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Smokescreens and Smear Campaigns: The Dutch Communist Party in Times of Crisis

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This article seeks to establish how different crises in the Eastern Bloc affected the political standpoints of the Communist Party of the Netherlands, *Communistische Partij Nederland* (CPN), through an analysis of publications in affiliated party magazines between 1953 and 1981. This analysis is conducted within a framework consisting of party change theories and the literature about Eurocommunism as a Europe-wide phenomenon. The analysis indicates that the CPN went from supporting military interventions in Germany, Poznan, and Hungary to condemning them in Czechoslovakia, initially while maintaining ideological distance from political opponents in the Netherlands. This changed in 1981, when the CPN seemingly without restraint joined the mainstream political parties in condemning the introduction of martial law in Poland and the *Socialistische Partij* (SP), the Socialist Party of the Netherlands, took over the CPN's position as a political outsider. This indicated a shift in the party's stance from a niche to a mainstream positioning against Moscow.

Keywords: Communist Parties, Eastern Bloc, Eurocommunism, Netherlands

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union largely lost its previous exemplary function for communist parties outside of the Eastern Bloc.[1] Communist parties in western and southern Europe underwent political, ideological, and organizational changes which have been characterized as a transformation into Eurocommunism. Eurocommunism could be described as a modernization attempt by such parties to appeal to a broader electorate. A new course fit for such purposes practically meant a step away from Moscow with a renewed focus on national circumstances. Armed interventions by the Soviet Union against protests and social movements in its satellite states, such as during the East German Uprising or the Hungarian Revolution, were met with heavy criticism in Western Europe. Scholars have attributed different levels of significance to the effects such events had on the development of communist parties in Europe. The secondary literature puts considerable emphasis on the

1 Bracke and Ekman Jorgensen, "West European Communism after Stalinism. Comparative Approaches."

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communist parties in France and Italy,[2] both of which were countries in which the communists at one point came close to parliamentary majorities. It is thus important to note that Eurocommunism is a broad umbrella term which hardly does justice to the differences among the various communist parties of Europe.

What makes the Dutch case interesting in comparison to France and Italy is that within the Dutch political landscape the CPN had always remained a small but constant factor. After World War II, the CPN performed relatively well and acquired ten seats in the national parliament.[3] This success was due to the role of the Soviet Union in the war and to the CPN's resistance to the German occupying forces. In the postwar years, the CPN even became the biggest party during the municipal elections in Amsterdam. During this period, the CPN was known as anti-German, anti-American, and also as a vocal supporter of Moscow. Since the mid-1960s, the CPN became more detached from Moscow due to the Sino-Soviet split until its ties with Moscow were renewed in the 1970s. During the Cold War, the CPN became less and less popular. In 1989, the CPN merged with other parties into GroenLinks, the Green Left.[4]

The secondary literature on Eurocommunism and party change theories could shed interesting light on the developments within and evolution of the CPN. The whole premise of Eurocommunism falls in line with party change theories. These theories indicate that the political standpoints of mainstream political parties are rationally altered to suit changing external circumstances. The literature on Eurocommunism proposes a narrative in line with this assumption, as communist parties all over Europe changed their political standpoints as a reaction to changing national political circumstances. However, this would require that communist parties be defined as mainstream parties. If not, party change theories would lack explanatory power for the emergence of Eurocommunism, since, if communist parties were to be defined as niche parties, they would theoretically remain unaffected by changing external circumstances and stick to their predetermined policy positions. By addressing the specific policy changes of the CPN towards the crises in the Eastern bloc, this article only addresses a fraction of an array of factors which could indicate a shift to Eurocommunism. Singling out crises in the Eastern Bloc as an explicitly party external factor offers the benefit that party change theories can indicate if a shift to Eurocommunism correlates with a shift from a niche to a mainstream political course. This leads to

2 Gombin, "French Leftism."

3 See Table 1 for an overview of the election results of the CPN between 1946 and 1982.

4 "Communistische Partij Nederland (CPN)."

the fundamental question I address in the discussion below: How did the CPN react to political crises within the Eastern Bloc, and did its political standpoints develop as a response to these events?

Table 2. An overview of the election results of the CPN in general elections in relation to the crises in the Eastern Bloc

Date of the general election	Crisis which preceded the election	Number of seats	Percentage of votes	Difference in seats compared to previous elections	Change of political standpoints
1946		10	10,6		
1948		8	7,7	-2	
1952		6	4,1	-2	
June 13, 1956	East Germany, June 16, 1953	7	4,7	+1	No
March 12, 1959	Hungary, October 23, 1956 Poznan, June 28, 956	3	2,4	-4	No
1963		4	2,7	+1	
1967		5	3,6	+1	
April 28, 1971	Czechoslovakia, August 21, 1968	6	3,8	+1	Yes
1972		7	4,4	+1	
July 25, 1977		2	1,7	-5	
May 26, 1981		3	2,0	+1	
September 8, 1982	Poland, December 13, 1981	3	1,8	=	Yes

Source: PDC. "CPN en de Tweede Kamerverkiezingen tussen 1946 en 1986." *Reference work Dutch Parliament*. Accessed 25 June 2021, https://www.parlement.com/id/vhsdgb8b3t09/cpn_en_de_tweede_kamerverkiezingen.

Literature Review

In a substantial article about the Hungarian Revolution and anti-communism in the Netherlands, Duco Hellema addresses the Hungarian Revolution and the Dutch response from an international relations perspective. In general, the political attitudes of Western European states towards the Hungarian Revolution could be described as rather passive. Hellema attributes the overall lack of action to a sense of cautiousness due to the constant threat of nuclear war. A second

factor is that in November 1956, France and Britain were preoccupied with the Suez Crisis. The Dutch attitude became something of an exception.[5] Hellema states that the Dutch public reacted "vehemently," as in comparison to other European states, the Dutch had a more outspokenly anti-communist reputation. According to Hellema, this came from a sense of conservatism which had its roots in a widely shared sense of discontent with the rapid modernization and societal changes after World War II. A factor which led the Dutch government to practice a cautious foreign policy was the loss of its former colonies. As a result of this, the Dutch government was forced to redefine its position on the international playing field and had no firm or predetermined Ostpolitik. In the postwar period, the Netherlands was governed by a Roman-Red coalition (a coalition of the Dutch labor party *De Partij van de Arbeid*, or PvdA and the Catholic People's Party, or KVP), the foreign policy of which was characterized by an anti-communist attitude and could be summarized as cautious. The developments in the Eastern Bloc were therefore not followed with great interest but rather with suspicion. As soon as the situation in Hungary escalated, the Netherlands had no specific criteria or Ostpolitik to fall back on. Eventually, the Hungarian revolution was considered a window of opportunity to reduce the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. The attitude of the Dutch government thus became impatient in comparison to the other Western European states. At the same time, the Dutch government acknowledged that it could only wait and see. The military intervention which brought the Hungarian revolution to an end was sharply condemned by the Dutch press and prompted large demonstrations. One of the main targets of indignation was the CPN.[6] Ultimately, no major sanctions were imposed on the Soviet Union. Hellema concludes that the Dutch people reacted fiercely to the events in Hungary and that this was somewhat reflected in the choices made by the Dutch government.[7]

The assumption that Dutch anti-communism has its roots in conservatism could be challenged. According to Revel, the staunchest anti-communists in Europe have always been the social democrats.[8] The anti-communist sentiments in the Netherlands and in other northwestern European states could therefore be explained by the strong presence of social democratic parties. This is important

5 Hellema, "The Relevance and Irrelevance of Dutch Anti-Communism: The Netherlands and the Hungarian Revolution, 1956–57."

6 Ibid, 175.

7 Ibid, 182.

8 Revel, "The Myths of Eurocommunism."

for the framing of the rise of Eurocommunism in the 1970s and 1980s: "The fundamental controversy about Eurocommunism in Europe is thus not a debate between the Right and the Left but between two Lefts. The question is which trend of European socialism, the Leninist or the social-democratic, will prevail."[9]

In *West European Communism after Stalinism. Comparative Approaches*, Maud Bracke and Thomas Ekman Jorgensen offer an overview of the different ways in which Eurocommunism has been addressed by various scholars.[10] In the late 1970s, many articles and books were published about the political and ideological changes which Western European communist parties underwent in the 1970s and the 1980s. Consequently, much of the literature on this topic suffered from the political burden of being directly linked to the Cold War. According to Bracke and Ekman Jorgensen, this context made it difficult for many scholars to approach the topic from a neutral perspective. Contemporary studies in Eurocommunism thus could benefit from a different and more neutral approach.[11] A second observation they make is that Eurocommunism has mainly been studied in countries where communist parties were more influential. Thus, within the literature on Eurocommunism, there is a strong focus on southern Europe.[12]

According to the same authors, one of the main motivations behind the transition to Eurocommunism was an increasingly critical attitude towards the lack of internal democracy in communist parties. At the same time, many party members realized that communist parties would not be able to obtain a leading role in modern protest movements which emerged outside of the working class, such as student protest movements and women's rights movements. The sense of insecurity within communist parties peaked in the 1960s because of the Sino Soviet split and because the New Left was increasingly winning political terrain. It must be noted, however, that the development of Eurocommunism cannot be entirely generalized due to large differences between communist parties.[13] In the 1960s, when it became increasingly urgent for communist parties to adapt to changing social circumstances, some of these parties were already far removed from their origins. Unique party cultures, histories, and circumstances gave

9 Ibid, 299.

10 Bracke and Ekman Jorgensen, "West European Communism after Stalinism. Comparative Approaches."

11 Ibid., 4.

12 Ibid., 3.

13 Ibid.

each of them a unique societal dimension. In Italy and France, the communist parties in particular emerged as influential political actors after World War II, a position which they initially managed to maintain in the 1950s. By comparison, the communist parties in the Scandinavian states were small and marginal.[14]

Scholars have attributed different levels of significance to the effects of the Hungarian Revolution and the Prague Spring on the development of Eurocommunism. The Hungarian Revolution is considered a turning point by some authors, but other scholars argue that the ideological crisis for communist parties began no earlier than the 1970s. Gombin argues that the 1950s were formative for the French Communist Party and the emergence of the New Left.[15] This was partly due to the Hungarian Uprising but also to the Algerian War: "Marxism lost its doctrinal primacy among an entire generation of young intellectuals and workers concerned with politics."[16] Jane Jenson draws a similar conclusion and considers 1956 a pivotal year for the communist party in France and "a high point between rise and decline."[17] Nevertheless, other authors claim the opposite. Roy Macridis[18] and Hadley Cantril[19] conclude that consternation within the French Communist Party was not particularly relevant for most of its members but mainly for its intelligentsia and leadership.

According to A. J. Liehm, the intended reforms proposed during the Prague Spring reflected and to a certain degree represented the ideal of Eurocommunism. Liehm concludes that the military interventions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, together with the general rejection of fundamental freedoms in Eastern Europe, were major reasons for the schism between eastern and western communist parties.[20]

Theoretical Framework

The circumstances under which political parties change their views are addressed widely within the field of political science. Several major studies have been bundled by Andreas Fagerholm in his 2015 article, *Why Do Political Parties Change*

14 Ibid., 78.
15 Gombin, "French Leftism."
16 Ibid., 53.
17 Jenson, "1956: French Communists Turning a Corner."
18 Macridis, "The Immobility of the French Communist Party," 642.
19 Cantril, *The Politics of Despair*, 169.
20 Liehm, "The Prague Spring and Eurocommunism," 819.

their Policy Positions? A Review.[21] Among the studies on policy position change, two traditions can be distinguished. The first tradition was initiated by Robert Harmel and Kenneth Janda.[22] Their general assumption is that political parties are conservative organizations which are averse to any form of change. If a political party changes policy positions, this is most likely because of internal party factors, such as leadership change. Alternatively, change could occur because of factors outside the party, such as disappointing electoral results or a shift in public opinion.[23] The second tradition, heavily influenced by the work of Ian Budge,[24] assumes that political parties rationally change their standpoints based on the political and societal circumstances they encounter while they engage in active political competition with one another. Budge identifies several factors which could indicate how likely it is for political parties to change their political standpoints.[25] These include external factors, such as change of public opinion, undesirable electoral performance, creating distance between ideological rivals, and position within government or opposition. Also, internal factors are addressed, such as change of party leadership and internal party structures.

It is important to note that niche and mainstream parties have different tendencies when it comes to how they react to these factors. Adams et al. address changes in political standpoints in the context of Western European niche parties. This research concludes that while mainstream political parties' policy shifts correspond to shifts in public opinion, niche parties do not display similar tendencies to adjust their policy preferences. A potential explanation for this phenomenon is that niche parties might have established their policy positions beforehand in such a way that they are already aligned with their rank and file.[26] While there is consensus that there are relevant differences between niche and mainstream political parties, the literature is more ambiguous about how niche political parties should be identified. This leads to an important question in this theoretical framework, namely if in a Dutch context the CPN should be defined as niche or mainstream. Fagerholm emphasizes that an important distinction between niche and mainstream political parties is the degree to which they

21 Fagerholm, "Why Do Political Parties Change Their Policy Positions? A Review."

22 Harmel and Janda, "An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change."

23 Fagerholm, "Why Do Political Parties Change Their Policy Positions? A Review," 502.

24 Budge, "A New Spatial Theory of Party Competition: Uncertainty, Ideology and Policy Equilibria Viewed Comparatively and Temporally."

25 Ibid., 507.

26 Adams et al., "Are Niche Parties Fundamentally Different from Mainstream Parties? The Causes and the Electoral Consequences of Western European Parties' Policy Shifts, 1976–1998."

seriously compete during elections. However, a second definition is also widely used; Adams et al. argue that a party should be qualified as niche based on its ideology. If a party adheres to a niche ideology, such as communism or a far-right ideology, it should be qualified as a niche party. In the case of the CPN, both definitions of a niche party are applicable to a certain degree. One of the key features of the CPN is that it initially related itself to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in an outspoken manner, which is something no other political party in the Netherlands did. In an ideological sense, as hardline communists, it should be defined as a niche party. However, when it comes to electoral performance, a different categorization might be appropriate. Even though the CPN had never become a serious candidate for government, they were consistently represented in the Dutch parliament. In the postwar years, the CPN was represented in the opposition with ten seats. Its popularity slowly declined until it was disbanded, while over the years maintaining between two and eight seats. As such, the CPN had something to lose during the national elections and therefore had to compete seriously. In this sense, the CPN might have been sensitive enough to external circumstances to adapt its political standpoints under the influence of factors indicated by Fagerholm, even though, in an ideological sense, the party could still be considered niche.

Research Methodology and Case Selection

This article seeks to establish how such crises in the Eastern Bloc affected left wing party politics in the Netherlands and specifically the political standpoints of the CPN. This will be done through a discourse analysis of articles related to this topic from party affiliated newspapers and magazines. These publications mainly originate from the CPN newspaper *De Waarheid*, but they are contextualized with publications from *Socialisme en Democratie* and *Paraat* from the PvdA) as well as articles from *de Tribune* from the Socialist Party *Socialistische Partij* (SP). The analysis of such documents offers multiple benefits in comparison to other options. The first benefit is that during the twentieth century, these party magazines and newspapers were published on a regular basis and formed an important means of communication. Most party magazines were issued at least monthly, and some party-affiliated newspapers were even published on a daily basis, allowing the parties to reach out to their electorates regularly. This regularity enabled political parties to address the issues of the day quickly and react to developments as soon as they occurred. As these publications were an

important way to communicate with the masses, any changes in a party's political and ideological stance to appease public sentiment are also likely to have been addressed here.

I have not collected or analyzed the data in accordance with a strict code book. The reason for this is that the data has been selected from fundamentally different sources covering a span of almost forty years with large time intervals. The analysis of data focusses on five reoccurring elements during each moment of crisis. These elements partly fall in line with some of the relevant factors listed by Fagerholm.

1. Close attention is paid to how the uprisings against the socialist regimes were addressed.

2. Attention is also devoted to the attitudes expressed towards the initial reaction by the national government. The analysis considers which desires were expressed by the Dutch political parties towards the national authorities of the state in which the crises took place.

3. Indications of support for or criticism of military interference are also considered. Each of the political crises was brought to an end by military interference, always backed up by or under pressure from Moscow.

4. Attention is paid to whether political parties expressed a preference for a hardline or a more liberal approach to state socialism.

5. The dynamics between Dutch political parties are also taken into consideration, as is the question of whether they supported or reprimanded each other for their responses to the crises.

The East German Uprising of 1953

During the East German uprising in 1953, demonstrations against work quotas developed into mass protests against the East German government. After the Soviet forces stationed in East Germany intervened, it took until June 24 before the situation was fully deescalated.[27]

The protests in East Germany, consistently described in *De waarheid* as provocations, were addressed for the first time on Wednesday, June 17, 1953.[28] The claim was made that the social unrest in East Berlin had been organized by

27 Ostermann, "'Keeping the Pot Simmering': The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953," 61–89.

28 "Ernstige provocaties in Oost-Berlijn Amerikaanse agenten uit het Westen organiseren ongeregeldheden," *De Waarheid*, June 17, 1953.

the West German government under Adenauer in cooperation with the United States. According to *De Waarheid*, the "provocateurs" were inhabitants of West Berlin to whom the East German authorities responded in a measured and appropriate manner.[29]

De Waarheid considered the protests an attempt to divert attention away from the conciliatory measures proposed by the East German government. The local correspondent claimed that the following alleged circumstances had been essential factors in the outbreak of open conflict or clear signs of provocation from the West: the visit of Jakob Kaiser (minister of all-German affairs) to Berlin; the spread of propaganda from West to East Berlin; wounded insurgents having been taken to West Berlin; and the fact that the provocations had taken place near the Western border. The actual inhabitants of East Berlin were reported to have defended their city against the provocateurs.[30] According to *De Waarheid*, the unrest among workers due to higher labor norms was immediately exploited by Western sabotage agencies, even though the East German government had acted quickly and adequately by altering their plans.

On June 18, it was stated by *De Waarheid* that American officers had been involved to such an extent that that they had walked through East Berlin in uniform and distributing orders. This was explicitly associated with Germany's Nazi past. People were reported to have sung the *Horst Wessel* song and chanted, "We want Hitler back!"[31]

The events in Berlin were also addressed by Marcus Bakker, a board member of the CPN. He stated that the Soviet Union had made many proposals which would further a peaceful solution to global issues. A peaceful foreign policy and potential German reunification, Bakker continued, were against the interests of the United States. The recent economic and political successes of East Germany had rendered the West German smear campaign irrelevant. This smear campaign, according to Bakker, had been conducted by the United States and West Germany to provoke conflict. This plan has failed because the DDR government had recognized and addressed its previous mistakes, and the provocateurs had shown their fascist nature.[32]

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29 Reimann, "Staat van beleg afgekondigd."

30 "Ernstige provocaties in Oost-Berlijn Amerikaanse agenten uit het Westen organiseren ongeregeldheden," *De Waarheid*, June 17, 1953.

31 "Provocaties in Oost-Berlijn ineengestort," *De Waarheid*, June 18, 1953.

32 Bakker, "Berlijn."

In *Socialisme en Democratie*, distributed by the PvdA, J. in 't Veld considered the turmoil in the Eastern bloc as an indicator of success for the West's cautious foreign policy.[33] In the following edition, J. Barents addressed the geopolitical implications of the East German Uprising.[34] The death of Stalin and the "workers revolt in Eastern Berlin" were interpreted as factors which could indicate an approaching change of the status quo: "One of the clichés destroyed by the East German uprising was the assumption that nations living under police and state terror could never rise up against their oppressors."[35] Barents considered the East German Uprising confirmation of Adenauer's insistence on free elections and the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

1956 Poznan Protests

The Poznan uprising was the first full uprising which occurred after Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956. A peaceful strike in Poznan grew into a two-day fight between insurgents and the Polish army. Later that year, some of the demands which had been made by the insurgents were met. The uprising caught a lot of international attention, as a large number of representatives of the foreign press had been attending an international fair in Poznan.[36]

In its reports on the Poznan Uprising, *De Waarheid* contended that imperial agents and reactionaries had attempted to exploit Poland's economic difficulties.[37] Implying that the disturbances were prepared provocations by foreign actors, *De Waarheid* characterized the demonstrations as unjust, as the Polish government had already addressed the grievances voiced by the protestors.

The next day, it was alleged in *De Waarheid* that it was foreign provocateurs who had motivated the workers to go on a strike. "The situation escalated when provocateurs and underground groups started to shoot near the security police building."[38] The correspondent reported that order had been quickly restored after the army had opened fire on the provocateurs. Reportedly, the real workers had not been harmed, as they had nothing to do with the outbreak of violence.

33 In 't Veld, "Planning for Freedom."
34 Barents, "5 Maart en 17 Juni."
35 Ibid., 416.
36 J. F. A. W. "Gomulka's Road to Socialism: The May Meeting of the Polish United Workers' Party."
37 "Ongeregeldheden in Poolse stad," *De Waarheid,* June 29, 1956.
38 "Poznan (Vervolg van pag. I)," *De Waarheid,* June 30, 1956.

In the article *Workers and terrorists,* the uprising in Poznan was linked to the protests in Berlin: "We have to say that it is easier to get a general overview of the events in the Polish city of Poznan than was the case in 1953 with the riots in Berlin (…) This is because the number of proponents of the Cold War has reduced since then."[39] The fact that there were economic and administrative issues in Poland was acknowledged, but the contention was also made that the government had devoted considerable effort to solving these issues. Looting and arson were considered indications that the disturbances had been instigated or carried out by professional foreign provocateurs. The Polish government was reported to have met the provocations with a continuation of "international and domestic *détente.*"[40] In the next edition of *De Waarheid*, the American offer to supply Poznan with food was condemned as "malicious propaganda."[41] The disturbances in Poznan allegedly could be traced back to the United States, which had "a hundred million dollars on their budget for sabotaging socialist countries."[42]

In the July 4 issue of *De Waarheid*, the contention was made that most of the workers had left the protests as soon as the provocateurs had become violent.[43] CPN member F. Baruch argued that the American involvement in Poznan had been hinted at by Dulles himself, as he had implicitly mentioned the Poznan uprising before it had taken place, and the whole provocation had been part of an effort to create a smokescreen to hide the USA's failing foreign policy.[44]

In the PvdA magazine *Paraat*, the Poznan uprising was explicitly addressed by Alfred Mozer.[45] Mozer interpreted the protests in Poznan as an event of great importance because they had led to significant internal changes in Poland and pushed back the Russian sphere of influence. However, he stated that the situation might be more complicated than it initially seemed.[46] According to Mozer, the death of Stalin implied that the conditions for the Stalinist model had ceased to exist, and this has led to an attempt by Moscow to ease relations with its satellite states by allowing them to liberalize to a certain extent. However,

39 "Arbeiders en terroristen," *De Waarheid,* June 30, 1956.

40 Ibid.

41 "Slachtoffers te Poznan begraven," *De Waarheid,*

42 "Verklaring CPSU over persoonsverheerlijking," *De Waarheid,*

43 "Poolse arbeiders keerden zich af van provocaties," *De Waarheid,* July 4, 1956.

44 Ibid.

45 Mozer, "Het lot van een volk de betekenis van de Poolse opstand."

46 Ibid., 303.

this attempt would always fail, Mozer suggested, since "hunger comes while eating."[47]

In PvdA's *Socialisme en Democratie*, Dedeijer expressed his faith in Władysław Gomułka's ability to solve the issues at hand: "Not only in his political postulates, but also in his behavior as a man, in his intellectual integrity and his rationality."[48] De Kadt stated that the pretenses of communism had been utterly destroyed, and the ideology had been reduced to what it truly was: "An enforced system that by an immense waste of human lives, human happiness, and human dignity reaches only meagre results."[49] Goedhart took a critical approach to the concessions made by Moscow in 1956, as the easing of strict policies in Poland and Hungary could not be considered a logical outcome of the communist system and therefore could not be used as an argument in defense of communism.[50]

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956

On October 23, 1956, students gathered in Budapest to demonstrate against one-party rule and demand more political, economic, and democratic rights. The protests soon escalated, and fights broke out countrywide between the insurgents and the army. The revolutionaries believed they had succeeded, as the Soviet troops retreated from Budapest, to which the government responded by requesting military support from the Soviet Union and the reinstalment of Imre Nagy as the prime minister. Nagy's decision to resign from the Warsaw Pact did not have the desired effect. In early November, Khrushchev crushed the revolution by sending the Red Army to Hungary. The international response which Nagy had hoped for did not come. After the revolutionaries were defeated, the government fell into the hands of the reorganized and purged Hungarian communist party.[51]

On October 24, 1956, the disturbances in Budapest were mentioned in *De Waarheid*. It was reported that counterrevolutionary gangs had conducted bloody attacks on soldiers and civilians. This allegedly had led the Hungarian government to announce martial law and to ask the Soviet troops to help restore

47 Ibid., 308.

48 Dedijer, "Aspecten van de Europese Integratie."

49 De Kadt, "Veertig jaar later."

50 Goedhart, "Positie en toekomst, de satellietlanden van Centraal-en oost-Europa."

51 Sebestyen, "Twelve Days: Revolution 1956. How the Hungarians tried to topple their Soviet masters."

peace.[52] In a second article, Imre Nagy was paraphrased: "hostile elements joined the peaceful demonstration of Hungarian young people. They misguided the working people and acted against the popular-democracy and power."[53]

The next day, *De Waarheid* addressed the situation in Hungary, recognizing that the demonstrations had been provoked by the irresponsible behavior of leading politicians. Therefore, they expected the new Hungarian government to introduce far-reaching reforms once peace had been restored.[54] Marcus Bakker blamed the Dutch media for not expressing solidarity with the Egyptians during the Suez Crisis, as they done with the Poles and Hungarians: "We are also deeply affected by the events in Hungary: while a people rose for a changed and improved construction of socialism, irresponsible elements made use of the situation to turn the desire for progress into a contra-revolution."[55] The Hungarian attempt to leave the Warsaw Pact was criticized the next day, as the only opponents of this pact would be "Adenauer and his Hitler-generals."[56] This assumption was illustrated by the example that fascists were reported to have sung "*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles.*"[57]

On October 30, the CPN offered a statement about the situation in Hungary and the alleged anti-communist campaign in the Netherlands: "The party administration makes a call for all peace-loving Dutch citizens to recognize the true and dangerous character of the events and to take a stand against the campaign of incitement."[58] The CPN also claimed that even though there was no clear overview of the situation in Hungary, all available data pointed towards a putsch. It linked "this counterrevolutionary adventure" and the interests of "American pro–Cold War politicians." The Dutch reaction to side immediately with this "counterrevolutionary coup d'état" showed the hypocrisy of other political parties: "The lament for the faith of the Hungarian people sounds especially false from the mouths of those who prepare an atomic war against the peoples of Eastern Europe and assist the rearmament of the SS in West Germany."[59] The worries about Hungary were interpreted by the CPN as

52 , "Hongaarse regering treedt op tegen contra-revolutionairen," *De Waarheid,* October 24, 1956.
53 "Hongarije (vervolg van pag. 1)," *De Waarheid,* October 24, 1956.
54 "Hongaarse regering neemt krachtige maatregelen," *De Waarheid*, October 26, 1956.
55 Bakker, "Krokodillentranen."
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 CPN, "Verklaring van het partijbestuur der CPN over de putsch in Hongarije."
59 Ibid.

"having the goal of diverting attention away from the deteriorating economic circumstances in the Netherlands and creating a false sense of unity."[60]

On November 2, it was reported that there had been Western intervention in the events in Hungary, as planes from the Red Cross had dropped weapons and supporters of the previous Horthy regime had crossed Hungary's Western border.[61] A similar interpretation could be found the next day: "Under the cover of smokescreens of talking about a 'heroic uprising' and 'Soviet Troops,' Western circles do everything in their power to restore the old reactionary regime in Hungary."[62]

On November 5, it was announced in *De Waarheid* that the new Hungarian government, under the leadership of János Kádár, along with the socialist forces of Hungary and the Soviet Union, had succeeded in their task.[63] Any attempts to discuss the situation in the forums of the United Nations were deemed unlawful, as the uprising had been a strictly domestic affair. Assaults on the properties of the CPN in the Netherlands were also addressed: "It had nothing to do with an indignant crowd, but everything with organized destruction commandos."[64] On November 6, the alleged underlying motivations of the anti-communist riots in the Netherlands were addressed in more detail: "They attempt to conceal the dangerous situation, which is the result of the British-French aggression against Egypt, behind the curtain of Hungary hysteria."[65] The PvdA was especially blamed for this, with their "unreasonable disruptions about Hungary."[66]

The tenth edition of PvdA's *Paraat* from 1956 was dedicated entirely to the events in Hungary and Poznan, obviously siding with the revolutionaries: "For the first time in history an oppressed people, by its own force, has triumphed over a modern dictatorship while the same people has been handcuffed again by brute military force."[67] The author asks how the situation will develop and whether Moscow would "[u]nashamedly, brutally, and cynically lower the Iron Curtain over Hungary again (…) Moscow does not believe in tears, blood, and freedom. A people is being suffocated under the chokehold of Communism."[68]

60 Ibid.

61 "Directe Westelijke steun aan contra-revolutie Duizenden Horthy-aanhangers stromen Hongarije binnen," *De Waarheid,* November 3, 1956.

62 "Hongaarse regering richt zich tot het volk," *De Waarheid*, November 5, 1956.

63 Ibid.

64 "Georganiseerd vandalisme tegen Waarheid-gebouwen Brandstichting in ANJV-kantoor," *De Waarheid,*

65 "Eenheid in waakzaamheid," *De Waarheid,*

66 Ibid.

67 Mozer, "Het verraad van Hongarije."

68 Ibid.

In another article, the authors of *Paraat* stated that the CPN had always been a "slavish imitation of the foreign communist parties that remain a slavish imitation of the Russian communist party."[69] The PvdA explicitly presented itself as an anti-communist party: "Now the terrible events in Hungary have united the PvdA, together with all other democratic parties, to take a stand against communism; to us this is a confirmation of our principal standpoint that we have drawn a line, which we have always followed as long as we have been democratic socialists."[70]

The Prague Spring 1968

In 1968, Alexander Dubček introduced far-reaching reforms which opened the way for a ten-year transition plan. His intention was to re-popularize socialism by removing its most oppressive features. In practice, this led to the socialist government and the Soviet Union being openly criticized. The Soviet Union perceived the Prague Spring reforms as a threat to the unity of its bloc. On August 20, WTO forces occupied Czechoslovakia. Immediately, all reforms were undone, and Czechoslovakia entered a period of "normalization." Within one year, the government re-established full censorship.[71]

In April, *De Waarheid* addressed the reforms of the Prague Spring. Its attitude towards these developments was positive under the precondition that the reforms would help build a stronger socialist state and the new foreign policy would remain in line with the foreign policies of other WTO members.[72] On August 21, it was reported that WTO troops had unannouncedly entered Czechoslovakia and occupied the most important political centers. *De Waarheid* mentioned that the Soviet press bureau reported that these troops had come to Czechoslovakia's aid only after the Czechoslovak government had requested armed support.[73] Directly next to this article, a commentary by the CPN was placed in which the CPN distanced itself from the armed intervention: "Over the course of recent months, the Communist Party of the Netherlands has repetitively and with great emphasis expressed its stance against any sort of intervention, military or anything else, in

69 Paraat, "Menselijke rechten en socialistische wettelijkheid."

70 Ibid.

71 Karmer, "The Kremlin, the Prague Spring, and the Brezhnev Doctrine."

72 "'Eigen wegen' Tsjechoslowaakse CP publiceert program," *De Waarheid,* April 10, 1956.

73 "Zonder toestemming van regering in Praag Russische troepen op Tsjechoslowaaks gebied," *De Waarheid,*

the affairs of Czechoslovakia."[74] The CPN was convinced that this intervention would have "harmful consequences to the necessary battle against American capitalism and West-German revanchism."[75] The CPN also stated, however, that the Western press had done everything in its power to escalate the conflict. In a later article, the CPN announced that, "[i]t is up to the Czechoslovak people and the Czechoslovak communists to decide how the affairs of their country should be dealt with in the continuing construction of socialism. Interference, in whatever form, can only do damage and lead to great harm."[76]

A week later, the front page of *De Waarheid* was covered by a manifesto of the CPN in which it strongly condemned the use of military force in Czechoslovakia: "The administration of the CPN declares with great emphasis that such conduct is unacceptable, that it has nothing to do with communist principles, and that it violates all decisions and declarations of the international communist movement."[77] The CPN stated that the crisis in Czechoslovakia had been caused by the former government under Antonín Josef Novotny, which Moscow had always supported. The Soviet Union thus had failed to deliver any justification for its interference. This made it the "most shameful breach of the principles of Leninism yet committed."[78] They stated that this interference took place with the silent approval of American imperialists, who seized the opportunity to nurture and inflame anti-communist sentiments. The CPN called for the Dutch working class not to be misled by the pro-Czechoslovak front of Dutch political parties. They felt that the other parties had used the situation in Czechoslovakia to cover up their support for the American war in Vietnam and German revisionism. However, the CPN also continued to present itself as a critic of the Soviet Union: "For years, the Communist Party of the Netherlands has been criticizing the leadership in the Soviet Union, much to the dismay of all anti-communists and the 'official circles' in our country."[79] The CPN then announced that they had cut off all ties with the leadership of the Soviet Union and its supporters: "The CPN insists that the current leadership in the Soviet Union cannot and should not in any way be identified with the Soviet Union or with the ideas of communism."[80] The CPN expressed the conviction that

74 De Waarheid, "Ons commentaar," *De Waarheid,* August 21, 1968.
75 Ibid.
76 "Tsjechoslowakije," *De Waarheid,* August 21, 1968.
77 "Manifest van de CPN over Tsjechoslowakije," *De Waarheid,* August 26, 1968.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.

it was "the only party in the Netherlands with the moral right to stand up to the violation of communist principles being committed by the current Soviet leadership."[81]

The Prague Spring was addressed in two articles in *Socialisme en Democratie*. Cees Laban spoke of the Czechoslovak people and politicians with great sympathy, concluding that

> it is clear that one is looking for a form of communism that is in line with humanism and the principle of freedom, which is rooted in the people, and which also has an economic effect that will give the population greater prosperity (…) Therefore, the moral duty rests on us to provide support for this people cautiously and by using all appropriate, however limited, resources at our disposal.[82]

In another article, another PVDA politician strongly condemned the Soviet intervention but simultaneously argued in support of continuation of the *détente* policy: "It is the only policy that can lead to real cooperation between East and West."[83]

Martial Law in Poland 1981

In the early 1980s, the Polish governing party (PZPR) was in crisis and rapidly losing influence. The opposition was gaining strength in the form of the *Solidarność* trade union and political movement under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa. The PZPR perceived Solidarity as the cause of the economic recession and accused its supporters of leading Poland into a civil war. The prime minister, Wojciech Jaruzelski, believed that the only way to maintain control and avoid Soviet intervention was to introduce martial law, marking a period of severe repression of the opposition and other far-reaching restrictions. Despite the severe measures, martial law did not achieve all the goals set by the PZPR, as Solidarity managed to remain active underground.[84]

On December 13, *De waarheid* stated on their front page that the Polish army had seized power and had announced a state of martial law.[85] On the same page, the CPN condemned the coup d'état by the Polish army: "This seizure of power

81 Ibid.

82 Laban, "De Praagse lente is voorbij en een lange donkere winter is begonnen," 460.

83 Dankert, "Praag'68."

84 Tudor, "The Martial Law Was Inevitable on December 1981 in Poland?" Revista de Stiinte Politice," 99.

85 "Poolse leger neemt de macht over, noodtoestand uitgeroepen," *De Waarheid,* December 14, 1981.

underlines the bankruptcy of the Polish United Workers Party and the urge to innovate as was expressed by the population and the trade union movement in Poland."[86] The CPN was convinced that this provided proof of "the failure of a one-party system, and that broad coalitions, separation of powers, and a deepening of democracy are necessary prerequisites for socialism."[87]

In the December 15 issue of *De waarheid*, it was announced that the Amsterdam departments of the CPN and PvdA, together with three other progressive parties, had published a response to the coup d'état by the Polish army.[88] Only a democracy, it was stated, could lay the foundations for political solutions.

On the next day, it was mentioned that a petition had been sent to the Polish ambassy in The Hague signed by the CPN, the PvdA, and, remarkably enough, three conservative political parties. Marcus Bakker, by then the leader of the CPN faction in the Dutch Parliament, was quoted: "In Poland, the point is that there was an opportunity to create real democratic socialism; but instead of seizing this opportunity, they intervened by military means. That is contrary to what we consider socialism."[89]

In *Paraat*, political relations between the PvdA and CPN were explored. The discussants addressed the CPN's political standpoints towards Eastern Europe and specifically their standpoint regarding the introduction of martial law in Poland. It was stated that the CPN had lost many members to the PvdA because its attitude towards Moscow had not been rectilinear. According to one of the discussants, the CPN had sometimes been critical of Moscow in the 1960s, but in the 1970s, the CPN had reorientated itself towards Moscow, and this had been something, the discussants contended, that the CPN's electorate had not found encouraging. The discussants did not believe that the CPN being critical of Moscow was necessarily very substantial: "I miss a story from the side of CPN about the current situation in Eastern Europe, what the balance of power there is. A cohesive story, and not a sum of incidents."[90]

In *Poland: an "internal affair" for democratic socialism*, Paul Kalma and M. Krop suggested that the PvdA had reacted reasonably to the introduction of martial

86 "Protest CPN," *De Waarheid*, December 14, 1981.

87 Ibid.

88 "Protest tegen machtsovername," *De Waarheid,* December 15, 1981.

89 "Protesten en reacties in Nederland op machtsovername Polen Vakbonden schorten hulptransporten op," *De Waarheid,* December 16, 1981.

90 "Samenwerking met de CPN: nostalgie of noodzaak; verslag van een discussie," *Socialisme en Democratie*, 1981.

law. Immediately, a statement of protest was written, and two demonstrations were organized. "However, this position does not undo the lukewarmness and half-heartedness that have characterized the reactions in the party to the events in Poland for the last year and a half."[91] One of the reasons for a lack of support, the authors supposed, was that the PvdA still had an old-fashioned concept of *détente* politics. It was therefore suggested that practical support of liberation movements in the Eastern Bloc should be taken more seriously: "Such support undoubtedly increases the tension between East and West, but that is the price which must be paid."[92] They argued that it would be key for successful *détente* politics to differentiate between the relaxation of relations between East and West while simultaneously acknowledging the changes to the European status quo. This way, a political course could be followed by the PvdA which would fall more in line with that of the United States.

De Tribune, the magazine of the SP, dedicated a large article to the introduction of martial law in Poland. In their view, Solidarity had become the mouthpiece of economic dissatisfaction. However, the Polish government had met most of the economic demands which could justifiably be made by a trade union. They did not consider Solidarity to be in the position to make any demands other than economic ones.[93] According to *De Tribune*, the establishment of Solidarity as the third power beside the Church and state would inevitably lead to political confrontations. After martial law went into force, the army became the fourth power: "A drama is unfolding in Poland, let's face it. A drama that for all progressive people will be experienced as a setback. But that is not yet a reason to cry with the CDA [Christian Democratic Appeal] and VVD [People's Party for Freedom and Democracy] wolves" [94] (as the CPN allegedly had done). *De Tribune* concluded that none of these four powers in Poland had the mandate or the popular power to solve Poland's economic issues. It therefore recommend that "Poland can only be drawn out of the economic swamp by an utmost concerted effort of these four powers, supported by the population."[95] In the article *Washington*, it was reasoned that while the situation in Poland dominated the news, many North American misdeeds had not been properly addressed.[96]

91 Kalma and Krop, "Polen: een 'interne aangelegenheid' voor het democratisch-socialisme."
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 "Washington," *De Tribune,* 1982, 18, no. 5.

A similar way of reasoning can be found in a later article: "Poland is met with hue and cry, while Minister Haig[97] praises Turkey, (…) They are using the Polish crisis to start a new anti-communist smear campaign and as a reason to sweep the disarmament talks off the table."[98]

Analysis

An analysis of the discourse used by each of the political parties reveals that during each of the crises, all parties took clear and unambiguous positions. The PvdA systematically condemned all Soviet interventions in the Eastern Bloc. Among the many parties, the standpoints of the CPN changed the most significantly, as they went from fully supporting military interventions to completely condemning them. However, there were some steps in between. Regarding the East German Uprising, the CPN did not take the political and economic discontent of East Germans (except for the workers of the *Stalin-Allee*) strongly into consideration. Most of the uprising was framed as the work of fascists and foreign agents, which the East Berlin workers allegedly had nothing to do with. During the protests in Poznan and Budapest, the CPN already acknowledged to a larger extent the possibility that political and economic discontent existed among workers and citizens. However, the CPN still insisted that the Polish and the new Hungarian government had already solved or would soon solve the issues that had given rise to expressions of discontent. Initially, the CPN put trust in Nagy's government to get hold of the situation in Hungary. However, as soon as Hungary left the Warsaw Pact, Nagy's revolutionary government could no longer count on the CPN's sympathy. The suppression of the Prague Spring was the first military intervention which was fully condemned by the CPN. The CPN supported the liberal policies of the Prague Spring, under the precondition that they would help further the construction of a better socialism. The CPN sympathized with the government of Czechoslovakia and stated that only the Czechoslovaks could solve the problems at hand, without any meddling by the WTO or Western powers. The CPN did not believe Moscow's claim that Prague had asked the Soviet Union to remove fascist elements from the Czechoslovakian elite circles, so the CPN considered the intervention illegitimate. This led it to condemn the invasion of Czechoslovakia sharply and to cut ties

97 Alexander Meigs Haig, the American Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1981 until 1982.

98 "Geen raket in mijn lunspakket," *De Tribune,* 1982, 18, no. 5.

with Moscow. However, the CPN still insisted that the situation had escalated due to Western Powers, which had put up another smokescreen to cover up German rearmament and the Vietnam War. During each of the four crises, the CPN repeatedly argued that the events in Eastern Europe were being used as smokescreens to hide American misdeeds and as part of smear campaigns to discredit communism. The introduction of martial law in Poland was therefore the second intervention which was fully condemned by the CPN but the first during which the CPN did not accuse any Western Powers of being involved. It is also important that, in contrast to its response to the events of the Prague Spring, during the introduction of martial law in Poland, the CPN contended that a democratic system was a prerequisite for socialism, not a one-party state. The SP interpreted the introduction of martial law as the result of the Poland's poor economic circumstances and Solidarity, as a trade union, having intervened too much in politics instead of focusing on labor policies. It observed that none of the actors involved (the army, the Church, the state, and Solidarity) had either the popular support or political mandate to solve Poland's (economic) issues. Therefore, the SP proposed that all actors cooperate. Despite this seemingly neutral position, it was still suggested in *Paraat* that the situation in Poland was being used by the Western Powers to start an anti-communist smear campaign to sweep disbarment talks off the table.

When the dynamics between the political parties in the Netherlands are considered, a few significant observations can be made. During the East German Uprising, the Poznan Protests, and the Hungarian Revolution, the dynamics remained largely consistent. The PvdA condemned military intervention and supported a more liberal and democratic political course. The CPN blamed the Western powers for allegedly organizing the crises and vocally supported the Soviet Union. On a national level, the CPN blamed the other political parties for utilizing the crises in the Eastern Bloc for their own gain, either to start anti-communist smear campaigns to divide the Dutch working class or to create smokescreens to hide the failing policies of the Dutch government. Simultaneously, the PvdA emphasized its anti-communist stance and called out the CPN for being a slavish imitation of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This dynamic changed with the end of the Prague Spring in 1968. This time, even the CPN distanced itself from Soviet intervention, though it was not yet willing to take a collective stance towards Moscow with other political parties. The CPN stressed that it was the only political party in the Netherlands with the moral authority to condemn the WTO intervention. The other Dutch

political parties were considered hypocrites for meddling in these affairs, as they did not even support the Dutch working class. Therefore, the CPN was unwilling to cooperate with initiatives and demonstrations organized by other political parties. The only crisis which the PvdA and CPN interpreted and acted on in the same manner was the introduction of martial law in Poland. Both parties considered this crisis symptomatic of a failing one-party state and acknowledged that the introduction of a multiparty system was much needed. The PvdA and CPN not only reached the same conclusion, they also acted in unity.

In 1981, the CPN adopted a very conventional and mainstream political standpoint towards the introduction of martial law in Poland. On this specific matter, the party acted together with the PvdA and even with conservative parties, such as the VVD and CDA. The SP explicitly placed itself outside of this cooperation. It also condemned the introduction of martial law, but the SP still did not want to work together with the other Dutch political parties. In fact, the SP framed the other parties as hypocrites and considered the international outrage little more than a smokescreen to get disarmament talks off the table. The SP publicly called out the CPN for its alleged hypocrisy on this issue. In this specific context, the SP in 1981 willingly took over the CPN's position as a political outsider. It is therefore clearly the case that left-wing political parties in the Netherlands did strongly react to political crises within the Eastern Bloc. In particular, the CPN's political standpoints towards these crises changed drastically over the years.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this discussion, I proposed to consider how the CPN reacted to political crises in the Eastern Bloc and whether its political standpoints developed in response to these events. An analysis of how the CPN presented itself in *De Waarheid* offers reason to assume that the party was motivated by the desire to appeal to a broader electorate, as it called public attention to its changed political standpoints. The CPN made considerable efforts to communicate its firm condemnation of the oppression of the Prague Spring and the introduction of martial law in Poland. It did this by placing elaborate statements in *De Waarheid*, which sometimes even covered full front pages, or as was mentioned in *De Waarheid*, by making a television appearance to express support for Solidarity.

The desire to keep ideological distance from political rivals seems to have played a role in how the left-wing parties in the Netherlands positioned themselves towards one another and the crises in the Eastern Bloc. In 1968, the CPN put in a lot of work into its efforts to underline its ideological distance from the PvdA, even though both parties condemned the Soviet Union's response to the Prague Spring. However, as the standpoint of the CPN towards the introduction of martial law in Poland became mainstream and the CPN started to act accordingly, the SP took its place as the political outsider. The suggestion that the PvdA should adopt a more pro-active stance towards *détente* politics also fits the narrative of creating ideological distance. A bolder approach towards crises in the Eastern Bloc would have distanced the PvdA further from the new course of the CPN. Simultaneously, the PvdA took a critical stance towards the new course of the CPN by doubting its substantiality and integrity.

As is addressed in the literature on Eurocommunism, many factors led communist parties in Western Europe to change their political standpoints in the 1960s and 1970s. Therefore, it remains difficult to say whether the CPN's political standpoints changed as a reaction to the crises in the Eastern Bloc or the CPN's reactions to these crises reflected earlier changes in political standpoints. However, within the framework of party change theories, the CPN seems to have become increasingly reactive to the reoccurring crises by changing its policies towards Moscow. It thus acted more like a mainstream party to appeal to a broader electorate, as the literature on Eurocommunism presumes.

This tendency can also be observed when the election results are coupled with the analysis of policy change in the CPN towards Moscow.[99] The CPN lost four seats during the 1959 elections, which were held two years after the Poznan protests and the Hungarian uprising. During the election of 1977, the CPN lost five seats. Therefore, it is remarkable that large electoral losses during the elections of 1959 and 1977 were followed by significant changes in the CPN's political standpoints during the subsequent crises in the Eastern Bloc, which occurred in 1968 and 1981. This indicates that the changes in political standpoints of the CPN towards the crises in the Eastern Bloc were seemingly affected by disappointing electoral results. Again, this indicates that the CPN acted in line with the presumptions in the theoretical literature on Eurocommunism in an attempt to appeal to a broader electorate.

99 See Table 1.

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