De Partij. Over het politieke leven in de vroege SDAP

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English summary
The Party. The political life in the early SDAP

The Party describes and analyses the origins and the first fifteen years of the Social Democratic Workers' Party in the Netherlands (SDAP) from a new perspective. Where most studies on political parties focus on what members mean to their parties, this book reverses the question and asks: what did the party mean to its first members? By taking regular local party members as the starting point for a party history, this book contributes to both the historiography of the SDAP and that of the emergence of political parties in the Netherlands. First and foremost, this 'member perspective' shows that the functioning of parties was not only shaped through the development of ideology, organizational structures, and leadership, but also by the need for sociability, local traditions, and several other social and cultural factors.

In seven chapters, this book provides a sketch of the earliest party life in the SDAP in two different ways. In chapters 1, 3, 5, and 7, general developments in the party are analysed. The first chapter focuses on the concept of a 'political party', the third on the emergence of the first local branches, chapter five on the unification process of the party on a national level and chapter seven on the character of quarrels among social democrats. Chapters 2, 4 and 6 zoom in on specific cases: two people, two locations and two meetings are discussed. The purpose of this two-sided approach is to provide insight into the personal choices and the background of regular party members.

This narrative and qualitative approach does not yield statistically representative results on the behaviour of the party members in general. Instead, it offers a broad range of historical analyses, often accompanied by one or more particular cases. All cases in this book have been selected using four criteria. First there is the 'pioneer criterion': all people, locations and meetings talked about in the book gained attention between 1894 and 1900. Secondly, the cases were picked to show how diverse the SDAP was during its first years. To not limit the discussion to big city

workers, a selection was made that reflects large sections of the party community. Thirdly, all examined case studies had to be new. No person, branch or meeting that had been extensively debated before is discussed in this book. Finally, there had to be enough archival material to perform thorough historical research. This last criterion in particular narrowed down the possibilities for research in a rigorous way.

1. 'Political party': A short conceptual history.
In the first chapter, the concept of 'political party' is researched. For workers in late nineteenth-century Netherlands, joining a parliamentary social democratic workers' party was not a very obvious decision to make. In fact, there were many reasons to *not* become a party member at all. In the first place, membership consumed a lot of time, while most workers did not have any leisure time at all. Secondly, it cost a lot of money, which the workers did not have either. Thirdly, around 1894 socialist ideology was not very clear: many opposing notions on the true nature of socialism existed throughout the Netherlands and across the rest of Europe too. Fourthly, there was a lot of distrust towards socialists. Royalists, Catholics, employers and policemen continuously kept their eyes on socialists, ready to fight or punish them. The fifth reason was that there were devastating quarrels going on inside the existing socialist organisations. Additionally, the Netherlands had never witnessed a party ran by workers before. Moreover, none of the first members of the party had any political experience, not even in other parties. Another reason was that only a very small minority of the prospective members had suffrage. Furthermore, the number of prospective members was negligible; launching a political upheaval was unthinkable. Finally, there were many alternative organizations for workers who wanted to fight for a better life.

So what were the reasons for becoming a party member? To answer that question, this chapter tries to find out what kind of organization people thought they had joined. This is done by discovering what different meanings the concept 'political party' had around 1894. An examination of newspapers, letters and minutes of several organizations leads to two interpretations of the concept 'party'. The majority used the concept to indicate a 'societal group', while the rest saw it as denoting a 'political organization'. During the first years of the SDAP, both interpretations of the concept were used side by side. People considered themselves part of a societal group (party) and inside that group they had different organizations (parties). This led to a situation in which members of oppositional socialist organizations addressed each other as 'fellow party members' because they still felt part of the same societal group.

So although the SDAP is nowadays often presented as one of the first modern political parties, the conceptual demarcation in 1894 was far from clear. Many of the regular members seemed to have joined the SDAP *despite* the use of the concept party. Their membership did not spring from the newness of the concept, but from a need for continuity. For many of the regular members the party was the successor of long-standing formal and informal networks. On a local level the party often took the place of an association, a branch of the Social Democratic League or institutionalized informal networks among families and friends.

This chapter concludes with two theses. The first is that members did not necessarily choose political innovation, but instead continuity. The other thesis is that party life in the early SDAP was organized as life was in 19th-century associations. That leads to the approach for the rest of this book, in which the political party is treated as an association.

2. A meeting in Atlas, living in the Blasiusstraat

The second chapter of this book consists of two micro-histories. The first one is about the founding of the SDAP in the town of Zwolle on 28th August 1894. While discussing the creation of the party, several key characters in the party history are introduced. This story also shows the most important ideological differences with the SDAP's predecessors, and provides insight into the social manners of the earliest party framework. The second micro-history zooms in on a group of Jewish social democrats living together in a street in Amsterdam: the Blasiusstraat. By discussing various individual members and their ties to each other and their party, a first glance is cast at everyday party life at the grassroots.

The SDAP had twelve founding fathers and all of them were former members of the Social Democratic League (SDB), a socialist organization built up from a variety of small local associations. Although the SDB had once won a seat in the House of Representatives, parliamentary socialism had not been its main interest since the beginning of the 1890s. A group of anarchist socialists had become more and more influential within the rank and file of the League. During the party congress of Christmas 1893, a motion was filed that obliged the party 'never to participate in elections again, not even for reasons of political agitation'. While the majority of the members of the League adopted the motion, a small minority decided to found an alternative political organization.

Most of the motley crew of parliamentary socialists were in their own way part of peripheral groups inside the SDAP. Some of them had a Jewish background, others came from remote areas, while others were intellectuals, coming from the social upper class. Especially the last group,

the so-called 'gentlemen', had difficulties proving themselves as true socialists. It took a lot of time and effort to break the mutual distrust among the parliamentary socialists. Eventually they succeeded and after a series of meetings a final meeting was organized: on 26th August 1894 a new organization was founded.

Because another organization had already scheduled a large meeting on suffrage in Zwolle, the socialist group decided to convene their meeting there as well. The meeting took place in a room called Atlas, where some of the socialist attendees had gathered before. About 140 people attended the meeting, and around 60 of them signed the form that gave them the right to vote during the meeting. The other attendees were journalists and people who were just interested in what was going on. They did not witness any of the political chaos that had characterized the SDB. In fact it was a well-organized and structured meeting with only one remarkable incident. At a certain moment a young anarchist from Amsterdam spoke up and threatened to 'punch [the other attendees] in the face'. What happened then was defining for the SDAP. Instead of throwing him out or shouting back at him, the chairman decided to consult the other organizers about whether they would let the man speak or not. After a short debate, the young anarchist was officially allowed to interrupt the meeting. But he did not have anything left to say. The contrast between the garish SDB and the organized deliberations in its successor could not have been sharper.

One of the most important items on that afternoon's agenda was choosing the name of the new organization. Some people said it had to be an 'association', while others wanted it to be a 'league'. Then the idea of calling it a 'party' was suggested. Not everyone was immediately fond of the idea, but in the end a name was chosen: the Social Democratic Workers' Party in the Netherlands. In the days after the meeting, newspapers remarked on the new party but did not consider it to be a serious threat to the political status quo. Most attention for the Zwolle meeting came from their former friends of the SDB. Their newspaper *Recht voor Allen* ("*Rights for all*") suggested that the social democrats had held a bacchanal after founding the 'party of gentlemen'. That never happened. In fact, the first meeting of the board was held in the open air in a soggy meadow, next to the suffrage meeting that was going on.

The second half of this chapter shows how a substantial part of the Jewish community in Amsterdam became socialist. By focussing on one particular street in the east of Amsterdam, an analysis is made of how a relatively closed community made a collective transition to social democracy. This street is the Blasiusstraat and it is selected because party

members lived in at least 80 of the 144 houses. Almost all of these members were Jewish and diamond workers.

Initially the relations between the Amsterdam Jews and the socialists were not very good. Most Jews were Royalists and among socialists anti-Semitism was not uncommon. By the beginning of the 1890s these barriers were levelled in two ways. On the one hand, two Jewish inhabitants of Amsterdam formed a group of radical socialists called ''t Centrum'. They organized meetings and demonstrations and showed that Jewish workers did not have to accept their disadvantaged positions. On the other hand, a few Jewish diamond cutters came into contact with Frank van der Goes, a prominent socialist intellectual. Henri Polak was one of these Jewish diamond workers and he became a leading figure in the Jewish Socialist movement. He was not only one of the founding members of the SDAP, but also founded the General League of Dutch Diamond Workers (ANDB), an organization that consisted largely of Jewish diamond workers. As a leader in both groups, Polak introduced the Jews via their jobs to socialism.

The amalgam of Judaism, socialism and diamond industry could be seen very well in the Blasiusstraat around 1900. This chapter gives a couple of striking examples of this particular subculture by discussing two residents of the street: Isidore Keesing and Salomon Rodrigues de Miranda. Keesing was a grumpy intellectual, a diamond cutter who read German dissertations on economy and statistics. Later he would become the party's statistician, the mainstay of the party's local treasurers. De Miranda, who lived a few doors down, developed a political career. He became one of the most well-known aldermen of the city of Amsterdam. Both Keesing and De Miranda, just like many other social democrats, started their party career in the Blasiusstraat and both of them saw Henri Polak as their personal hero.

The connection between the people in the Blasiusstraat was a deeper one than just a sum of some factors. They formed a community long before they were socialists and even before they were diamond workers. Even though many of the socialists did not attend the synagogue anymore, they called themselves Jews and cherished their religious background. People with this background recognized each other and felt at home with each other. That is why they had the same jobs, lived in the same area, and married within the same group. Organizer Henri Polak was one of them and even became one of the leading figures in this informal structure. His support for social democracy led many other people in his own network in the same direction.

A few conclusions are drawn at the end of this chapter. Firstly, the

party depended on local heroes to become big and strong at a grassroots level. Secondly, the party culture was also defined by local circumstances. Whether this was just one example or something that occurred in other branches too is discussed in the following chapters.

3. The first members of the sdap

By discussing the history of the foundation of four different local branches of the SDAP, this chapter shows how workers' associations and networks of friends, family members and colleagues preceded local party life. On the one hand this illustrates a phenomenon that was already seen in the Blasiusstraat: local party life was often very homogeneous. On the other hand it shows that the differences between the local branches were rather big. The last part of this chapter researches an exceptional category of party members. Most members joined the party on a local level: they were first and foremost members of their local branch. But there were also members who joined the SDAP on a national level. These 'verspreide leden' were scattered all over the country and did not have their own local party structure. By discussing the varying kinds and interpretations of party membership this chapter also illustrates the wide range of expectations members had of their party.

The first local branch discussed was founded in the city of Arnhem. Most of its members knew each other from earlier socialist associations. They had been members of the SDB and had met each other in local pubs and workers' societies. Long before the SDAP emerged they formed their own subculture where mutual trust was far more important than a spotless cv _ some of the members actually had criminal records. In fact, the SDAP was the new name for a longer existing organization: a local parliamentary demerger from the SDB preceded the local branch. Many of its members lived in the same neighbourhoods where colleagues or family members resided. Organizational habits from other kinds of associations remained unchanged. Potential members were balloted before they could join the party. Nevertheless, or maybe because of this, the later SDAP branch was very successful. It organised one of the first party congresses, provided a national board member, and had someone elected onto the municipal council.

The second local branch discussed in this chapter is the one from Groningen. Just like in Arnhem, an SDB branch preceded the Groningen SDAP. That is why most of its first members were actively socialist, long before they actually joined the SDAP. Before 1894 the socialists had their own building with a pub, a cooperative bakery and a meeting hall. They organized many big meetings and had several sub-associations such as

choirs and sports clubs. So when the few parliamentary socialists of the SDAP seceded in 1894, they gave a new form to a long-standing tradition of socialism. For the first years they were outcasts in an anarchist majority but from 1899 onwards the number of members grew and slowly the local SDAP became an important player in local politics. But even when the party became bigger and bigger and took over the former anarchist infrastructure, the local party elite was very small and dependent on about 10 members.

Just like Arnhem and Groningen, Warga was one of the first local branches to join the national party. But unlike the other branches this one was not a product of an SDB branch that split up. In fact, most SDAP members in this small town in Friesland were active members of the Dutch Suffrage League (NBAKS). The situation in Warga clearly demonstrates how important local leaders were. Most members were living in very poor circumstances and were not able to do too much for the party organization. Only a few men kept the local branch alive.

In Holwerd, another town in Friesland and the final example in this chapter, the local branch was created in a different way. The institutional ties between the members in Holwerd were even more vague than in the other places. Here the branch was the product of an intervention by party leader Pieter Jelles Troelstra. After a fight between local workers and a group of soldiers from outside the village, three workers were arrested. During the trial that followed, Troelstra offered to be their lawyer. After the trial he also helped them to reorganize a disused local association into a new SDAP branch. But this obsolete organizational infrastructure was not the only thing the members shared. Genealogical research shows that many were also members of the same family and most of them had the same religious background. Furthermore, almost all of them worked as farmhands.

The phenomenon that a certain subculture -formally organized or not- preceded the branch can be found in most branches. But not so for the final group of members discussed in this chapter, the so-called 'verspreide leden', who joined the party as individuals. They did not join/form a local branch and were often the first and only socialist in their village or neighbourhood. The 'verspreide leden' were often financially independent and many of them worked as school teachers or artists or in other intellectual professions. Most of them were attracted by the ideological message of the SDAP. A relatively high number of the 'verspreide leden' became politically active. Some of them founded a local branch, while others became contributors to newspapers or even politicians on a national level.

By studying several branches and the group of 'verspreide leden', this chapter provides insight into reasons for becoming a member of the SDAP. Most members of the local branches were socialist before they actually joined the party. In fact, they often joined the party collectively. One or two leading figures of existing networks brought their friends, family, and colleagues into the party. They followed, but did not become very active members. Becoming a party member was not a revolutionary choice for all members. In fact, most of them were inclined to stick to old habits. Because of the differences between the local networks and the weak national structure, the party did not yet have a unified national character. In every town the SDAP had a different face and appearance. Seen from a national level, the party could be characterized as a patchwork party. Only a small minority of about 500 'verspreide leden' had a different position. To them, being a party member was indeed a revolutionary choice. They had clear expectations of the ideology, a more privileged background, and a different attitude towards the party.

4. Two members: Wolf Lelie and Geert Thole Beishuizen

The micro-histories presented in this chapter are biographies of two more or less forgotten but illustrative members of the SDAP. One of them is Wolf Lelie: an Amsterdam Jew from the area around the Blasiusstraat who in his party career evolved from a street fighter to bureaucrat. The other is Geert Thole Beishuizen, one of the 'verspreide leden' and school teacher from a small town in the north of the Netherlands.

As an Amsterdam diamond worker, Wolf Lelie joined the SDAP at an early stage. During the rough first days of the party he was the bodyguard of Pieter Jelles Troelstra. He gained popularity by making sure that Troelstra could move freely through mass meetings dominated by anarchists. In 1901 he got a formal job in the party and became one of the first sellers of the party newspaper *Het Volk*. Selling socialist newspapers was no less dangerous then being a leader's bodyguard. During harsh confrontations with anarchists, royalists, and policemen, Lelie became the everyday face of the party, and was more recognisable on the streets of Amsterdam than some politicians.

Lelie's party career would develop in two different directions at the same time. On the one hand he remained a newspaper seller, though in a different way. He became the head of distribution of the ever-growing newspaper. He directed the newspaper deliverymen in an authoritarian style; most of them did not like Lelie at all. They considered him to be an unreliable and underhand person who was friendly to his employers but bossy to them. The party secretary also had bad experiences with Wolf

Lelie. During his work for the party, Lelie turned out to be a greedy and calculating person, who knew that he would be protected by the people he had once protected. But at the same time something else happened. Wolf Lelie became the flag-bearer of the party. During national demonstrations and other official meetings, Lelie led the procession of socialists. In this way -even more than as a street fighter- his sturdy physical appearance became a party mascot. Without any political involvement—as much as one political remark by Wolf Lelie can be found in newspapers and minutes—he became an important symbol for the party.
Lelie's party career was very different to that of Geert Beishuizen, who never became successful as a party employee and never had any political success either. As a school teacher in a remote village, Beishuizen was the only socialist for miles around. Nevertheless he was an active advertiser of a particular form of socialism. In the 1880s he founded his officially non-socialist workers associations in his village. Although he did help the local workers, his efforts never really led to success. Time and time again Beishuizen's associations struggled to survive, or perished. After he founded several local and regional clubs, he got into contact with the socialists on a national level. He was invited to a meeting held by the National Suffrage Committee, which was an organization mainly ran by socialists. The organisers found him because of his involvement with the League for Dutch Schoolteachers (BvNO). Not long after the meeting, Beishuizen subscribed to the party as a 'verspreid lid'. The first thing he did as a party member was help Johan Schaper get elected to parliament.

Together with a socialist friend and colleague, Beishuizen tried to found a branch of the party. They succeeded in their ambitions, but just as his earlier projects, this branch was not a striking example of a successful workers' movement. Most people who initially joined the club stopped showing up after a few meetings, and the local government was eager to frustrate the club. At the same time there were other kinds of problems. Beishuizen got into fights with more and more people. First he had a conflict with the members of his own branch, then with local politicians, then with his colleagues and finally with some leading party members, including Johan Schaper. Although he still had a function in the BvNO, and even had a political career as a member of the States Provincial, Beishuizen was gradually sidelined in every organization he loved so much. Finally, after being fired as a school teacher as well, he left the province where he had spent his whole life. Only in Zaandam, the town with the first SDAP mayor, could he get a new job as a teacher.

In this chapter, two different visions on the SDAP are presented. Both Lelie and Beishuizen illustrate the importance of having a social context

inside the party, though in very different forms. Lelie was not a very political person, but he started his party career with an immensely strong network inside the SDAP. Beishuizen on the other hand worked hard but never made it to the top because he could not find enough comrades, and had many personal conflicts with leading figures in the SDAP. Lelie had his conflicts as well, but with his employees, not his bosses. Although Beishuizen was not a very doctrinal socialist, he was stigmatized for life: his socialism meant he had minimal chance of becoming a head teacher and partly made his social life impossible. With Wolf Lelie it was the other way around. Socialism *was* his career. He got his job, his status and his good income through the SDAP. Lelie and Beishuizen were definitely not the most extreme examples of differences in party life, but they do make clear that the notion of what the ' SDAP' was differed greatly among the various regions, social groups and individuals.

5. From collection to collective: the SDAP as a family

Where previous chapters focus on the local levels of the party, this chapter considers the national level of the SDAP. It not only focuses on the national organization but also looks at sub-organizations that encouraged people to develop cultural and social activities. By doing so, this chapter shows how informal networks—the ones that played such an important role on the local level—were also very important on a national level. To make clear what the importance of the networks was, this chapter suggests seeing these networks as 'family networks'. Therefore, the first part of this chapter introduces the idea that the party should be seen as a family both in a biological and symbolic way.

Even around 1900, when the party was only a few years old, some of its members were already able to live a fully socialist life. The reason for this was that many local networks had had a socialist identity before the party existed. Family life and socialism went hand in hand. Husband and wife met each other in socialist circles and the men were best men at other socialists' marriages. When children were born, they were introduced to the party at a young age. Celebrations of the Dutch Sinterklaas festivities and other holidays were done together. Youth clubs such as 'De Zaaier' made sure adolescents got their place in the party as well. In bigger branches, every member of the family had his or her own club. In smaller branches, families sometimes operated as the core of the branch. This chapter names many examples of families running branches. Brothers, cousins, fathers and sons, husbands and wives; time and time again families appear to be the cornerstone of smaller branches. Both family members running the party and socialism defining family life -even be-

fore the SDAP existed- show how politics and private life were intertwined.

Next to biological family relations, symbolic family relations had a big influence on party life. Just like among Christians, the family metaphor was used among socialists far before the SDAP was founded. Nevertheless it is interesting to consider this phenomenon inside the SDAP. The family metaphor was used in a surprisingly structural way. Of course comrades were often called 'brothers' and leading figures were referred to as 'father'. But certain party members got the nickname 'uncle' or 'aunt', while younger members called other party members 'grandfather'. Family life also played a striking role in songs, poems and party speeches. So party members were considered to be part of a kinship in which symbolic and biological family relations were both very common. This was illustrated well when social democrats died. At funerals, biological and symbolic family members stood side by side at the grave. Often their roles were comparable: they carried the coffin, lowered it into the earth, and made speeches.

Both biological and symbolic family relations led to familiar manners of behaviour. This had substantial effects on party life, even on the formal organization. Obviously the organizational structures of the party were very important, but they were spirited by the informal family. To show how familiar manners were common and crucial at the national level, this chapter discusses a few party components.

The first example is the party press. Socialists always had their own newspapers but most of them were only regionally distributed. In 1900 a new national newspaper was founded: *Het Volk*. Although it was the most professional organization within the party, it was built up along the lines of family networks. The leading journalists, editors and board members had known each other long before the newspaper came into existence, and in the organizations of the newspaper, familiar manners were easily recognizable. The kinds of conflicts and relationships that occurred were very comparable with what happened in the local branches.

Besides the family network functions inside the newspaper's organization, the newspaper also played a role in strengthening family relations in the party as a whole. Together with local newspapers, *Het Volk* provided an infrastructure that connected different local branches and introduced them to the national party as a symbolic family. It familiarized the most important party leaders, showed traditions, and made the local party part of a whole. Being the mouthpiece of the socialist family was the most important task of the newspaper. So even the most professional organization in the party relied on both symbolic and biological family

relations to become a real success.

Despite its success, the newspaper basically communicated top down. This was different to the second example of familiar manners discussed in this chapter: the party's secretary. From 1897 onwards, Johan van Kuijkhof led the party's secretariat, and had contacts with the key figures in all local branches. By doing so he became a central figure in the party family. He connected people from all over the country with each other and acted as a counsellor in case of problems, which meant he kept peace in different parts of the party. He and his wife were considered examples of how party members should behave. He was friendly, patient, and allowed party members to become part of his network. He was the most important 'human hub' inside the party.

On a smaller scale, the 'human hub' function can be seen in the third and fourth examples of familiar manners that are discussed in this chapter, namely a collection of choirs and an intellectual reading club. Although these two were two completely different kinds of clubs, with different kinds of members, they shared certain similarities. Both the choirs and the reading club operated on a level that exceeded that of the local branch. The rank and file of these organizations was often composed of people with a very similar background. The members of the Amsterdam choir De Stem des Volks, for instance, were mostly Jewish, while the members of the reading club were university students. By importing networks to the party, these clubs imported lots of new 'human hubs'. They did so because the members of these clubs were often also participating in a local branch, a charity board, a women's club or another kind of sub-organization. The same phenomenon of stacking memberships can be seen in the fifth example mentioned in this chapter: the Leagues of Socialist Board Members. These local clubs formalized the relations between the board members of local party branches, local trade unions, choirs, bicycle clubs, co-operatives and other socialist sub-organisations. Although not all league members were party members, the leagues definitely connected party members to each other and strengthened the social democratic family.

The most important conclusion of this chapter is that the SDAP was very much dependent on people that functioned as 'human hubs'. This chapter does not focus on the most important formal organizations, but on how people functioned inside the party. By stacking functions from different sub-organizations, the human hubs connected single networks throughout the country with each other in a way a formal organization could have never done. This chapter characterizes the manners used in these informal contacts as 'family manners'. These were very important

for the process of unifying the party. Even formal organizations such as a newspaper or a national secretariat could not fully function without them. Or rather: these organizations were spirited and brought to life by human hubs and their family manners.

6. Life in 'Het Gooi' and a Congress in Haarlem

Just as in the second chapter, this chapter presents a micro-history of an area where many socialists lived, and a micro-history of an important party meeting. The location discussed is the village of Laren in the Het Gooi area, and the meeting is the Haarlem Congress of 1907. Together these micro-histories show the benefits and drawbacks of the growing diversity in the party. In so doing, it not only gives insight into the social situation in the SDAP around 1907, but also sketches the events that preceded 'the Deventer Schism' of 1909: the moment the party split into two.

In some regards, Laren was a very atypical place for socialists to live. It was home to many poor Catholic workers, as well as a place where many rich people from Amsterdam had their country houses. But Laren also had a different face. Around 1900 it became a centre for painters and other artists. At the same moment it was a focal point of a societal movement that attracted vegetarians, cabin builders, and Tolstoyans. Many of the first SDAP members in Laren were well acquainted with one or more of these traditions. In fact, most of them were painters, writers or craftsmen, and none of the members of this branch of the Social Democratic Workers' Party were workers themselves. A few members knew each other from art academies in Amsterdam. There were also members who had lived in Frederik van Eeden's colony 'Walden', an autarkic commune in the tradition of Thoreau. Other members were party members before they actually moved to Laren and had been active in the party before.

Two members of the branch, both Laren residents, are discussed in detail in this chapter. Liede Tilanus and Henriette Haitsma Mulier were both women with a wealthy bourgeois background, who were interested in social questions at a young age, discussed gender roles, and were married to socialist artists. Besides all this, both women were active as organizers and authors, especially in the Social Democratic Women's Club and in the League of Social Democratic Women's Clubs. Although most women did not actively profile themselves as feminists -which would have been counterproductive in a socialist environment- they tried to educate and help women in other branches as well. With this combination of characteristics they represented some typical features of social democracy in Laren. In contrast with other branches, the role women

played in Laren was rather large. Obviously, this was partly the result of the relatively good financial position that some of these women had. At the same time something else was going on in Laren, something that did not only engage the female members of the branch: many of the branch members participated in ideological debates. The most striking example of a fierce debater from Laren was Henriette Roland Holst, but she was definitely not the only member of her branch interested in ideological hairsplitting.

The second part of this chapter deals with ideological debates in particular. It describes what happened during the Easter days of 1907 at the party congress in Haarlem. In the years preceding this congress the ideological debates in the party had taken an unpleasant turn. More and more people criticized party leader Pieter Jelles Troelstra for his unsteady ideological leadership and Troelstra was not a person to react mildly to these comments. What started with ideological remarks from people like Henriette Roland Holst culminated in a series of mutually offensive disputes with a group of orthodox Marxists led by David Wijnkoop. In newspapers, during meetings and in pamphlets, party members remarked that the fire in party life had died. They feared that the 1907 congress could become the devastating apotheosis of years filled with quarrels. The day before the congress started the atmosphere was far from good. Despite the various musical performances that were announced the number of visitors on the festive evening preceding the congress was small, and the opening speech was a hesitant one.

The next day the congress started with an update about the 'tactics affair'. The difference between Marxists and Revisionists was shortly explained for those party members that did not know the ins and outs of the ideological quarrels. Then the debates began. Troelstra and Gorter, representing different ideological movements within the party, talked for hours. But then something happened: instead of the feared disruptive fight a relatively friendly conversation ensued. The speakers were clear and straightforward and although they sometimes clashed, they were not destructive. A few other key players came onto the stage and argued in the same cooperative way.

That night the delegates went to their hotels or hosts' houses with a sense of hope, and the next morning the atmosphere was different. A satirical newspaper was handed out and the debates were lively and critical but not damaging. Frank van der Goes, in some respects the ideological conscience of the party, even withdrew a critical pamphlet he had written. But not everybody had said what was in his or her heart. By the

end of the congress a small group of orthodox Marxists led by David Wijnkoop did not feel heard in the way they wanted they be heard. They did not feel comfortable with the situation and wanted to continue the battle for orthodox Marxism.

The cases of Laren and Haarlem show the diversity inside the SDAP, which at that point counted 7000 members. They illustrate how various groups from varying backgrounds still fitted in the same party, while at the same time showing how big these differences had become within the body of the party. Most of the Laren Marxists were still part of networks that incorporated leaders of the party: they were friends or even family members of the first group of members. But the new group of Marxists that showed up in Haarlem formed a new generation with its own networks.

7. The fighting family

Although most socialists tried to be friendly to each other, they did not always succeed in this ambition. During the first 15 years of the party, a lot of fights occurred. Some of them had political reasons, others had a more personal background, and more often than not, but elements intertwined. This chapter does not discuss these conflicts to shed new light on who was wrong or who was right, but because the conflicts illustrate what was considered worth fighting for. Participants in conflicts explicitly told what they expected from others and their party, what they cared about and why they were disappointed or angry. In this way conflicts provide insights that friendly conversations or festive speeches could never give. The selection of conflicts discussed is based on the idea that different kinds of conflict should be analysed. That is why a conflict inside the group of founders of the party was chosen, as well as some conflicts inside general branches, a conflict within the top cadre of the party and a conflict that divided the party as a whole.

The first conflict showed how Hessel Poutsma transformed from a promising socialist to a social outcast. In 1894 he was one of the few socialist publishers the party had -a very important role- and one of Troelstra's close confidants. But the group of founders he had to collaborate with did not fully trust him. He was excluded and even humiliated when one of the other members started an affair with his wife. Poutsma did not do anything wrong in particular, but nobody sympathized with him. His case makes clear that politics were about personal relations and emotions just as much as they were about ideology and organization.

The second case shows how these kinds of trust-related problems inside the local branches occurred all the time. Gossip and fights over per-

sonal matters constantly marked the branches' political actions. Even the organizational course of the branch was often determined by factors that lay far beyond the scope of the political. This chapter mentions many examples of branch members having trouble with their political friends and family members. This varied from complex political intrigues to rather random accusations of forgery, bribery, or strike-breaking. Sometimes branches were able to find a solution for the problems themselves, while at other moments the national board had to step in. Of course there were also quarrels that could not be stopped without taking strong measures. Members were punished, got disbarred, or were put on blacklists. The most fascinating aspect is that in many cases it was hard to pinpoint the exact reason for the fight. Gossip, problems with other organizations or families and neighbourhood conflicts were all imported into the party. Because members were often closely related to each other, every animosity could lead to harsh and long-lasting family feuds.

The third example focuses on a fight between David Wijnkoop and Frederik Hugenholz. They were both part of the upper party cadre: Wijnkoop was a national board member, and Hugenholz was a Member of Parliament. At the same time they were colleagues in a socialist insurance company and that is where the conflict first started. But behind the labour dispute much more was going on. The two men did not like each other and took opposite political and ideological positions. First they fought in relative anonymity, but after a while the situation escalated and became public. Both had their own friends and networks inside the party and especially Wijnkoop knew how to mobilize them. Soon it was not person against person, but network against network. Wijnkoop's friends shadowed Hugenholtz, and Hugenholtz intimidated Wijnkoop via his own friends. Because all this happened in the city centre of Amsterdam, not only were the key players in the national party aware of it, but the regular members as well. It was all over the newspaper and everybody was talking about this conflict.

This fight blended seamlessly with the fourth example mentioned in this chapter, the so-called 'Deventer Schism', in which the party split into two sides. David Wijnkoop was the leader of a group that got disbarred from the party in February 1909. That happened after an ideological conflict about the politics of party leader Troelstra. But at the same time there were other problems as well. There was a war going on between opposing networks in the party. Wijnkoop was the leader of a new generation of socialists that felt they were not able to gain any political power and decided to take matters into their own hands. It led to a *total conflict* that affected every aspect of party life.

What happened during this kind of conflict? In fact they arose from a mixture of many different factors, but most of the time the exact reason for the conflict was not the most important aspect. What makes the conflicts so interesting is the attitude of the fighters. This chapter identifies a few elements that made people so fierce and tenacious in their fights. In the first place, the members felt indebted to the party. The party was the vehicle that had to bring them to a future without suffering and hardships. Besides that, the party was often their social environment: it was a family, a network of friends and a neighbourhood in one. That is why when someone else seemed to harm the party, members considered that they were allowed to intervene. The problem though -and this is the second element- was that everybody had a different idea of what was in the interests of the party. There were ideological conflicts of the party's interest, but opposing traditions and other local elements could also be the bone of contention.

Thirdly, fighting was part of the core business of the party. This might sound strange, but for many members the party was the only place where they could debate on a serious level. Their political activities never reached outside the party, so a good fight every now and then was not a bad thing. It is not that they started the quarrels for fun, but they did dramatize them very often, especially when there were external advisory boards, special voting procedures, or so-called 'referees' involved to stop the problems. The conflicts in a milder form were exactly the kind of politics that attracted people. The problem was that it was hard to keep them in their milder form.

Finally, the general human condition was the source of many disputes. Many of the local players were overworked and had physical and mental health problems. Because of their work and their low wages, they did not have enough time to do their jobs. In letters of many of the key players the same complaints can be found. In the end, party membership was not a very healthy lifestyle.

Conclusion

The Party has researched the early SDAP as an association. On the one hand, this has led to new information on the cultural and social developments in the party itself, and on the other hand to new insights on the functioning of political parties in general. It has made clear that people not only became party members for political reasons but for social reasons as well. Most members wanted to remain part of the networks they were already part of. In that sense becoming a member of this revolutionary party was a kind of conservative act as well. These networks were

called family networks because members appeared to have kinship relations in a biological or symbolic ways. That branches were governed by these kinds of relationships also explains why certain people never really became politically active, although they did become members. In fact these people did not come to the party, but the party came to them. Friends or family members had persuaded them to become members, but they never felt the urge to become passionately politically involved themselves.

The analysis of family networks also makes clear why every local branch had its own character and why socialist politics had a different face in every town. The SDAP was very homogeneous at a local level, but very heterogeneous at a national level. Although socialism was more or less the same for everyone and provided an international symbolic language, the local appearance of socialism was determined by local factors. In the first years of the party, the symbolic international factors and the familiar local factors were the most formative ones for party life. The national party only played a relatively small role, in effect just acting as an umbrella for local clubs. Even the concept of 'party' referred to more than one particular meaning. Only after 1900 did the national party seize the primary identity of the SDAP. Before that time the local leaders were the party's primary icons.

The small but important group of 'verspreide leden' were the big exception to this rule. They had become members without any ties to local predecessors of the party and were often much more interested in ideological questions then branch members were. Many of these 'verspreide leden' were intellectuals and although they formed a small group they were responsible for the majority of ideological articles in newspapers and pamphlets. To them the national party was much more than an umbrella; it was their most precious structure from the start. Similarly, the national party was relatively dependent on the 'verspreide leden'. Many crucial party members at the national level started as 'verspreide leden'. So one of the most important conclusions of this book is that there were different kinds of membership. Distinguishing these kinds gives a better understanding of what the party meant to its members and how this varied.

Besides that, this book has explained how these different kinds of membership influenced the political behaviour of the party in their own way. The analysis of socially inspired membership makes clear that leaders were not only chosen because of their qualities as a leader, their political programme or their ideological knowledge. Very often, they were the founders of local branches that had motivated their own rank

and file to join. They were natural leaders, not chosen ones. For a long time this was not much different in the national party. But not everybody was happy with this status quo. The new intellectual generation led by David Wijnkoop, for instance, challenged this traditional leadership on political grounds. There was an ideological conflict, but this only became as devastating as it was because of an irrevocable clash of traditions. Because together with different kinds of membership came different expectations of what the party was or must be. This variety of expectations led to varying identifications of what was in the party's interest. The manifold ideas on this led to conflicts and disputes, which were often exacerbated because they took the form of family feuds.

So seeing the party as an association and seeing its members as members of a socialist family leads to a better understanding of the party member's manners, of party leadership and the way the party functioned in politics. Of course the SDAP is the focus here, but it is very likely that this approach would be fruitful for other parties too.