532 aldermen appointed. In 1946, some municipalities had only a few dozen inhabitants; others, such as Antwerp or Brussels, had tens of thousands. The local situation and the tools available to the community varied greatly depending on the size of the municipality.

Over the years municipal law has been the subject of regular and varied controversies and has been regularly modified. For instance, the transformation of 1895 gave some voters four votes in the framework of plural suffrage. In some communes, a corporatist dynamic was even introduced to complement – rather imperfect – local democracies.⁶ After the First World War, institutional constraints surrounding municipalities evolved in significant and even avant-gardist ways. In February 1921, plural suffrage was abandoned, as was the complementary composition of some local councils. Above all and in contrast to the situation that prevailed for legislative elections, women were granted the right to vote. In this respect, the ballot of November 24, 1946 differed from the legislative election held in February of the same year; the latter had been held on the basis of universal male suffrage only. Another particularity of municipal law is that the number of municipal councillors, always odd, is proportional to the size of the population. The number of aldermen is also linked to the demographic size of a specific municipality. In 1946, mayors were appointed by the king based on the proposals of the Minister of the Interior, who was informed of these proposals by a majority of local councillors. The mayoral appointee did not have to be a local councillor. The main difference with the national election

was that the distribution of seats was based on the Imperiali formula rather than the D'hondt formula.⁷ This formula is more disadvantageous for small and medium-sized parties as winning a first seat is more complex than with the D'hondt formula, especially when magnitude is low.⁸

III. The Communist Party of Belgium : the influence of the Communist International (CI) and 'Moscow'

As with all Communist Parties, the history of the PCB-KPB has been closely linked to that of the Comintern (1919–1943) and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) but this link was far from straightforward. No Belgian figure took part in the founding meeting of the CI in March 1919.⁹ However, War Van Overstraeten was present at the second congress (17 July–7 August 1920). Coming from the Young Socialist Guards, Van Overstraeten was the main protagonist who formed the Brussels Communist Group in November 1920.¹⁰ This group had a specific ideological profile which was rather close to the ultra-left tendencies denounced by Lenin in *"Left-Wing" Communism : an Infantile Disorder*¹¹, although Van Overstraeten condemned the "abstract revolutionarism" of the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands, KAPD).¹² The Brussels Communist Group totally rejected parliamentarianism and had no intention of engaging in elections. Moreover, it was suspicious of the Socialist Trade Union.¹³ At the same time, the left wing of the Belgian Worker's Party (POB-BWP), grouped around the newspaper *L'Exploité*, founded another com-

6. CHANTAL KESTELOOT, "Elections communales 1890-1970. Quelques considérations à propos de l'élaboration d'une banque de données", *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 81(2), 2003, 351.

7. PASCAL DELWIT, *Introduction à la science politique*, Brussels, 2017, 187-188.

8. The magnitude is the number of seats to be allocated in an electoral district.

9. PASCAL DELWIT, *Les gauches radicales en Europe. XIX^e-XXI^e siècles*, Brussels, 2016, 77.

10. "Les "amis de l'exploité" après leur troisième congrès. Documents sur la fondation du parti communiste de Belgique", *Cahiers marxistes*, Special Issue, 1971, 13.

11. VLADIMIR LENIN, *"Left-Wing" Communism : an Infantile Disorder*, Moscow, 1964.

12. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, MIKHAIL NARINSKI, MICHEL DREYFUS, CLAUDE PENNETIER, BRIGITTE STUDER, HENRI WEHENKEL, SERGE WOLIKOW, *Komintern : l'histoire et les hommes. Dictionnaire biographique de l'Internationale communiste en France, à Moscou, en Belgique, au Luxembourg, en Suisse (1919-1943)*, Paris, 2001, 567.

13. MARCEL LIEBMAN, "Origine et fondation du PCB", in : Collectif d'histoire et d'études marxistes, *Le parti communiste de Belgique (1921-1944). Actes de la journée d'étude de Bruxelles - 28 avril 1979*, Brussels, 1980, 19.

munist organisation. Led by the trade union leader Joseph Jacquemotte, it joined the Communist International as the Belgian Communist Party. Since the Comintern did not admit two member parties from the same state, its executive committee imposed a merger in a motion of 13 July 1921. Under the leadership of Wilhelm Koenen, sent to Brussels by the CI, a difficult merger process began.¹⁴ It proved extremely complex, given the differences in the political cultures of the two groups. The process was finally completed during a congress on 3 and 4 September 1921.

The Belgian Communist Party was particularly affected by the shifting orientations of the Communist International. In 1924, the policy of “Bolshevisation” adopted at the Fifth Congress of the CI was difficult to implement in Belgium. But, above all, it was the power struggle among the leadership of CPSU that had a major impact on Belgian communists. Unlike the other Communist Parties in European countries, a large percentage of Belgian communists supported Leon Trotsky’s theses against those of Joseph Stalin.¹⁵ Shifting this balance, as the Communist International intended, was complex and only achieved with logistical support from the CI. In March 1928, the Trotskyist current was defeated by 74 votes to 34 at the Antwerp congress. This internal struggle within the PCB-KPB was at the heart of Charles Plisnier’s novel *Faux Passeports*, which won the Goncourt Prize in 1937.¹⁶ As a consequence, many militants quit the PCB-KPB, leaving the party weakened for some time. From then on, the PCB-KPB followed the ever-shifting policies of the Comintern.

At the Sixth Congress of the CI in 1928, it was decided that the PCB-KPB would be part of the new strategy known as *class against class*. Social

democracy was defined as the main enemy. Then, in the mid-1930s, the PCB-KPB followed the U-turn called for by the Popular Front strategy, which was cautiously¹⁷ endorsed at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935 after the Dimitrov Report.¹⁸ On 21 and 22 April 1935, “under the sign of severe self-criticism”¹⁹, the PCB-KPB condemned its sectarian course at a national conference. The PCB-KPB made an attempt to appease socialist organisations, but it did not succeed in creating a dynamic union similar to those achieved in Spain and France. Nevertheless, adopting a unifying anti-fascist line, the party gained political and electoral appeal at a time of social and political polarisation in Europe and Belgium. Its membership rose to 8,500 in 1936 and reached 10,000 in 1939, up from 1,500 in 1934.

At the 1936 elections, the Communist Party won nine seats in the House of Representatives, compared with three in 1932. This phase of the anti-fascist Popular Front was disrupted and then upended by the announcement of the German-Soviet pact. On 22 August 1939, when the opening of negotiations between the Reich and the USSR was announced, the Comintern made it clear that the pact in preparation in no way excluded “*the possibility and necessity of an agreement between England-France-Soviet Union for joint resistance against aggressors*” and that the Communist parties “*must continue with even greater energy their anti-fascist struggle against aggressors, and above all German fascism*”.²⁰ And on 21 August, the PCB-KPB warned again: “*Were Hitler to attack Belgium, the communists would be in the front line to defend (it) with arms in hand*”.²¹

Similarly, in the chamber, the party’s general secretary, Xavier Relecom, spoke of the “*fair war*” being waged by Poland. Although the communists

14. “Les “amis de l’exploité” après”, 49.

15. “Belgium”, in: The Communist International, *Between the fifth and the sixth World Congress. A report on the position in all sections of the World Communist Party*, London, 1928, 180-181.

16. CHARLES PLISNIER, *Faux passeports*, Brussels, 1991.

17. FRIDRIKH I. FIRSOV, HARVEY KLEHR, JOHN EARL HAYNES, *Secret Cables of the Comintern, 1933–1943*, New Haven, 2014, 53-54.

18. *Vllth Congress of the Communist International, Abridged stenographic. Report of Proceedings*, Moscow, 1939.

19. *Le Drapeau rouge*, 27 April 1935.

20. “Télégramme de Dimitrov à Maurice Thorez, Jacques Duclos et Eugen Fried”, in BERNHARD H. BAYERLEIN, MIKHAIL NARINSKI, BRIGITTE STUDER, SERGE WOLIKOW, *Moscou-Paris-Berlin. Télégrammes chiffrés du Komintern (1939-1941)*, Paris, 2003, 60.

21. *La Voix du peuple*, 26 Augustus 1939.

refused to vote for the government because of its policy of neutrality and anti-grassroots practices, they did vote in favour of the national defence plans. But the European communist parties, which had not grasped the extent of the reorientation of the political situation in the wake of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, had to adapt their behaviour and rhetoric. On 13 September, the party's Central Committee endorsed the shift: *"Our country (...) must not become the plaything of either Hitler's Germany or Chamberlain's England"*.²²

On 26 September, the PCB-KPB rejected Germany and the United Kingdom back to back: *"We do not want to die for Hitler or for Chamberlain"*.²³ Internally, the pact had not dramatically affected the Communist Party. Few members and supporters distanced themselves.²⁴ Externally, the Communist Party was caught "offside" politically and increasingly repressed

During the first months of the occupation, the PCB-KPB's stance towards the German authorities was one of accommodation mixed with social resistance. However, at the beginning of 1941, the situation changed in Moscow where the leaders were worried about German power. The policy of accommodation was abandoned and the groundwork for a new direction was laid. The fight for "national independence" became the key issue. On 27 February 1941, Andrei Zhdanov judged that the Communist parties had been slow to take up the national question: *"We were wrong on the national question. We have not drawn enough attention to national movements"*.²⁵

On 26 April, the Executive Committee of the CI sent a directive to the French Communist Party urging it to create a *"broad national front to fight*

for independence".²⁶ On 22 June 1941, the invasion of the Soviet Union confirmed the turning point. In two days, the CI Secretariat outlined the new position in *"Basic Tactical Principles for the Occupied Capitalist Countries"* and communicated it to communist parties at the beginning of July. No more 'no London, no Berlin'. No more Socialist revolution: *"Keep in mind that at the given stage the question is about defence of peoples against fascist enslavement and not about socialist revolution"*.²⁷

According to this new position, communist parties had to be at the forefront of the struggle for national independence. The PCB-KPB threw itself entirely into the resistance effort and was the linchpin of the Independence Front, which was founded in March 1942. This period of integration in the national framework lasted until early 1947.

IV. A turbulent political context

In Belgium, the end of the war took place in a specific context. The liberation of most of the territory was very rapid, raising the question of political transition. Since 1940, the King had been unable to reign and his possible return to the throne caused political turmoil. For socialists and Catholics, ensuring that people forgot the troubled atmosphere in the build-up to the war and, sometimes, during the conflict, and closing off the political system to "novelties" was crucial. In the Catholic pillar, fear was expressed towards the Belgian Democratic Union (UDB).²⁸ As for the socialists, it was the unprecedented influence of the Communist Party that vexed them and their leadership wished to nip this new influence in the

22. *La Voix du peuple*, 16 September 1939.

23. *La Voix du peuple*, 26 September 1939.

24. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, "Guerre et libération, jalons pour une étude", in: Collectif d'histoire et d'études marxistes, *Le parti communiste de Belgique (1921-1944)*, 101.

25. SERGE WOLIKOW, *L'Internationale communiste (1919-1943). Le Komintern ou le rêve déchu du pari mondial de la révolution*, Paris, 2010, 131.

26. *Ibid.*, 131.

27. Quoted by FRIDRIKH I. FIRSOV, HARVEY KLEHR, JOHN EARL HAYNES, *Secret Cables*, 185.

28. WILFRIED BEERTEN, *Le rêve travailliste en Belgique. Histoire de l'Union démocrate belge*, Brussels, 1990.

bud. Between the summer of 1944 and the spring of 1947, the newly-formed Belgian Socialist Party (PSB-BSP) and its affiliated organizations worked diligently to this end.

The Belgian Communist Party enjoyed a moment of “*great moral prestige*”²⁹ after the war and the image of the Soviet Union was overly positive. The PCB-KPB had been at the forefront of the political, military and social resistance and welcomed many protagonists who wanted to join the fight against the Nazis among its ranks. At the end of the war, the PCB-KPB believed that it would become one of the “big” parties on the same footing as its Catholic and socialist political opponents; a party that would be as imposing as its sister party, the French Communist Party (PCF).

At the same time, the PCB-KPB had to face several new and difficult challenges. The most significant one, as it affected its actions, was the lack of experienced executives and leaders. The party had paid a very heavy price for participating in the resistance. Of the 35 members and candidates of the Central Committee (CC) elected in 1939, only five escaped death and deportation. Furthermore, four tried and tested leaders were relieved of their responsibilities for questionable behaviour in 1943, after the arrest of most of the members of the CC.³⁰

Following this German operation, Edgar Lalmand was appointed General Secretary of the party.

Together with Jean Terfve and Raymond Dispy, Lalmand was the main protagonist of the communist leadership in the post-war period³¹, along with the emissary of the Comintern to the PCB-KPB, the Hungarian Andor Berei.³²

This death of its leaders came at a time when the Communist Party was experimenting with a number of innovations in its lifespan.³³ The first was government participation. Even before the end of the war, the PCB-KPB had been asked to join a national unity executive. It is an understatement to say that the request received a cold reception. It was primarily the socialist leadership that had been behind this request as they feared the communists’ newly-gained influence.³⁴ But it was also strongly encouraged by Moscow in the context of promoting the policies of “national independence”³⁵ and “production first”³⁶, as well as the establishment of a lasting peace between the allies; sometimes the USSR, Great Britain, the USA and France³⁷, sometimes the USSR, the USA and Great Britain.³⁸ It was not just a question of peace, but also of not falling under the economic, political, military and cultural domination of the United States.³⁹ Of course, Belgium was not an isolated case. After the war, communist parties in Germany, Austria, Finland, France, Italy, Luxembourg and, very briefly, Norway took part in their respective national governments at a time when European communist parties were gaining ground in national elections (Table 1).

29. *Ibid.*, 32.

30. Pierre Joye, Joseph Leemans, Xavier Relecom and Georges Van den Boom.

31. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, “Guerre et libération, jalons pour une étude”, in: Collectif d’histoire et d’études marxistes, *Le parti communiste de Belgique (1921-1944)*, 77.

32. “Berei Andor”, notice in *Le Maitron* (<https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article50003>).

33. MOGENS N. PEDERSEN, “Towards a New Typology of Party Lifespans and Minor Parties”, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 5(1), 1982, 1-16.

34. MARTIN CONWAY, *Les chagrins de la Belgique. Libération et reconstruction politique 1944-1947*, Brussels, 102.

35. Parti communiste de Belgique, *Les tâches du parti communiste de Belgique à la veille des combats décisifs pour la libération du pays. Résolution du CC*, April 1944, Centres des archives du communisme en Belgique (CArCoB).

36. “Théorie et action”, *Rénovation*, October-November 1945, 5.

37. EDGAR LALMAND, *Le parti communiste de Belgique dans sa lutte pour la libération, rapport présenté au comité central du PCB pour la libération le 21 octobre 1944*, CArCoB, 6-7.

38. JEAN TERFVE, *Vers la rénovation de la Belgique. Rapport présenté au comité central élargi du PCB*, 12 août 1945, éditions populaires (unpaginated).

39. WIDUKIND DE RIDDER, “De communistische subjectiviteit onder de Koude Oorlog: de uitsluitingen uit de Kommunistische Partij van België (1944-1956)”, *Revue belge d’Histoire contemporaine*, 2006, 1-2, 161.

		1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951
PCI	Italy			18,9		31,0 *			
PCF	France		26,1	26,2 & 28,6					25,9
PCB-KPB	Belgium			12,7			7,5	4,7	
CPN	The Netherlands		10,6			7,7			
KPL	Luxemburg		11,1			14,3			3,2
LKDL	Finland		23,5			20,0			21,6
NKP	Norway	11,9					5,8		
VP	Sweden	10,3				6,3			
DKP	Denmark		12,5		6,8			4,6	
S	Iceland			19,5			19,5		
KPD	Germany						5,7		
KPÖ	Austria		5,4				5,1		
PdT	Switzerland				5,1				2,7
CPGB	United Kingdom		0,4					0,3	0,1

Table 1: Electoral Results of communist parties in Western Europe (1944–1951), in percentages. PCI 1948 percentage represents the Union of communists and socialists. Source: Compiled by the author from documents from the Centre des Archives du communisme en Belgique (CARCoB), Archives of the Institut Emile Vandervelde, State Archives of Belgium, and from newspapers at the Belgian National Library).

The prospect of joining the executive was discussed at length at the first non-underground meeting of the CC on September 23, 1944, when the Pierlot government had just returned from London. The communist leaders feared this invitation. They interpreted it as a trap but also felt it betrayed their identity. “*The participation of the party comes at a particularly difficult time and it is necessary to explain to the masses that the Communists in the government remain the soldiers of the party*” stated Jean Terfve⁴⁰, author of the introductory report. Edgar Lalmand did not show any enthusiasm for what was clearly a poorly thought through perception of Belgian communist culture:

“We cannot insist enough on the dangers we must guard against in the presence of our party’s participation in the government. Our possibilities are not conditioned by the number of ministers we have in government, and it would be absolutely wrong to believe that it is the

ministers who will become the vanguard of the party from now on (...). It would be dangerous to go down this road, because we would then be like the other parties who subordinate everything to parliamentary successes.”⁴¹

Nevertheless, on September 24, 1944, the PCB-KPB joined the government, still led by the Catholic Hubert Pierlot. This minimalist participation in an unpopular executive may seem surprising. Historian Martin Conway was amazed at the ease with which the Communist Party accepted the offer, even though it was fraught with difficulties: “*Perhaps the most surprising element of the September events was that the Communists accepted to play a minority role in the new government.*”⁴² On the other hand, the speed of the liberation of Belgium removed all illusions of a long-dreamed-of national uprising and the Communist Party really had no other ‘ready-made formula’ according to José Gotovitch.⁴³

40. “Comité central du parti communiste de Belgique du 23 septembre 1944”, Jean Terfve Archives, CARCoB.

41. *Ibid.*

42. MARTIN CONWAY, *Les chagrins*, 103.

43. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, *Du rouge au tricolore. Les communistes belges de 1939 à 1944. Un aspect de la résistance en Belgique*, Brussels, 1992, 359.

The PCB-KPB inherited the Ministry of Public Health, to which Albert Marteaux was appointed as minister, while Raymond Dispy was appointed as “minister without portfolio”. The communist Fernand Demany also joined the Minister’s Council but without a portfolio and as leader of the *Front de l’Indépendance* (FI). After an eventful demonstration at the end of November 1944, the PCB-KPB left the executive in December and returned a few weeks later in a government led this time by the Socialist Achiel Van Acker. Albert Marteaux again became Minister of Public Health, while the Party’s Secretary General, Edgar Lalmand, was promoted to the perilous post of Minister of Supply. After a one-week hiatus in March 1946 following the national elections, the Communist Party entered a new coalition with the socialists and Liberals. Jean Borremans inherited Public Works, Edgar Lalmand retained Supply, Jean Terfve became Minister of Reconstruction and Public Health, and Albert Marteaux inherited the Ministry of the Family.

Internally, the party had to deal with an unprecedented influx of new members. The arrival of these members took place in two stages. During the war, the PCB-KPB saw workers disappointed with the Belgian Workers’ Party (POB-BWP)⁴⁴, formally dissolved by Hendrik de Man in the summer of 1940, seeking to join it.⁴⁵ But members of the middle classes and intellectuals also accompanied him in his resistance against the Nazi occupiers. The aftermath of the war saw an explosion in the party’s membership figures. Before the war, the PCB-KPB had reached a peak of some 10,000 members. Within a few months, tens of thousands of members joined the party. From 11,000 members in 1944, the membership of the PCB-KPB soared to almost 88,000 in 1945 (Table 5).

The Communist Party was thus confronted with two new challenges: participation in government and a shift in the organisational paradigm. It also had to assist the trade union change to the left. During the war, taking advantage of the vacuum that appeared in several sectors of the Belgian General Confederation of Labour (CGTB), the Communist Party established Trade Union Struggle Committees (CLS). In October 1944, these merged into the Belgian Central of Unified Trade Unions (CBSU), dominated by the PCB-KPB and its main trade union figure, Theo Dejace.⁴⁶ In this sphere, which was so crucial for the Communist Party, the disappearance of many pre-war trade union leaders had a considerable impact. Some witnesses of the time pointed specifically to this sector. “*The mass arrests of 1943 are, from this point of view, a disaster. Most of the witnesses to the rich trade union experiences of the 1930s had physically disappeared, and the few survivors were hardly listened to*” wrote Jean Blume in his memoirs.⁴⁷ “*From then on, applying the French strategy to Belgium to the letter, like a copy and paste, was ineffective and counterproductive. It was necessary to do it differently. And those in the PCB who knew the realities of the trade unions and the pre-war workers’ movement were unfortunately boycotted during the Lalmand period because they were considered undisciplined*”, remarked the future president of the PCB-KPB, Louis Van Geyt.⁴⁸

The Communist Party, unenthusiastically and in the belief that it could compete with the socialists, agreed to a merging of the trade union structures close to it and the Socialist CGTB. The General Federation of Labour of Belgium (FGTB-ABVV) was created at a merger congress between four trade union federations: the CGTB, the CBSU, the Unified Trade Union Movement (MSU)⁴⁹ and the United General Union of Public Services

44. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, “Guerre et libération”, 67.

45. PASCAL DELWIT, *La vie politique en Belgique de 1830 à nos jours*, Brussels, 2022, 200.

46. RIK HEMMERIJCKX, LUC PEIREN, WOUTER STEENHOUT, “Le mouvement syndical socialiste pendant la seconde guerre mondiale”, in JEAN-JACQUES MESSIAEN, LUC PEIREN (Eds), *Un siècle de solidarité. 1898-1998. Histoire du syndicat socialiste*, Brussels, 1997, 71.

47. JEAN BLUME, *Drôle d’agenda. Tome 1*, Brussels, 1985, 156.

48. *Libres entretiens avec Jean Lemaître, Louis Van Geyt. La passion du trait d’union. Regards croisés sur le parti communiste de Belgique (1945-1985)*, Arquennes, 2015, 135.

49. RIK HEMMERIJCKX, “Le Mouvement syndical unifié et la naissance du renardisme”, *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 1119-1120, 1986, 19-20.

(SGUSP). The MSU was formed during the war as the result of a merger between the Metalworkers' Federation of Liège and the CLS of the Liège metallurgical industry. As for the SGUSP, it had initially resulted from a merger between various sectors of the CGTB active in the public sector. In 1943, they established the General Union of Public Services (SGSP). Faced with the growing importance of the CLS, the SGSP also coordinated with them and eventually agreed on a Walloon-side merger.⁵⁰ However, the contribution of the four federations was uneven. The merger took place on the following basis: 248,259 members for the CGTB, 165,968 for the CBSU, 59,535 for the MSU and 51,789 for the SGUSP. If the organic link between socialist trade unionism and the PSB-BSP had been critically weakened, the Communist Party struggled to contain a large-scale campaign to undermine communist influence within the FGTB-ABVV.⁵¹

For the PCB-KPB, the situation was exhilarating, but also highly complex to manage. Since the parliamentary vote in the summer of 1945 on the impossibility of continuing Leopold III's reign, Belgian politics had been polarised by the State-Church cleavage⁵² without the protagonists necessarily having wanted this evolution. Socialists, communists and liberals faced the Christian Social Party (PSC-CVP), exceptionally in the opposition. At the same time, the socialists attempted to undercut the communist aura. The first parliamentary elections were delayed as long as possible by Van Acker. Several PSB-BSP leaders kept in touch with the PSC-CVP leaders. In the end, the first national elections did not take place until February 1946.

In this first electoral trial by fire, the communist leaders expected a striking result. The campaign was feverish and the PCB-KPB hoped to finally

get the recognition it felt it deserved. The party presented the result as a spectacular success, but this was not really the case. On February 17, 1946, the Communist Party won 12.5% of the votes nationwide. They performed most strongly in Wallonia where the Communists reached 21.47%. The results in the Charleroi-Mons axis, in the Liège district, in Brussels and also in Tournai and its periphery were significant. Conversely, the score in Flanders confirmed the Communist Party's limited appeal in the north of Belgium. With the exception of Antwerp, the Aalst region and Ghent, the PCB-KPB was not a key political player in Flanders. It received barely 5% of the votes.⁵³

Despite satisfied public pronouncements in the wake of the election, the result was a bitter disappointment for the communist leaders. The result ensured it overtook the Liberal Party (PL-LP) as the third party of the kingdom, but the PCB-KPB had expected to assert itself as a key player and win several dozen seats, which did not happen. The disappointment was immense at all levels. A process of internal reorganisation was set in motion, but the Communist Party lost much of the momentum that had accompanied it since liberation.

The election also revealed the complexity of maintaining an anti-clerical front. The parliamentary majority was tenuous and hung by thread in the senate. In the PSB-BSP, President Max Buset was under pressure from Van Acker and Spaak to change the majority. The government's path was strewn with challenges. In the summer, the Political Bureau (PB) met regularly to assess its continuation in the executive after a senate vote that put the government in the minority. Quitting the government became an increasingly favoured option. *"As far as leaving the government is concerned, (I am) convinced that the break would cause relief among the working masses"*, said Georges

50. RIK HEMMERIJCKX, "Les syndicats des services publics et la résistance en Belgique", in ROBERT VANDENBUSSCHE (Ed.) *Les services publics et la Résistance en zone interdite et en Belgique (1940-1944)*, Lille, 2018, 54.

51. GEORGES DEBUNNE, *J'ai eu mon mot à dire*, Brussels, 1988, 14.

52. PASCAL DELWIT, "Les clivages et la structuration des systèmes partisans", *Pouvoirs*, 179(4), 2021, 6.

53. PASCAL DELWIT, "Des Golden Sixties électorales pour le parti communiste de Belgique?", *Cahiers marxistes*, 222, 2002, 25-40.

Glineur.⁵⁴ The “masses consider that we have become like the others”, added Bert Van Hoorick.⁵⁵ In the spring, a series of social movements shook the foundations of the Communist Party. Some communist meetings in Liège or Charleroi were held in a “stormy atmosphere”.⁵⁶

However, not all leaders shared this pessimistic assessment or the willingness to abandon the government. Politically, this choice was considered risky. “There is a danger that a reactionary government will be formed after our departure”, argued Jean Borremans.⁵⁷ During the entire month of July, the pressure was on. But, at the beginning of August, the political crisis was resolved. While the formation of a Social-Christian/Socialist executive seemed imminent, the Socialist-Liberal-Communist coalition was re-launched with a new Prime minister, Camiel Huysmans, a veteran of Flemish socialism.

In this context, the forthcoming municipal elections were not given any specific attention. In the handful of subsequent biographies, it is hardly ever mentioned by any of the protagonists⁵⁸ and observations are rare in academic works.⁵⁹ On July 8, in the PB, the Secretary General briefly echoed to these local elections, but only in relation to the national political situation. “We are approaching municipal elections, the results of which will go far beyond the framework of the communes and will influence the situation of the country and the kind of government we will have in the future”, warned Edgar Lalmand.⁶⁰ And other mentions only referred

to their national or organisational scope. “The local elections must correct the bad results of the legislative elections” Raymond Dispy said significantly.⁶¹

The establishment of the Huysmans government solved the political problem of the summer, but economically and politically, many difficulties remained. The increase in the price of coal and the question of rents came up repeatedly. The PCB-KPB executives reported different views. “Criticism is directed above all at the salaries of parliamentarians and ministers, even among our comrades, and discontent, instead of being directed against the capitalists and the reaction, is directed against the party”, said Neuray from Liège at the CC session of August 27–28, 1946.⁶² “Participation is strongly discussed” confirmed René Beelen.⁶³ “The working class has the impression that we are going backwards and forwards”, said Verdoodt.⁶⁴ “Even leading comrades are no longer sure whether we should participate in the government or not”, added Minnaert.

The centrality of the political context and the social issue, as well as the attitude of the Communist Party towards its relationship to power, overshadowed all other concerns, including the party’s organisational issues and the forthcoming municipal elections. At the end of the summer, in his reply to the debate on the political situation, Edgar Lalmand did not once mention the approaching local elections, even though the party was struggling to function effectively.

54. Georges Glineur, Speech to the Political Bureau on 8 July 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

55. Bert Van Hoorick, Speech to the Political Bureau on 8 July 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

56. MARTIN CONWAY, *Les chagrins*, 297.

57. Jean Borremans, Speech to the Political Bureau on 8 July 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

58. PIERRE VERMEYLEN, *Mémoires sans parenthèses*, Brussels, 1985; JEAN BLUME, *Drôle d’agenda*. Grippa echoes this very laconically: Jacques Grippa. *Chronique d’une époque 1930-1947*, Antwerp, 1988, 364; ANDRÉ DE STAERCKE, “*Tout cela a passé comme une ombre*”. *Mémoires sur la régence et la question royale*, Brussels, 2003.

59. For example, in his treatment of the 1944-1950 period, Vincent Dujardin does not mention the November 1946 municipal elections once. VINCENT DUJARDIN, “La régence. 1944-1950. Les clés d’une Belgique nouvelle”, in MICHEL DUMOULIN, VINCENT DUJARDIN, EMMANUEL GÉRARD, MICHEL VAN DEN WIJNGAERT (Eds), *Nouvelle histoire de Belgique*, Brussels, 2006, 103-189. Martin Conway makes only a brief reference to it to pinpoint Christian Social success; MARTIN CONWAY, *Les chagrins*, 451.

60. PCB-KPB, Political Bureau on 8 July 1947, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

61. Raymond Dispy, Speech to the Political Bureau on 8 July 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

62. Comité central du parti communiste de Belgique, 27-28 Augustus 1946, Central Committee Archives, CArCoB.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*

Many of the party's leading players had their work cut out participating in the national government, which was problematic as the PCB-KPB was plagued by a lack of intermediate, transversal and vertical leadership; the General Secretary's participation in the government deepened the complications. In the summer of 1946, the question of whether he should remain in the executive was even raised. *"It is certain that the Party lacks leaders and suffers from the absence of Lalmand"*, confessed the president Julien Lahaut.⁶⁵ *"From the point of view of the party's policy, isn't he more useful as a leader of the party not participating in the government?"* queried the Moscow delegate, Geroe⁶⁶, who clearly did not favour the current scheme and he lamented a few days later that it was *"regrettable that it is not possible to remove Lalmand"*.⁶⁷ Yet, everyone also considered his presence in the government politically unavoidable, given the highly fluid nature of the political situation and the internal PSB-BSP battle. Lalmand remained in the executive at the cost of a breakdown in the party's organisational structure.

The dysfunctionality of the federations and lack of central organization were regularly lamented. Sometimes, the situation deteriorated completely. In Liège, a real internal cold war prevailed to the point that the PB had to confront the problem. In a report presented on July 22, Joseph Thonet severely criticised both the federal president Louis Neuray⁶⁸, who was held in low esteem by Julien Lahaut and Théo Dejace⁶⁹, and his opponents Massart, Marcel Baywir and René Bernimoulin.⁷⁰ Ernest Burnelle succeeded Neuray.

It was not until the end of October that the subject of "municipal elections" finally appeared as an item on the agenda. At the PB of October 19, Georges Glineur's report on the issue was alarming. The party expected to run candidates – alone or in alliance – in 1,350 localities, then 1,200, then 1,100.⁷¹ There was much that could still go wrong. The federations had all lowered their standards and, fifteen days before the submission of the lists, the confirmed total number of communists on the ballots amounted to only 540.

The atmosphere was gloomy. *"There is very little agitation. The preparation of our election campaign once again reveals the weakness of our leadership and organisation. The cronies do not know their municipalities and are unable to carry out their programmes"* lamented Bert Van Hoorick.⁷² Glineur was asked to present an encouraging and energising report to the CC, far from its actual expectations. In it, he again announced the objective of a communist presence in 1,350 communes. But this voluntarism met with considerable scepticism. Several officials reported numerous difficulties.

While the Communist Party pleaded for lists of *Entente Démocratique* with the PSB-BSP and the PL-LP, the socialists doused its attempts, doing all they could to avoid a coalition with the PCB-KPB. In socialist milieux, this was not always easy to hear. In small and medium-sized municipalities, such a union could lead to the overthrow of a Social Christian mayor. Moreover, it was not always easy to submit a complete socialist list. But the socialist leaders did not care. In the

65. Julien Lahaut, Speech to the Political Bureau on 21 July 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

66. Clevely (Geroe), Speech to the Political Bureau on 21 July 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

67. Clevely (Geroe), Speech to the Political Bureau on 23 July 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

68. *"Neuray's attitude cannot be questioned during the occupation. But the CC draws the attention of the PB to the particularly serious situation that developed in Liege, for which Neuray bears a large part of the responsibility. He has failed to organise collective leadership. The PB should consider what changes to make to the federal leadership"* suggests Thonet. Report by Joseph Thonet, Political Bureau of the PCB on 22 July 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

69. Julien Lahaut & Theo Dejace, Speeches to the Political Bureau on 22 July 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

70. Report by Joseph Thonet, *op. cit.*

71. Report by Georges Glineur on local elections, Political Bureau on 19 October 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

72. Bert Van Hoorick, Speech to the Political Bureau on 19 October 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

Tournai federation of the PSB-BSP, the leadership reminded local activists who called for an alliance underlined the danger “of allowing such a practice to develop”, arguing “that everything possible should be done to fight on homogeneous Socialist lists, even if they were incomplete”.⁷³

The generalised socialist refusal to compose union lists; the lack of follow-up in local sections by the federations⁷⁴; the sluggishness of checks at the central level; and the professional fears of running for office on the part of several members⁷⁵ were all significant complications. The communal ballots revealed more than ever a clear political point in Belgian communist practice: the primacy of social action and, consequently, of political work in companies. The political dynamic was based more on the logic of the cell – political activity in the workplace – than on the section – political activity in the place of residence.⁷⁶ “The link of action is in the factory, not like in the PSB on an electoral basis”, emphasised Jean Borremans.⁷⁷ There were few personalities who had significant local influence. Unlike the French or Italian communists, the PCB-KPB never really viewed the commune as a determining lever of its political action or in the setting up of a counter-society⁷⁸ according to Annie Kriegel’s categorisation of the PCF.⁷⁹ There was no “little Moscow”⁸⁰ in Belgium. This focus on companies and the working class distracted the Communist Party from any investment at the local level and from identifying possible suitable local personalities to preach the party message

As a matter of fact, the party was wary of people who had garnered local reputations. As Edgar Lalmand asserted to the BP, “Local popularity is not always very healthy”.⁸¹ The municipal election was therefore only assessed in indirect ways: a victory of “democracy” over “reaction”, the ability to achieve organisational goals and even, according to the General Secretary, an assessment of the international situation: “The results of the elections will have a profound influence on the situation in our country and it can even be said that they will have international significance.”⁸²

Basically, there was no real party strategy for the election. This was the case, for example, with the desired coverage. At the October PB, Van Hoorick advocated a policy of concentrating the party’s activities in the most important municipalities. On the contrary, Edgar Lalmand pushed for maximum coverage. The question of leaders in the municipalities was also chaotic. For the Secretary General of the party, the national leaders should not be involved because it was necessary to “manage to detach oneself from (his’s/hers) region”⁸³, which would not prevent him from holding the head position of the list in the commune of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean.

In the end, the Communist Party was far from the 1,350 presences expected, and even from the 1,000 that would have been a high standard according to Glineur. According to its own initial data, the Communist Party announced 810 pres-

73. Parti socialiste belge, *Procès-verbal de la séance du Comité fédéral du 12 octobre 1946 de la fédération de Tournai-Ath-Mouscron*, fédération de Tournai-Ath-Mouscron du PSB-BSP, Archives of the Institut Emile Vandervelde.

74. “In the communes I visited in the Ardennes, with a technical assistant, we noticed that some communes were really abandoned, without any contact with the federation” Neuray points out.

75. “In the section where I am godfather, Verviers, we received a letter for which several comrades evaded the need to create a list under the most fallacious pretexts” complains Jean Taillard.

76. Maurice Duverger, *Les partis politiques*, Paris, 1981 (10th édition), 37.

77. Jean Borremans, Speech to the Central Committee on 22 December 1946, Jean Terfve Archives, CArCoB.

78. STÉPHANE COURTOIS, MARC LAZAR, *Histoire du parti communiste français*, Paris, 1995, 14; PIERRE BROUÉ, “Spartakisme, bolchévisme, gauchisme face aux problèmes de la révolution prolétarienne en Allemagne (1918-1923)”, *Le Mouvement social*, 84, 1973, 94; DANIEL-LOUIS SEILER, *La politique comparée*, Paris, 1982, 103.

79. ANNIE KRIEDEL, *Communismes au miroir français. Temps, cultures et sociétés en France devant le communisme*, Paris, 1974, 181.

80. JULIAN MISCHI, “The French Communist Party and the working classes (1920s-1970s): A perspective from local activism”, *French Politics*, 10(2), 2012, 168.

81. Edgar Lalmand, Speech to the Political Bureau on 4 November 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

82. Edgar Lalmand, Speech to the Central Committee on 26 October 1946, Central Committee Archives, CArCoB.

83. Edgar Lalmand, Speech to the Political Bureau on 4 November 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

ences. These were broken down into 551 homogeneous Communist lists, 139 contributions to a Socialist-Liberal-Communist list, 103 Socialist-Communist lists and 17 contributions to a Local Interest list.

In his paper, José Gotovitch differs somewhat. He announces 838 lists. This is another total announced internally on the basis of an update of the transmissions from the federations: 542 Communist lists in the strict sense, 139 in coalition with the PSB-BSP and the PL-LP, 105 cartels with the PSB-BSP and 36 insertions in Local Interest lists.⁸⁴

Based on the compilation of the electoral data, the data available in the Communist archives, in the archives of the other parties, the results collected from the municipalities and the *archives de l'Etat*, we present a somewhat different picture. It should be stressed at the outset that the reconstruction work was difficult. There is no official database of election results and the ideological qualification of lists is not always easy to carry out. Moreover, in the archives of the Communist Party, there is no homogeneity on the issue depending on the time and the source: in particular, in some cases, a list is announced as *Entente Démocratique* while occasionally it is presented as an alliance with the PSB-BSP alone or as a list of Local Interests.⁸⁵

According to our estimates, the Communist Party was present in 865 communes: it ran autonomously in 574 communes, in alliance with the PSB-BSP in 100 communes, in alliance with the PSB-BSP and the PL-LP in 143 localities, in a cartel with the PL-LP in two communes and on a Local Interests list in 34 instances. In addition, the PCB-KPB won at least one seat in 12 communes where there was no electoral competition (Table 2). Very occasionally, the Communist Party was able to win a seat on a list labelled as Socialist

without it being a cartel list, but this does not constitute a Communist participation in the election.⁸⁶

As expected, the Communist Party submitted the most autonomous lists in its strongest areas: the industrial areas of Liège, Charleroi, Mons-Borinage, Brussels plus, more recently, in Western Hainaut. On the other hand, union lists with the Socialist Party or with the Socialist Party and the Liberal Party were mainly seen in Wallonia and in the territories of the fight against the PSC-CVP: in the boot of Hainaut, in the Namur Region and the province of Luxembourg, as well as in the current Walloon Brabant. In Flanders, the lists of the *Entente Démocratique* or of the alliance with the Socialists were virtually absent from the competition: we counted only 28 lists of the *Entente Démocratique* and 13 lists of the union with the Socialists (Table 2).

V. A national campaign and still married with the seal of war

For the PCB-KPB, the short electoral campaign regularly unfolds from two angles: a global approach and a local focus, commune by commune. In line with its approach and organisational way of functioning, the Communist Party focused its campaign on the first register. The battle was national in essence and tailored to the specific political context. The Huysmans government was fragile. In the PSB-BSP, several leaders pleaded for an alliance with the Catholics.⁸⁷ For its part, the PSC-CVP wanted to show its strength in this election, where it was traditionally well rooted. The Communist Party wanted to be united for all and to support the sensibility carried by the president of the PSB-BSP Max Buset in its own party. It would even suggest a possible merger between the PCB-KPB and the PSB-BSP.⁸⁸

⁸⁴. Surprisingly, the total does not equal 838. This proves the fluidity of information around the municipal election inside PCB-KPB.

⁸⁵. *Le Drapeau rouge*, 15 November 1946.

⁸⁶. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, "Le parti communiste et les élections communales 1926-1952", 303.

⁸⁷. ELS WITTE, ALAIN MEYNEN, "Het naoorlogse herstelbeleg (1944-1950)", in: ELS WITTE, ALAIN MEYNEN e.a., *De geschiedenis van België na 1945*, Antwerp, 2006, 30.

⁸⁸. JEAN TEREVE, "The Communist Party", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 247, 1946, 20.

	PCB	PCB-PSB	PCB-PSB-PL	PCB-PL	IC	No Election	
Hainaut	202	29	34		6	5	276
Liège	108	20	9	1	9	1	148
Luxembourg	14	10	35				59
Namur	51	11	24		4	4	94
Walloon Brabant	28	17	16	1	3		65
Brussels	19						19
Flemish Brabant	29	4	15		3		51
Antwerp	27	2			1		30
Western Flanders	41	2	5		2		50
Eastern Flanders	46	2	5		3	1	57
Limburg	9	3	3		3	1	19
	574	100	143	2	34	12	865

Table 2: Participation of the Communist Party in the municipal elections of November 24, 1946. Note: The attachment of the communes to the provinces occurred after the linguistic laws of 1962-1963. Source: see table 1. Calculations made by the author.

Overall, the Communists focused on two axes. First, it was important to “save democracy” from the “reactionary” attack. “The success of the Communist Party must be considered as a guarantee of firmness, giving the possibility of a truly democratic government which could act effectively for the success of the renovation of the country”, said the General Secretary of the party.⁸⁹ “This left-wing government must be able to renounce a sitting on the fence policy and find the strength to govern against reactionary actions. The municipal elections must be a new beginning for us”, he said emblematically, just before the vote.⁹⁰

The national aspect of the campaign was such that the Communist ministers were concerned about the framework of their intervention in order not be “weakened”. A revealing incident bore witness to this. In the working-class commune of Herstal, Minister Jean Terfve was scheduled to hold a meeting. However, his participation was can-

celled at the last minute, much to the disappointment of the local Communists.⁹¹ When he arrived at the venue, Terfve judged the audience to be insufficient for a minister – about a hundred people – and refused to perform despite his trip. Terfve complained about the “amateurism” of this section that embarrassed the party and its ministers in the government, without however specifying the nature of the embarrassment. More broadly, it was the Liège federation that was targeted: “This exchange of statements, set against the organisational work done, is clear proof that the activity of the Liège federation for many months has been both mediocre and shoddy”.⁹²

Second, it was still important to support and reaffirm the spirit of the resistance and the party associated with it. “Almost all our candidates are RESISTANTS who did not hesitate to risk their lives and their freedom by leading a merciless fight against the invader of our step” concluded

89. *Le Drapeau rouge*, 28 October 1946.

90. *Le Drapeau rouge*, 15 November 1946.

91. The Herstal section of the PCB will vigorously protest against Jean Terfve’s attitude to the central authorities of the party. “Lettre du 16 novembre 1946 de la section de Herstal qui se plaint que Jean Terfve a refusé de faire un meeting devant si peu de personnes”, Jean Terfve Archives, CArCoB.

92. “Lettre de Jean Terfve à Raymond Dispy”, 26 November 1946, Jean Terfve Archives, CArCoB.

the Communist section of Monceau-sur-Sambre in one of its electoral leaflets.⁹³ In the leaflets of the PCB-KPB in Wasmes, many candidates put forward some reference to the war in their short biography: “prisoner of war”, “works in the resistance”, “rendered many services during the occupation to the resistance”, “shelters and places Russian, Polish and Jewish prisoners”.⁹⁴

The PCB-KPB was the formation of regeneration, the party one joins. The few Socialists, and sometimes Liberals, who rallied the PCB-KPBs were highlighted. “These are not the only candidates to be mentioned, there is *Avaux*, former socialist alderman, first candidate in *Boitsfort*, *Nollet*, former socialist alderman, first candidate in *Saint-Josse*; *Van Dooren*, old Socialist activist, candidate in *Aasche*, *Boxus* and *Van Huyneghem*, both from Liberal backgrounds, head of the list in *Etterbeek* and *Jette*. And so on and so forth” pointed out Jean Bertrand, Federal Secretary for Brussels, in his account of the election campaign at the *Drapeau Rouge* (Red Flag).⁹⁵

From a programmatic point of view, the fixation on the local level is very irregular. It only occurred when a section of the Communist Party has been functioning for a long time, which was rather exceptional. For the most of part, this only concerned local situations in the Hainaut and Liège areas, a few Brussels communes, as well as in Aalst.⁹⁶

The most emblematic case was Seraing. The Communist Party had been present there for a long time around its then president, Julien Lahaut. The

communal programme submitted to the elections was one of the most developed and most concrete in the exercise of local competences, as it was also an important commune.⁹⁷ Local developments could also be found in some communes of the Charleroi district. In Goutroux, for example, the Communist Party focused a large part of its campaign on the industrial taxation of the headquarters of the *Société des Charbonnages de Monceau-Fontaine*.⁹⁸

The need for communal sports infrastructures for the practice of sport and youth activities was regularly mentioned.⁹⁹ In general, the most cited and developed communal lever was the revaluation of communal public education, especially important for Primary School. In the general programme that was submitted on the eve of the elections, the Communist Party also insisted on the issues of housing and public health. In the campaign coverage, the need to develop public bathhouses has been stressed many times.¹⁰⁰

In the communal commission at the 8th congress of the PCK-KPB on June 1 and 2, 1946, Albert Marteaux raised the issue of mergers. In his opinion, the great number of communes weakened the “financial possibilities (bad administration)” of the entities. He therefore advocated “the unification of communal credits” and “the inter-communalisation of major public services”.¹⁰¹ This intervention gave rise to a brief and intense discussion, and in view of the reluctance expressed, the point was not included in the programme.

93. Parti communiste, *Elections communales du 24 novembre 1946. Section de Monceau-sur-Sambre*, Centre des archives de Charleroi.

94. Parti communiste de Belgique, section de Wasmes, “Nos candidats”, Fédération du Borinage du PSB-BSP Archives, Archives of the Institut Emile Vandervelde.

95. *Le Drapeau rouge*, 4 November 1946. The *Drapeau rouge* was the Communist French speaking daily newspaper.

96. MARTIN CONWAY, *Les chagrins*, 353.

97. Julien Lahaut, “Nous avons un plan complet de reconstruction de Seraing”, *Le Drapeau rouge*, 2 November 1946.

98. *Le programme financier du parti communiste de Goutroux. Faire payer Monceau-Fontaine pour exonérer de taxe les pensionnés*, Elections communales du 24 novembre 1946, Centre des archives de Charleroi.

99. Parti communiste de Belgique, section de Wasmes, “Notre programme”, Fédération du Borinage du PSB-BSP Archives, Archives of the Institut Emile Vandervelde; Parti communiste de Belgique, section de La Bouverie, “Notre programme”, Fédération du Borinage du PSB-BSP Archives, Archives of the Institut Emile Vandervelde.

100. “Pour la prospérité des communes et la rénovation du pays. Le programme du parti communiste”, *Le Drapeau rouge*, 16 November 1946.

101. Albert Marteaux, Speech to the VIII^e congress of the Communist party of Belgium, 1 & 2 June 1946. “Commission communale”, Congresses Archives, CArCoB.

VI. A true victory?

The Communist results in the communal election were the best the PCB-KPB would ever achieve in a local election. They were much higher than the benchmark until then: the municipal election of 1938.

Overall, the Communist Party obtained its best percentages in the provinces of Hainaut and Liège. In the 187 localities in Hainaut where we were able to find the result, the average score of the communist list was 19.7%. And in the 89 Liège municipalities where we were able to collect data, the average percentage was 20.8%. On the other hand, the result was much weaker on the Flemish side. Not only was the coverage lower, but so was the performance: 4.9% on average in the Antwerp municipalities where the Communist Party presented itself independently, 5.1% in Western Flanders, 7.8% in Eastern Flanders, 3.2% in Limburg and 8.1% in the Flemish part of Brabant (Table 3).

More specifically, the Communist Party scored the highest in areas where it was already strong. In the industrial area of Charleroi, the PCB-KPB achieved some very high percentages: 40% in Goutroux, 38.7% in Bellecourt, 37.8% in Roux, 34.9% in Farciennes, 29.9% in Piéton, 28.7% in La Hestre, 28.6% in Fayt-lez-Manage, 27.6% in Montignies-sur-Sambre, 26.9% in Forchies-la-Marche, 26.8% in Godarville, 25.6% in Dampremy, 24.7% in Ransart, 24.6% in Courcelles and 24.5% in Châtelet, to mention only the most salient examples.

In the Borinage mining area, some results were even more striking: 44.4% in Audregnies, 41.5% in Wasmes, 39.4% in Wihéries, 35.6% in Elouges, 31.1% in Saint-Ghislain, 29.7% in Hensies, 28.4% in Flénu, 28.2% in Frameries, 28.1% in Ghlin and 27.8% in Ciplu.

These peaks were similar in several working-class localities in the Liège district, particularly in the localities of the current commune of Seraing,

	PCB-KPB	Number of communes	PCB-KPB with PSB-BSP	Number of communes	PCB-KPB with PSB-BSP and PL-LP	Number of communes
Brussels	10,60%	19				
Walloon Brabant	17,20%	28	11,80%	17	13,90%	16
Hainaut	19,70%	202	13,20%	29	11,70%	34
Liège	20,80%	108	19,10%	20	10,30%	9
Luxembourg	10,70%	14	10,00%	10	8,50%	35
Namur	14,6%	51	18,80%	11	12,20%	24
Wallonia	19,00%	403	14,20%	87	11,30%	118
Flemish Brabant	8,10%	29	2,40%	4	7,40%	15
Antwerp	4,90%	27	7,50%	2		
Western Flanders	5,10%	41	3,10%	2	6,40%	5
Eastern Flanders	7,80%	46	15,10%	2	8,10%	5
Limburg	3,20%	9	10,70%	3	14,70%	3
Flanders	6,30%	152	6,80%	13	8,20%	28
		574		100		146

Table 3: Average score of the PCB-KPB in the areas where it occurs at the provincial and regional level and according to the configuration of the list. The Communist score is estimated by the proportion of Communist seats in the total number of seats won by the list. Source: see table 1. Calculations made by the author.

where Julien Lahaut was active: 39.7% in Seraing, 39.5% in Bonnelles, 28.4% in Ougrée and 26.1% in Jemeppe-sur-Meuse. The PCB-KPB reached 40.5% in Hognoul and 40.4% in Fooz, 30.8% in Poulseur, 28.7% in Tilff and 26.6% in Tilleur.

In the working-class areas of what is now Walloon Brabant, the Communist Party also obtained some convincing results: 39.7% in Clabecq, 37.6% in Couture-Saint-Germain, 32.1% in Corbaix, 29.6% in Mélin, 23.8% in Marbais or 22.3% in Quenast.

Brussels, especially in its northern and western parts, remained a place of definite penetration: 10.6% on average. The Communist lists reached 15.9% in Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, 15.1% in Jette, 14.1% in Anderlecht and 13% in Brussels. Finally, the extension of the Communist influence was noticeable in Western Hainaut. The PCB-KPB reached 43.3% in Maffle, 38.1% in Warchin, 26.1% in Basècles, 22.5% in Orcq and 21.6% in Ere.

In Luxembourg and Namur, the good Communist scores could be seen more in the form of an archipelago: 30.9% in Belgrade, 29.5% in Vodélé, 25.6% in Ciney, 23.2% in Tellin, 22.1% in Oignies-en-Thiérache, 22% in Blémont or 17.9% in Andenne.

In Flanders, as mentioned before, the Communist Party was a political player with little relevance. Even in the working class areas of Antwerp and Ghent, it only achieved a few good results at best: 14.3% in Burcht, 7.9% in Borsbeek, 7.8% in Hoboken, 5.2% in Antwerp, 7.8% in Wondelgem, and 5.8% in Ghent. The Communist Party only achieved a real presence in some municipalities on the edge of Brussels, such as some of the places that are now part of Aalst – 23.2% in Nieuwerkerken, 13.6% in Aalst, 12.3% in Hofstade, 9.3% in Erembodegem –, Geraardsbergen – 16.2% in Moerbeke and Viane, 14.8% in Geraardsbergen and 9.6% in Idegem –, Ninove –

17.9% in Ninove –, Halle – 15.5% in Halle – and Vilvoorde – 15.2% in Vilvoorde.

How did this electoral result translate politically? In the spring of 1947, in a still provisional report on the situation arising from the local elections, Jean Taillard announced 793 elected members in 452 communes.¹⁰² Later, the same Taillard presented two different totals: sometimes 780 communist councillors, sometimes 800.¹⁰³ José Gotovitch worked on the basis of the latter data: 800 communal councillors, 692 of whom in Wallonia and 36 in Brussels.¹⁰⁴ The latter figure is the number announced for the Brussels federation of the PCB-KPB. However, contrary to what is stated, these were not exclusively elected members from the Brussels territory. The Brussels federation of the PCB-KPB covered municipalities other than those in the Brussels territory itself, in particular part of the municipalities in what is now Flemish Brabant. In the Brussels area strictly speaking, the PCB-KPB only took 29 seats.

To return to this question as accurately as possible, we cross-referenced the various sources available. This was also a complex exercise because the sources in the Communist Archives never lead to exactly the same results. Based on our encoding of the electoral data, the various sources of the Communist Party itself and a systematic encoding of two manual files available at the CARCoB, we count 824 Communist and related councillors. 811 were elected in a Communist-controlled struggle (Table 4). Twelve were elected on a socialist list without reference to a PSB-BSP-PCB-KPB alliance. This was the case, for example, in Xhendremael, where two Communists were present on the PSB list without the approval of the Liège federation of the PCB-KPB. Finally, we did not find the list of the elected representative of Attenhoven.

Among the 811 representatives elected on a list with communist participation, we count 563 on

102. Jean Taillard, Speech to the Political Bureau on 19 April 1947, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CARCoB.

103. JEAN TAILLARD, "L'activité des mandataires provinciaux et communaux communistes", *Rénovation*, 1, 1948, 50.

104. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, "Le parti communiste et les élections communales 1926-1952", 304.

	PCB	PCB-PSB	PCB-PSB-PL	PCB-PL	IC	No Election	
Hainaut	296	28	23		7	8	362
Liège	156	31	14	2	11	2	216
Luxembourg	2	8	16				26
Namur	22	11	19		4	7	63
Walloon Brabant	27	13	19	1	4		64
Brussels	29						29
Flemish Brabant	8		4				12
Antwerp	3						3
Western Flanders	4		2		1		7
Eastern Flanders	16	2	4		2	1	25
Limburg		1	3				4
	563	94	104	3	29	18	811

Table 4: Territory of election of Communist communal representatives in the Local elections of November 1946. Source: Compiled by the author from documents from the CARCoB, the Archives of the city of Charleroi and from newspapers at the Belgian National Library.

an autonomous party list, 94 on an alliance list with the PSB-BSP, 104 within the framework of the *Entente Démocratique*, 29 on a list of Local Interests and 3 on an alliance list between Communists and Liberals. Finally, 18 were elected on a list without electoral competition.

This was the best result the Communist Party had achieved in a local election before the process of merging the municipalities. In 1938, the Communist Party announced 122 elected councillors.¹⁰⁵ And, although it is difficult to compare with the local elections of 1976, 1982 and 1988, after the great process of merging the municipalities, it is undeniable that the Communist penetration was incomparably lower than in 1946.

Taking into account the use of the Imperiali formula for the allocation of seats, three elements affect the ability to take one or more seats. The first is the demographic size of the municipality: the smaller it is, the fewer seats there are to distribute, and the more complex it is to win the first councillor. And vice versa. The second is, of course, the electoral performance, given that the

smaller the municipality is, the higher is the percentage that must be reached in order to win the first seat. Finally, given the electoral constraint, the presence or absence of the PCB-KPB in an electoral alliance plays a role in its ability to win one or more local mandates.

In view of these considerations, the first observation relates to the weak institutionalisation in Flanders. In its contemporary delimitations, the Communist Party only won 51 local councillors in Flanders. This is logical. Not only was its coverage weaker than in Wallonia, but we also noted the virtual absence of electoral cartels. Moreover, the result was on average much weaker than in the Walloon workers pools and in Brussels.

From the point of view of the distribution of mandates, the weak relevance of the party in Flanders, as assessed by Sartori¹⁰⁶, was even more obvious than from the results. In 130 of the 152 Flemish municipalities where the PCB-KPB ran autonomously, it did not win any local councillors. This was the case in seven of the nineteen Brussels municipalities and in 157 of the 403 Walloon municipalities.

105. *La Voix du peuple*, 19 October 1938.

106. GIOVANNI SARTORI, *Partis et systèmes de partis. Un cadre d'analyse*, Brussels, 2011 (1976).

Logically, the Communist Party won the most seats in the municipalities where it was best rooted or in municipalities with a high magnitude. For example, in the fifteen communes of the current city of Charleroi¹⁰⁷, the Communist Party obtained 44 communal councillors versus 109 for the PSB-BSP, 55 for the PSC-CVP and 10 for the PL-LP. In the municipalities of the current communes of Liège¹⁰⁸, Herstal¹⁰⁹, Saint-Nicolas¹¹⁰ and Seraing¹¹¹, the Communist Party won 54 seats, for 134 to the PSB-BSP, 86 to the PSC-CVP and 7 to the PL-LP.

The PCB-KPB won 44.2% of its municipal councillors in Hainaut and 26.8% in the province of Liège. In the provinces of Namur, Walloon Brabant and Luxembourg, the majority of Communist seats were won in the framework of an alliance or on the fringes of the electoral process. In the Brussels municipalities, the Communist Party was far from competing with the three historical parties. For 29 Communist seats, the PSC-CVP claimed 162, the PSB-BSP 129 and the PL-LP 100.

This electoral breakthrough and the polarisation on the State-Church cleavage partly changed the status of the PCB-KPB in political life. For the first time, Communist representatives became mayors. In Roux, now incorporated in Charleroi, Henri Glineur became the first Communist mayor in Belgium in January 1947.

There is some uncertainty about the communist presence in the colleges of mayor and aldermen. In the spring of 1947, Taillard mentioned 125 alder-

men and 15 mayors¹¹² and at the congress of April 1948, participation in 121 communes.¹¹³

According to our research, the Communist Party won twenty mayor positions (Table 4).¹¹⁴ The PCB-KPB cannot claim any 'big trophies'. Most of them were in small localities in terms of population. As will be seen later, the Communist Party failed to take the town hall of Seraing. It appointed six mayors in Hainaut, seven in the province of Liège, one in the province of Luxembourg, two in Brabant and, somewhat surprisingly, five in the province of Namur (Table 5).

The conquest of the communal house of Roux was the most celebrated. Henri Glineur was a senior party leader with long-standing roots in this working-class commune in the Charleroi area, where the Socialist Party was dominant.

The day after the elections, the PCB-KPB also believed it could celebrate its president, Julien Lahaut, in Seraing. Jean Terfve approached the Minister of the Interior, Auguste Buisseret, to try to obtain the most favourable situation. He had known him for a long time, having pursued his legal training with him.¹¹⁵ But despite the striking result of the Lahaut-led list and the status of first party in the municipality, the PCB-KPB faced a Socialist blockade where the opposition to Lahaut was longstanding.¹¹⁶ The issue goes far beyond Seraing and even the district of Liège. *"Not obtaining the sash in Seraing would be a terrible blow to the prestige of the party"* conceded Edgar Lalmand to the PB.¹¹⁷ But for the PSB-BSP,

107. Charleroi, Couillet, Dampremy, Gilly, Gosselies, Goutroux, Jumet, Lodelinsart, Marchienne-au-Pont, Marcinelle, Monceau-sur-Sambre, Mont-sur-Marchienne, Montignies-sur-Sambre, Ransart and Roux.

108. Angleur, Bressoux, Chênée, Glain, Grivegnée, Jupille-sur-Meuse, Liège, Rocourt and Wandre.

109. Herstal, Liers, Milmort and Vottem.

110. Montegnée, Saint-Nicolas and Tilleur.

111. Boncelles, Jemeppe-sur-Meuse, Ougrée and Seraing.

112. Report by Jean Taillard, Political Bureau, CArCoB.

113. Jean Taillard, "Rapport au IX^e congrès du PCB-KPB, avril 1948", Jean Taillard Archives, CArCoB.

114. René Desnos is sometimes mentioned as mayor of Estinnes-au-Mont (ADRIEN THOMAS, *"Une telle indifférence"*.

La présence communiste dans les entreprises belges de l'après-guerre (1945-1948), Mémoire d'histoire à l'Université de Liège, 2014-2015, 122). But the appointed mayor was Bernard Evance.

115. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, *Avocat, chef partisan, député, ministre, Jean Terfve, un "prince" communiste?*, Brussels, 2014, 4.

116. CHANTAL KESTELOOT, "Elections communales 1890-1970. Quelques considérations à propos de l'élaboration d'une banque de données", 356.

117. EDGAR LALMAND, *Speech to the Political Bureau on 14 December 1946*, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

	Mayor	Aldermen		Mayor	Aldermen
Hainaut			Luxembourg		
Roux	Glineur, Henri	1	Herbeumont	Grégoire, Oscar	
Bellecourt	Dagneaux, Louis	2	Arlon		1
Angre	Bertiaux, Gilbert		Aubange		1
Audregnies	Vallée, Fabien	2	Athus		1
Arbre		1	Meix-devant-Virton		1
Warchin	Carette, Paul	2	Virton		1
Calonne	Moerman, Maurice	2	Namur		
Couillet		1	Serinchamp		1
Monceau-sur-Sambre		1	Floreffe	Massinon, Edmond	
Montignies-sur-Sambre		1	Gelbressée	Fisette, Maurice	
Pont-de-Loup		1	Wierde		1
Presles		1	Heers-sur-Meuse	Perpète, Georges	
Godarville		2	Sinsin		1
Piéton		1	Bonneville		1
Thiméon		1	Franc-Waret		1
Fontaine-l'Évêque		1	Jemeppe		1
Montigny-le-Tilleul		1	Pry	Canivet	1
Monceau-Imbrechies		1	Petigny		1
Mons		1	Olloy-sur-Viroin		1
Ghlin		1	Brabant		
Flénu		1	Bossut-Gottechain	Verbanis, Emile	
Havré		1	Anderlecht		1
Mesvin		1	Evere		1
Cuesmes		2	Braine L'Alleud		1
Wasmes		1	Braine-le-Château		1
Élouges		1	Wauthier-Braine		2
Quévy-le-petit		1			
Hensies		1	Ophain		1
Fayt-Lez-Manage		1	Chaumont-Gistoux		1
Baudour		1	Saint-Géry		1
Chercq		1	Nethen		1
Harchies		1	Rebecq-Rognon		1
Peronnes-lez-Antoing		1	Neerheylissem	Vivignis, Louis	2
Tournai		1	Bost		2
Ellezelles		1	Lasne-Ch.-St-Lambert		2
La Glanerie		1	Mont-Saint-André		1

	Mayor	Aldermen		Mayor	Aldermen
Basècles		1	Ottignies		2
Bernissart		1	Tubize		1
Lahamaide		1			
Maurage		1	Eastern Flanders		
Anderlues		1	Ninove		1
Binche		1	Nieuwerkerken		1
Péronnes-lez-Binche		1	Western Flanders		
Ressaix		2	Ninove		1
Erquelinnes		1	Moerbeke-Viane		1
Bersillies-l'Abbaye		1	Avelgem		1
Grand-Reng		1	Limburg		
Montignies-St-Christophe		1	Suilzen		2
Fontaine-Valmont		1			
Carnières		1			
Liège					
Modave	Beaujean, Jules	2			
Anthisnes		1			
Lanaye	Dozot, Charles	1			
Ben-Ahin		1			
Ville-en-Hesbaye	Demoulin, Georges	1			
Antheit		1			
Aineffe	Joiret, Jules				
Engis	Dejong, Hyacinthe				
Vyle-Tharoul	Neuville, Joseph	1			
Liège		2			
Bonnelles	Bosly, Nestor	2			
Bressoux		1			
Glain		1			
Alleur		1			
Pepinster		1			
Ampsin		1			
Embourg		1			
Comblain-au-Pont		1			
Tilff		1			
Retinne		1			
Heure-le-Romain		1			
Vivegnis		1			
Haccourt		1			
Seraing		1			
Ougrée		2			

	Mayor	Aldermen		Mayor	Aldermen
Sprimont (Hornay)		1			
Romsée		1			
Rouvreux		1			
Richelle		1			
Herve		1			
Cornesse		1			
Stavelot		3			
Verviers		1			
Wegnez		1			
Stembert		1			
Latinne		1			

Table 5: Presence of the PCB-KPB in the college of mayor and aldermen. Source: CArCoB.

the issue was just as crucial. The PSB-BSP had been fighting against Communist influence for more than two years and there was no question of having the president of the PCB-KPB as mayor of such an important working-class municipality. In the end, Lahaut would not become mayor, unlike Nector Bosly in Bonnelles, the neighbouring commune.¹¹⁸

The other mayor positions were regularly won within the framework of an alliance list or even in the absence of electoral competition. However, in other circumstances, these were clear Communist victories, such as in Audregnies, Bonnelles, Calonne, Engis or Warchin.

At the same time, according to our estimates, the Communist Party captured 134 aldermen. Contrary to the observation regarding to the mayors, the PCB-KPB entered the college of important municipalities such as Anderlecht, Arlon, Binche, Liège, Mons, Seraing, Tournai and Verviers. This penetration regularly took place in the building of an anti-clerical majority against the PSC-CVP or a workers' majority when the PSB-BSP did not have an absolute majority, as in Seraing, for example, where Lahaut obtained an alderman

mandate. In total, the Communists entered in 123 communal majorities (Table 5).

We were able to find the competences assigned to the Communist aldermen in most cases, but not in all. Public works was by far the most frequent: 60 occurrences. This is followed by Public Instruction (35 occurrences), Finance (21 occurrences), Civil Status (5 occurrences) and Social Works (5 occurrences).¹¹⁹

As expected, this institutionalisation at the communal level primarily concerned Wallonia. We noted this for municipal councillors and the same applies to aldermen and mayors. Nevertheless, it should be noted that under the 1946 conditions, Lanaye – Ternaaien – was integrated into Limburg. The municipality only joined the province of Liège at the time of the last transfer of some municipalities from one region to another, in 1963. Formally, therefore, there was a Communist mayor in Flanders. Similarly, Neerheylissem, which was then assigned to the district of Leuven, was attached to the district of Nivelles in 1963 and to the municipality of Hélécinne when the municipalities were merged. By hypothesis, there would have been two Flemish Communist mayors.

¹¹⁸. *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹. Source: Fédération nationale des mandataires provinciaux et communaux communistes and files I & II of Communist Councillors, CArCoB.

VII. A result seen as a defeat

Like the legislative elections held in February of the same year, the municipal elections of November were, as we have pointed out, the best performance of the Belgian Communists at that level. Both electorally and politically, the PCB-KPB made significant progress compared to the previous elections of 1926, 1932 and, especially, 1938. And it never managed to come close to this feat in the following municipal elections, before (1952, 1958, 1964, 1970) or after (1976, 1982, 1988)¹²⁰ the merger of the municipalities. How was this result appreciated internally?

In truth, behind the forced enthusiasm of the *Drapeau rouge* and the *Rode Vaan (Red Flag)*¹²¹, the result had, as in February, distressed the Communist leaders. First of all, the ballot confirmed the observation derived from the parliamentary elections: once again, the PCB-KPB did not manage to approach the new political status to which it so much aspired. What dominated the results of 1946 was the continuity with the pre-war period.¹²² In Flanders, the PCB-KPB still appeared as a negligible player. Worse, and this was a painful fact for the Communist leadership, the overall result was significantly lower than that of the February national election, even though the party had hoped to have learned the lessons of this disappointing election. Also, internally, the analysis of the results apparently blew hot and cold.

Taking into account the electoral system, the lack of notoriety of the Communist candidates and the context, there was reason to be “globally” satisfied, announced Lalmand to the PB.¹²³ But, after this obligatory pathway, the analysis federation

by federation gave a rather different view. In Flanders, the results were “very bad”. In Ghent, it was “abysmal”. In Antwerp, for such a “working class city”, the “results are disastrous”. In Leuven, it was a “very bad result”, just like in Verviers and Liège. In Brussels “it’s not great” and the management “found itself in a disastrous situation”. Even though he only gave it a minimal importance, the General Secretary regretted the absence of “work on the communal level”: “The sections do not work. The federations are screens between the leadership and the base”.¹²⁴

Despite this inglorious inventory, no questioning of the trajectory since liberation was submitted. On the contrary, the results of the elections would prove that the political line was correct. “I don’t think we have made any mistakes since the liberation” ventured Edgar Lalmand.¹²⁵

In the wider space of the CC, the General Secretary played with the double register. Firstly, there would be a sort of satisfaction, if not relief, about the result. It was not good, but not as bad as expected:

*“This time we approached the struggle with a diametrically opposed feeling and many comrades had for Sunday and they expected the famous tidal wave that the PSC had been talking about for months to be realised (...) But, today that the result far exceeds the hopes of many of our comrades, we draw from this situation more favourable elements than from the previous lessons”.*¹²⁶

However, this introduction was not accompanied by any other positive comments. There was no mention of a possible historic performance

120. PASCAL DELWIT, “Belgian Communism in the light of Its Vanishing (1976-1994)”, *Open Journal of Political Science*, 8, 2018, 316-337.

121. Communist Flemish daily newspaper.

122. NICO WOUTERS, “New order and good government: municipal administration in Belgium, 1938-1946”, *Contemporary European History*, 13(4), 2004, 406.

123. Report on 1946 Local elections by Edgar Lalmand at the Political Bureau on 27 November 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

124. Edgar Lalmand, Speech at the Political Bureau on 27 November 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

125. *Ibid.*

126. Edgar Lalmand, Speech at the Central Committee on 22 December 1946, Jean Terfve Archives, CArCoB.

in the municipal elections or of a very large coverage compared to the local elections of 1932 or 1938. The Communist Party did suffer another political-electoral setback. The federations pinned down in the PB were also pinned down in the CC. In fact, only the federation of Western Hainaut and the work in Aalst were praised. Elsewhere, the litany of qualifiers went on: “In Louvain, almost complete failure”, “In Ghent, disastrous”, “The worst results are those of Verviers”... From the point of view of the leadership, the overall performance crudely illuminated the inability to bounce back after the February 1946 election:

*“The brutal fact is there, indisputable, that, while we were given the task of improving the situation from the organisational point of view, of creating new groups and sections, of giving them more activities, of considerably developing the internal life of the party, of reinforcing the links between the different echelons of the party, while the application of these measures should have placed us in front of an improved situation, we are forced to recognise that, in this field, instead of progressing, we have regressed.”*¹²⁷

As for the communal majorities, the failure in Seraing was cruelly felt. And in general, the Communists were only integrated backwards. “Nowhere did they agree to let us participate in the college if there was any other way”, Edgar Lalmand could not hide from the PB of December 14, 1946.¹²⁸ Disappointment and concern clearly dominated the analyses.

And, in fact, the indicators became alarming. The subscription campaign for the *Drapeau Rouge* and the *Rode Vaan* was faltering. At the end of October, the party reported only 15,514 subscribers to the French-speaking daily and, above all, only 2,599 to the Dutch daily.¹²⁹ The fate of the

latter was even announced as sealed. At the CC meeting of December 22, 1946, Dispy acknowledged a total disorganisation in the management of the Communist press. “Most of the complaints about subscriptions are justified in 80% of the cases. The administration of our newspaper is in a very serious state of disrepair” he confessed.¹³⁰ At the beginning of 1947, Jean Terfve, the new director of the communist press, could only observe the collapse of sales: “We have seen a vertical drop: 146,000 in July 1945, 89,000 in July 1946 and 67,000 to date, or 45,000 DRs and 20,000 Rode Vaan.”¹³¹

The number of subscribers had fallen even further compared to the autumn of 1946: there were now only 12,498 subscribers to the *Drapeau Rouge* and the *Rode Vaan*. At the same time, the treasurer reported a significant drop in the number of applications for membership cards from the federations. In fact, in the image of the electoral dynamic, the movement of affiliates was in clear decline. In 1947, the Communist Party lost nearly 20,000 members compared to 1946, which had already shown a decline compared to 1945 (Table 6).

1943	8,035
1944	11,306
1945	87,892
1946	76,194
1947	57,295
1948	44,683
1949	38,361
1950	24,360

Table 6: Evolution of the membership of the PCB-KPB from 1943 to 1950. Source: CArCoB.

Even in its territories of influence – the Hainaut and Liège areas – the decline was notable. In 1947, the Communist federations had only a little more than half the membership of 1945 (Table 7).

127. *Ibid.*

128. Report by Edgar Lalmand at the Political Bureau on 14 December 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

129. Appendix to the Central Committee on 1 December 1946, Central Committee Archives, CArCoB.

130. Raymond Dispy, Report at the Central Committee on 22 December 1946, Jean Terfve Archives, CArCoB.

131. Jean Terfve, Speech at the Political Bureau on 11 January 1947, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

Antwerp	4,572	3,668	2,99	2,538	2,313	2,03
North of Western Flanders	1,116	870	685	562	500	210
South of Western Flanders	2,69	1,927	1,355	974	784	650
Western Flanders	3,806	2,797	2,04	1,536	1,284	860
Limburg	1489	1049	719	499	390	105
Dender Region	3,066				3,556	2,03
Ghent	2,111					
Ronse - Flemish Ardennes	648					
Eastern Flanders	5,825	4,917	4,236	3,782	3,556	2,03

Table 7: Evolution of membership in the Communist Party federations between 1945 and 1950. Source: CARCoB.

For many officials, the minimal service of the *Entente Démocratique* and the Socialist hostility anticipated the end of the government of the “lefts”. The return of “reaction” was announced. “The events we are witnessing are the preparation for the constitution of a PSB-PSC government”, anticipated the Minister of Public Health, Albert Marteaux.¹³²

In fact, the joint opposition to the return of King Leopold III to the throne, which had contributed to a political axis associating Socialists, Liberals and Communists, was running out of steam. Several Socialist leaders had long been seeking a way out of this situation, as had Catholic cenacles. Even though the behaviour of Leopold III made this disengagement complex, in the spring of 1947 a political shift took place. The Communist strategy of union for all collapsed¹³³ at the same time as the battle of the “war camp” led by the USA against the “peace camp” led by the USSR was announced.

Inside the Communist Party, the analysis of the communal elections led to a new internal reorganisation. However, there was no change in the focus of militant investment. It must remain a priority in relation to the professional environment. Nevertheless, the General Secretary of the party opened the door to a gendered division of labour: men are responsible for action in the company; women are responsible for investment at the local level, where the debate is more about household affairs:

“During the municipal elections, it became clearer to me than in the past that women should take precedence over men at the municipal level. Indeed, if on the one hand, for men, the most important activity takes place in the company, because it is there that the worker can act most directly, it does not take long to come to the conclusion that, if we disregard the major political problems and arrive at the essential content of communal politics, we see that on this level a series of very important problems arise, the whole of which constitutes the daily life of the household and consequently concerns women more directly than men.”¹³⁴

This approach, which legitimised the granting of the right to vote to women in communal elections after the First World War but not in national elections, was not followed up. In any case, the Communist Party entered a new cycle. In early 1947, the Belgian Communists left the government over the price of coal. This was not a singular event in the Communist world. Communists in Luxembourg (March 1, 1947), France (May 4, 1947), Italy (May 31, 1947), Austria (November 20, 1947) and Finland (August 29, 1948) were ousted from governments. In this respect, the dismissal of the French and Italian Communists into opposition in May was sometimes seen as a turning point.¹³⁵ However, it was Harry Truman’s speech on March 12, 1947 that

132. Albert Marteaux, Speech at the Political Bureau on 14 December 1946, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CARCoB.

133. JULES GÉRARD-LIBOIS, JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, *Léopold III. De l’an 40 à l’effacement*, Brussels, 1991, 176.

134. Edgar Lalmand, Speech at the Central Committee on 22 December 1946, Jean Terfve Archives, CARCoB.

135. NEIL REDFERN, “The Comintern and imperialism: a balance sheet”, *Journal of Labor and Society*, 2017, 20(1), 55.

symbolically marked the start of the Cold War and a new “doctrine”.¹³⁶ The Soviet Union abandoned its line of rhetorical appeasement and initiated a new sequence for the Communist world. Andrei Zhdanov was its driving force. In a report submitted to the leaderships of several Communist parties, Zhdanov delivered what became the new way of thinking, the “*fundamental document of Communist ideology*” during the Cold War.¹³⁷ Two camps clashed. It was a form of struggle between good and evil, and the confrontation had to be accepted:

*“The fundamental changes caused by the war on the international scene and in the position of individual countries has entirely changed the political landscape of the world. A new alignment of political forces has arisen. The more the war recedes into the past, the more distinct become two major trends in postwar international policy, corresponding to the division of the political forces operating on the international arena into two major camps; the imperialist and anti-democratic camp, on the one hand, and the anti-imperialist and democratic camp, on the other”.*¹³⁸

In the weeks that followed, the logic of the two camps was applied to different spheres of society: bourgeois art vs. socialist realism, bourgeois science vs. proletarian science, etc. Zhdanov’s report was presented at the Sklarszka Poreba meeting, where Cominform, the new Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers’ Parties, was established.¹³⁹ The organisation was the new international umbrella for Communist parties.

In Belgium, the Communist Party made the expected turnaround. It was radical, and took place outside the realities of the field, both politically and in the trade unions. Attention to the local level and to the actions of MPs was neglected. Mayors and aldermen were obliged to apply instructions that were out of touch with reality. In Roux, where the appointment of the first Communist mayor had been widely celebrated, the PCB-KPB forced Henri Glineur to resign in early 1950.¹⁴⁰ Glineur harshly criticized this decision at the Central Committee meeting in May 1954:

*“The resignation of Mayor in Roux, imposed by the PB against the advice of the rank and file, has undermined the political authority of a party leader, and consequently that of the party, for years to come, while the intransigence of the CC has shattered the union achieved with the socialists”.*¹⁴¹

Sectarianism was also the order of the day in union work and a small purge of some leaders was carried out.¹⁴² To exacerbate the political and social situation in late 1947 and early 1948¹⁴³, Theo Dejace, whose “*role had very little significance*” according to Lalmand¹⁴⁴, was also forced to resign – against his will – from his position as Secretary of the FGTB-ABVV. This out-of-touch attitude of the Communist leadership, its orientations totally detached from the Belgian social scene, and Lalmand’s very rigid and iron-fisted¹⁴⁵ personality led to an unprecedented event in the Communist spectrum: the dismissal of the General Secretary on the basis of an internal dynamic and not under pressure from Moscow.

136. ELSPETH O’RIORDAN, *Understanding the Cold War. History, Approaches and Debates*, Cham, 2023, 43.

137. LILLY MARCOU, *Le Kominform*, Paris, 1977, 47.

138. ANDREI ZHDANOV, *New Aspects of World Conflict: The International Situation. September 22, 1947*, Seventeen Moments of Soviet History. An online archive of primary sources (<https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1947-2/cold-war/cold-war-texts/zhdanov-on-the-international-situation/>).

139. LEONID JA. GIBJANSKIJ, “Cominform”, in: SILVIO PONS and ROBERT SERVICE (Eds), *A Dictionary of 20th century Communism*, Princeton, 2010, 132.

140. Henri Glineur wanted to increase property tax by 40 centimes: from 360 to 400 (Political Bureau, meeting of October 29, 1949). But he ran into opposition from the party leadership. Following internal disagreements and blockages at municipal level, the party invited Henri Glineur and Communist aldermen Léon Mercier and Camille Delforge to resign.

141. Henri Glineur, Speech at the Central Committee on 5 May 1954, Archives of the Central Committee, 1954-59, CArCoB.

142. WIDUKIND DE RIDDER, “De communistische subjectiviteit”, 169.

143. RIK HEMMERIJCKX, “The Belgian Communist Party and the socialist trade unions, 1940–60”, *Journal of Communist Studies*, 1990, 6(4), 135.

144. Edgar Lalmand, Speech at the Political Bureau on 5 January 1948, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

145. RIK HEMMERIJCKX, “The Belgian Communist Party”, 139.

Following another electoral defeat in the elections of 11 April 1954, the May Central Committee meeting was held in a stormy atmosphere. Exceptionally, it lasted no less than six days, although only three had been scheduled. Edgar Lalmand and the Political Bureau were at the heart of very harsh recriminations that shook the leadership. At the end of the meeting, a compromise resolution was adopted. The CC recognised that “*the tendency to make no distinction in day-to-day practice between the Belgian Socialist Party and the bourgeois parties is wrong*”.¹⁴⁶ New members were elected to the Political Bureau¹⁴⁷ and Ernest Burnelle joined the Secretariat. But the rebellion did not die down and was expressed at the congress convened in December in Vilvoorde, a Brussels suburb city. At the tribune, the opponents of the leadership denounced the sectarianism and cult of personality of the Belgian General Secretary.¹⁴⁸ For his part, Stalin was always described as the “*continuator of Marx and Engels*” and “*Lenin’s best disciple*”. The political line implemented since 1947 was repudiated. Edgar Lalmand and the majority of the Political Bureau were outvoted. At the end of the Congress, the General Secretary was dismissed in favour of a triumvirate comprising René Beelen, Ernest Burnelle and Gerard Van Moerkerke. The Secretariat and the Political Bureau were completely renewed, despite the reluctance of the Cominform delegate, the Frenchman Etienne Fajon.

This explosive congress revealed another facet. In the new wording of the statutes, the reference to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat was dropped.¹⁴⁹ As for the reference to Marxism-Len-

inism, the party still occasionally mentioned it, but this became episodic. The Communist Party refocused its practice and thinking on internal issues.¹⁵⁰ A new national focus was introduced into the actions and existence of the PCB-KPB, without leaving the central reference to the Soviet Union.¹⁵¹ Even before the change of leadership, Lalmand had announced to the BP the absolute necessity for the *Drapeau Rouge* to “*considerably reduce the space dedicated for foreign affairs*”, to “*reduce the quantity and improve the quality of texts devoted to the USSR and the People’s Democracies*” and to “*pay much greater attention to the domestic situation*”.¹⁵²

VIII. Conclusions

This article has analysed the local elections of November 1946, focusing on the electoral and political performance of the Communist Party in Belgium. This has been no easy task given the difficulties in collecting detailed data from municipal elections pre-dating the major merger of the communes in 1976. Even after a concerted attempt to collect the widest range of data possible, certain inaccuracies still exist as it was not possible to discover all the electoral results due to insufficient archival material. Nevertheless, the electoral data for the vast majority of the 2,670 communes was identified and encoded, as was information related to the 824 communist and communist-related councillors.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings. The most obvious is the low level of importance that the PCB-KPB attached to the municipal

146. *Le Drapeau Rouge*, 18 May 1954.

147. René Beelen, Ernest Burnelle, Frans Van den Branden et Gerard Van Moerkerke.

148. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, “Construction and deconstruction of a cult: Edgar Lalmand and the Communist Party of Belgium”, *Twentieth Century Communism*, 2009, 1(1), 128-152.

149. NICOLAS NAIF, *L’eurocommunisme en Belgique. Crises et débats autour d’une voie belge au socialisme (1954-1982)*, Bruxelles, CArCoB, 2004, 34.

150. In the introduction to his book of conversations with Louis Van Geyt, Alain Meynen linked the Vilvoorde congress to internal movements in the Socialist organisations; especially, the adoption of the structures’ reform program at the FGTB congress and the radicalization of the Young Socialist Guard, invested by many Trotskyists. ALAIN MEYENEN, *Van Praag 1948 tot Vilvoorde 1954. Politiek-biografische gesprekken met Louis Van Geyt*, Brussels, 2002, 13.

151. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, “Communist Party in Belgium”, in: SILVIO PONS and ROBERT SERVICE (Eds), *A Dictionary of 20th century Communism*, 149.

152. Edgar Lalmand, Speech at the Political Bureau on 5 June 1954, Online Archives of the Political Bureau, CArCoB.

elections. These elections took place more than two years after most of Belgium had been liberated and a few months after the first postwar federal elections. Above all, the election took place in an explosive political climate due to deepening polarisation caused by the “royal question”. For the time in Belgian political history, the Christian Social Party found itself in opposition while having reached an electoral ceiling at the national elections of February 1946. Just as unusual, the Communist Party was in government alongside the Liberals and Socialists. All of its energy was focused on the establishment of a “democratic block” which would serve to hamper the return of “reactionary forces”. Organisationally disrupted by the arrival of tens of thousands of members and the impact of its executives’ hopes for governmental action, the PCB-KPB struggled with its political work.

The lack of interest and groundwork carried out in preparation for local elections are notable. This apathy towards the elections was reinforced by a striking political-organisational feature: the sphere of attention and action is the company, direct campaigning in members’ constituencies was very low. Several federation officials or delegates to the federations also pointed to a lack of interest in many sections. In a way, this political choice is surprising. One of the strengths of Belgian socialism has resided in its municipalisation,¹⁵³ mainly in Wallonia, but also partly in Flanders, as illustrated by the configurations of Ghent or Antwerp branches.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, a form of municipal communism could be detected in some countries. In contrast to the condemnation of “*municipal cretinism*”¹⁵⁵ in the 1920s, the dynamic was set in motion in France in the 1930s. In the municipal elections of April–May 1945, the French Communist Party won majorities

in many municipalities and established a “*class-based parochial patriotism*”.¹⁵⁶ In Paris, the “red suburbs” developed, a space where the world of the *communist being* was built around the municipality from “*the cradle to the grave*”. In November 1946, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) made a breakthrough in the municipal elections and won a number of campaigns. By the end of the elections, the left governed 37 of the 92 provincial capitals.¹⁵⁷ Municipal power was valued by the PCI: the municipal council was presented as the “*first condition of a political society*” and a “*bastion of democracy*”.¹⁵⁸

But perhaps the seemingly paradoxical stance of the PCB-KPB during the 1946 local elections is not that surprising at all. In some ways, the confrontation with the socialists and their base was much tougher at the territorial level than at the corporate level. The popularity of the socialist mayors was hard to shake and the PCB-KPB had few local personalities among their ranks. Leadership did not seek them out and had no desire to ‘create’ them. Julien Lahaut and Henri Glineur were rare exceptions in areas where professional life and territory were largely intertwined.

Despite the great socialist reluctance to draw up workers’ lists (PCB-KPB/PSB-BSP) or democratic lists (PCB-KPB/PSB-BSP/PL-LP), and despite its own apathy, the Communist Party achieved its most striking electoral and political results at municipal level on November 24, 1946. Unsurprisingly, its performance was asymmetrical: the PCB-KPB was weak in Flanders. It was far more relevant in Brussels and Wallonia. More precisely, it achieved consistent results in the area encompassing the Charleroi-La Louvière-Mons-Tournai axis and the district of Liège.

153. JEAN PUISSANT, “‘L’œuvre gouvernementale du POB commence’ ou le POB à la conquête d’un substitut du pouvoir d’Etat (1884-1921)”, in *Les élections*, 75-105.

154. GUY VANSCHOENBEEK, “De oorsprong van de sociaaldemocratische aanwezigheid in de Vlaamse gemeenpolitiek”, in *Les élections*, 107-129.

155. EMMANUEL BELLANGER, “Devenir une ‘ville rouge’ en banlieue parisienne et le rester”, *Le Mouvement social*, 272(3), 2020, 83.

156. PAULINE CLECH, “Les territoires du communisme”, *Sociologies*, 4(4), 2014 (online).

157. MARTHA H. GOOD, “The Italian Communist Party and Local Government Coalitions”, *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 13(2/3), 1980, 199.

158. ROSARIO FORLENZA, “The Italian Communist Party, local government and the Cold War”, *Modern Italy*, 15(2), 2010, 181.

Despite this unprecedented electoral and political breakthrough, the internal analysis of the results shows a political-electoral ‘failure’. The legislative elections of February 1946 had revealed this, and the municipal elections confirmed it: there was no break in the status quo. The socialists and the Catholics ensured and consolidated their status as the major players in the Belgian political system, despite some pre-war errors. The Communist Party did not succeed in dismantling the political system, nor sufficiently undermine the influence of the socialist and Catholic pillars, which was its ‘primary goal’ at the time.¹⁵⁹

This irony of a ‘victory’ understood as a defeat brings us back to two key interpretations of how the electoral results are viewed. The first refers to the notion that electoral performance is first and foremost examined through the prism of social expectations and the objectives of the various actors. This is one of the reasons why the parties rarely formulate them explicitly in the contemporary period and contest those of observers. The second is that the interpretation of an electoral result is more regularly based on the commentary that is made on it than on the materiality of the data itself.

History cannot be repeated. In retrospect, however, and without judging the realism of the PCB-KPB’s goals, it appears that this was an unequivocally ‘good’ election for the PCB-KPB despite the ‘subjective perception’.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, within the PCB-KPB the result eventually came to be sincerely thought of, experienced and presented as an electoral victory.¹⁶¹

But this victory was short-lived. The change in the geopolitical context and the beginning of the Cold War affected the Communist Party, which engaged in rhetorical flights of fancy completely detached from the Belgian context. Moreover, the PCB-KPB gained few politico-organisational insights from the election.

Does this mean, as José Gotovitch wrote, that the entire history of the Communist Party at the municipal level was played out from its birth to the 1952 ballot?¹⁶² This statement needs to be qualified. First of all, the communist history of municipal elections did not end in 1952. The PCB-KPB still ran candidates in local elections in a structured manner until 1988. No particular break was to be observed in 1952. After that, it is possible to point to some gradual changes, the new ‘national’ focus after the Vilvoorde Congress for instance. Furthermore, little by little, the organisational focus on the world of enterprise was loosened in the context of deindustrialisation in Wallonia and Brussels and the disappearance of significant sectors, such as the coal mines.

The role of the local sections – spreading the party message where its adherents lived – in the running and influence of the party increased, sometimes in a conscious manner. This was very clear in the Brussels federation in the 1970s and 1980s. In several areas, the Brussels communists reoriented their political work towards territorial themes and social issues relating to life in the city. It is also possible to identify a shift in the Communist presence from the communes in the north and west to some communes in the south, centre and east of Brussels, such as Ixelles, Forest and Water-

159. ROBERT HARMEL, KENNETH JANDA, “An integrated theory of party goals and party change”, *Journal of theoretical Politics*, 6(3), 1994, 265.

160. ANNA PACZEŚNIAK, MACIEJ BACHRYJ-KRZYWAŹNIA, MAŁGORZATA KACZOROWSKA, *Electoral Defeat and Party Change. From Makeover to Retouching*, London, 2022, 20.

161. In the preparatory report to the May 1954 Central Committee, 1936 and 1946 elections were presented as the party’s two great “electoral successes”. Edgar Lalmand, *Report to the Central Committee*, Archives of the Central Committee of 5, 6 and 7 May 1954. Many of the leaders who spoke at the Central Committee referred to the “victory” of 1946, a period of “euphoria” according to Jean Taillard. Jean Taillard, Speech at the Central Committee on 6 May 1954, Archives of the Central Committee, 1954-59, CArCoB.

162. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, “Le parti communiste et les élections communales 1926-1952”, in *Les élections*, 293.

mael-Boitsfort. As for Wallonia, some communist municipal figures were called upon to promote the party and initiate new political approaches, such as the Union of Progressives (UDP). It is worth

mentioning André Delrue and Pierre Bal in Tournai, Jules Vercaigne in Quaregnon, René Noël in Cuesmes¹⁶³ and Mons¹⁶⁴ and Marcel Couteau in Le Roeulx in particular.

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163. "L'évolution du parti communiste de Belgique (1968-1972) (II)", *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 562-563, 1972, 21-22.

164. FABRICE MAERTEN, "René Noël et l'Union démocratique et progressiste, 1971-1982. À la recherche d'un autre communisme dans un Borinage en crises", *Cahiers d'histoire du temps présent*, 15, 2005, 435-459.