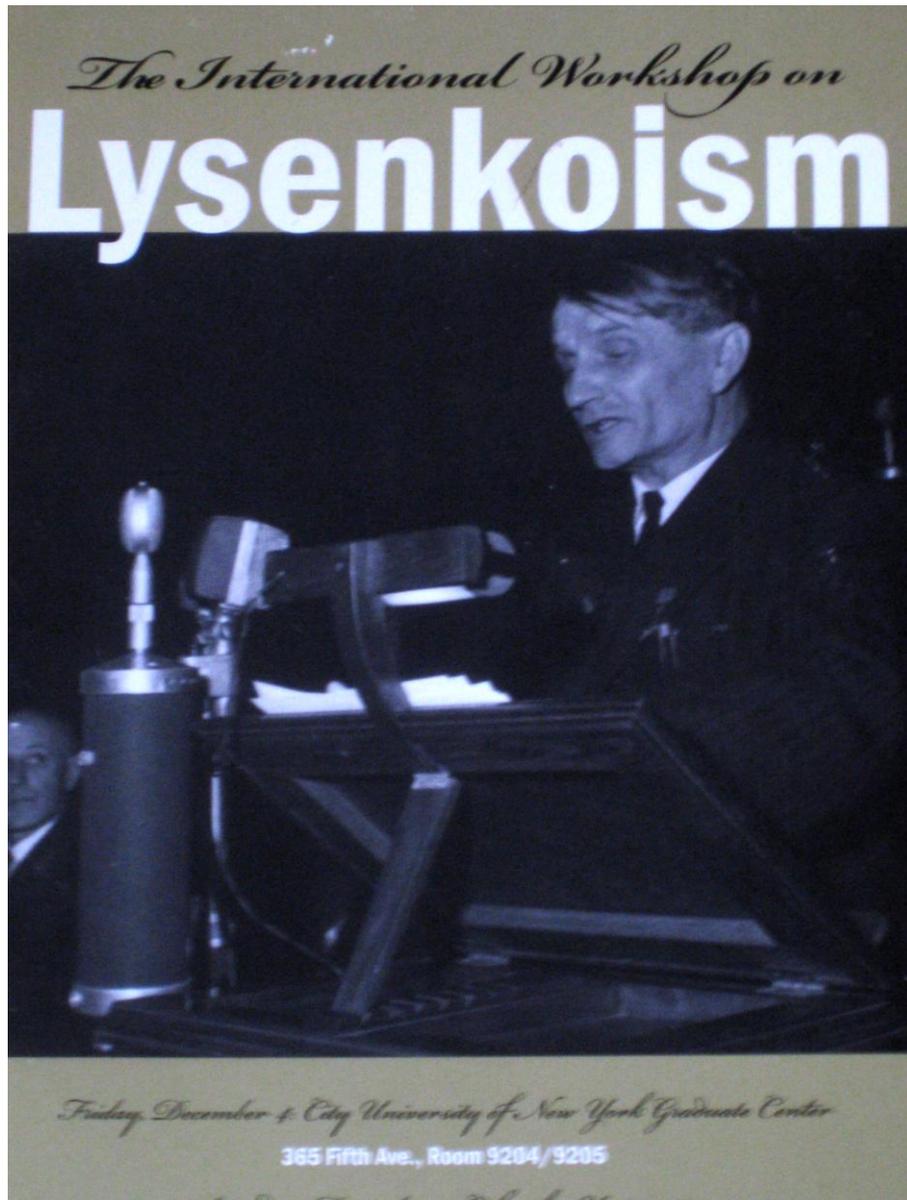


## A Dutch Treat: the Lysenko Affair in Holland



(Conferentie over 'Lysenkoism' in New York, Columbia University, 4 en 5 December 2009)

I suppose that my reason to analyze the Lysenko Affair will be a curious one in this Conference. I was at that time a member of the 'Central Committee' of the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN). After a traumatic loss in the elections of 1977 a discussion had started about the principles of this party. One of the core questions was whether such a party was a 'program party' with leftist principles you could adhere to, or that such a party should have a Marxist or 'dialectical materialist' ideology. There was also a big discussion around 1980 about 'Stalinism': the party had not spoken about Stalinism in twenty-five years, though it had known a shameful and ferocious party struggle in the fifties. The new generation of students and intellectuals that had invaded the party in the seventies had examined its history and wanted to draw the conclusions from Stalinist practices of that time. It was still a practical subject, because the relationship with the Communist Party of the Soviet-Union had been

revived during the huge peace campaign against the employment of American neutron bombs and Cruise missiles in the Netherlands. Many party members were not confident any more after hearing of the Stalinist history that had never been disclosed or criticized. And in fact the decisive nucleus of the leadership of 1958 was still in charge of the party of 1981, and now transparency was required about the foreign contacts.

In the party program things had to be said about ideological terms. I was convinced of the necessity of 'unity' in the party and I thought that as an intellectual I had to make clear to the party members what had been the history of terms like 'dialectical materialism' or 'Leninism'. I started a series of articles, the first one about 'Lysenko and dialectical materialism' in a communist quarterly, *Komma*<sup>28</sup>, and four adjacent ones about 'Marxism', 'Leninism' and 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', and even 'feminism', in the monthly *Politiek & Cultuur*.<sup>29</sup> At the end of the first article I drew the conclusions for the renewal of a 'program party': "The Lysenko Affair has, amongst other aspects, much to do with the relationship of (natural) science, materialist dialectics and communist parties. For me this relationship was the motive to go deeply into the matter. I presumed that a fundamental cause was at stake, that had not lost its actuality. Meanwhile the sources about the affair are abundant<sup>30</sup>. The curious thing is that the principle sources are written from very different angles of incidence and that they are contradictory on major issues. Though, when relating all the data and events an image imposes itself: the pieces of the puzzle match. But the puzzle is far from completed.<sup>31</sup>"

At a seminar of historians in Budapest this summer, 'Marxists and Natural Scientists in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century', I met the Hungarian scientist Miklós Müller who noticed my former preoccupation with Lysenko and who invited me to come to this Conference. I translated my article on the reception of the Lysenko Affair in Holland. However this text mainly concerns the state of affairs with the communist party in France (PCF), because at the time this seemed the most relevant analogue to the issues within the Party in Holland. I dealt with the Lysenko Affair again when writing my dissertation about the history of the Dutch Association of Scientific Workers ('Verbond van Wetenschappelijke Onderzoekers'), a sister organisation of the British ASW, so that I could complete the review of the discussion in Holland<sup>32</sup>.

To give you a general sense of how I approached the Lysenko Affair I will begin with an analysis of how Marxist scientists in the 1930s treated achievements of modern genetics. I will then discuss the book *Proletarian Science?*, written by Dominique Lecourt. Next, I will

---

<sup>28</sup> Leo Molenaar, *The Lysenko Affair (1927-1981)*, *Komma*, December 1981, 67-100.

<sup>29</sup> Leo Molenaar, *Marxism and labor movement*, November 1982; *Lenin and Luxemburg*, December 1982; About 'leninism' and 'marxism-leninism', January 1983; *Revolution in Marxist theory*, February 1983. The series was completed in Oktober 1985, *Marxism as a source of inspiration*. All articles in *Politiek & Cultuur*, monthly of the CPN.

<sup>30</sup> Zhores Medvedew: *Rise and Fall of T.D. Lysenko*, New York 1969; David Jorawsky: *The Lysenko Affair*, CAmbriage 1970; Dominique Lecourt: *Proletarian Science? The Lysenko Affair*, Paris 1977; Richard Lewontin and Richard Levins: *The dilemma of Lysenkoism*, Natur och Samhälle 1, Lund 1978; J.P. Regelmann: *The history of Lysenkoism*, dissertation, Frankfurt 1980.

<sup>31</sup> *The Lysenko Affair*, note 1, page 67.

<sup>32</sup> Leo Molenaar, *We cannot leave it to the politicians any longer; The history of the Dutch Association of Scientific Workers 1946-1980*, Rijswijk 1994, 107-108.

describe the discussions in Holland about Lysenkoism, focusing on two journals in which social-democrat, liberal and communist scientists shared their opinions. Finally, I shall tell you what resulted from these discussions within the Dutch communist party in the 1980s.

1. The dialectical synthesis: the Marxist view about genetics in the thirties.

In the thirties there was much debate about the theories of Darwin and Mendel. From communist scientists popular scientific works would appear like *Heredity and Politics* by the Englishman John Haldane, *Biology and Marxism* by the Frenchman Marcel Prenant or *The Race Question* by the Dutchman Gerrit Kastein. The books contained the positive formulation of the dialectical synthesis in biology, and criticized the abuses that the Nazi ideology made of the biological insights. As Marcel Prenant wrote: “What Marxists attack is the false fascist science, also the bluff of racist literature, that begins with a chapter of the genetic laws of Mendel, and continues by pretending that these laws can deduce the fascist conclusions of the superiority of the chosen race, the necessity to preserve this race and the right of the suppression of the inferior races.<sup>33</sup>”

The abuse of biology was mainly threefold. The first focused on ‘the struggle for life’. Darwin supposes that the natural selection finds its way through ‘struggle’ between and within the species. The fascists had made a ‘merciless’ struggle for existence a keystone of their ideology: “The struggle of the different dispositions, understood in their full meaning, seems to us the most important feature. The struggle of the different race souls is for us the axis of the history of the world and the culture”, wrote Nazi-ideologist Alfred Rosenberg. In their biological ideology the ‘struggle for existence’ led to war. The second abuse was about Mendel’s doctrine of heredity. One conclusion of his laws was that the hereditary ability (‘genotype’) of living organisms was transferred unchanged. The race ideologists now presumed that the ‘Nordic race’ had kept its ‘race soul’ from Teutonic antiquity to the actual German *Volk*: “The members of a race always produce their equals”, declared Nazi-ideologist Hans Günther<sup>34</sup>. The third abuse was ‘eugenetics’, the breeding of a healthy (blond, tall, blue-eyed) race, that was used as an argument for the annihilation of Jews, gypsies and handicapped. Eugenetics had also been on the agenda of communist biologists in the Soviet Union in the twenties: Koltsov, Serebrowski, Agol and Levit had written about the breeding of a healthy, socialist Soviet people. Later geneticists like Levit and Koltsov would be dishonored during their political processes for being ‘racists’ and ‘fascists’ because of these publications.

These three abuses also show three examples of misinterpretation. The debate about questions of heredity had become politically loaded, but the debate had to be engaged in order to make the results of biological science publicly known and to attack the Nazi abuse of biology. The Marxist Gerrit Kastein saw in the development of biology a confirmation of his philosophy. At first there was the material basis of the hereditary factors (Mendel, Morgan), then came the empowerment of Darwin’s materialist development theory, and the finale was the dialectical synthesis of the seemingly mutually excluding theories of Darwin and Mendel by the

---

<sup>33</sup> Marcel Prenant, as quoted by Gerrit Kastein, *The Race Question*, Amsterdam 1938.

<sup>34</sup> Quotes of Rosenberg and Günther in G. Kastein, *The Race Question*.

mutation theory of De Vries. The racist fallacies were proudly contradicted: scientifically, morally and politically—as Darwin and Mendel were rescued for the Left.

Yesterday some speakers already mentioned this ‘dialectical synthesis’ in biology between 1860 and 1920. But are we all aware what tangible content is meant by this vague expression? The Englishman Charles Darwin had stressed the change in species and organisms in his ‘Origin of Species’ (1859): in due time organisms will change. The Czech Gregor Mendel (1859) and the American Thomas H. Morgan (1916) discovered that the material carriers of heredity were chromosomes and genes: in due time organisms stay the same. Then the Dutchman Hugo de Vries (1905) discovered the occurrence of haphazard mutations of the species, that were hereditary. So the ‘thesis’ is Darwin’s theory of change because of the survival of the fittest. The ‘antithesis’ is the gene theory of Morgan that explains why organisms stay constant. The ‘synthesis’, the mutation theory of De Vries, makes it understandable that organisms change in time because of scarce *mutations*, and at the same time that organisms do not change in time because of *scarce* mutations. The gene theory of Mendel and Morgan is, so to speak, the ‘negation’ of the theory of Darwin, and the mutation theory, ‘the negation of the negation’, makes the mutually excluding theories of Darwin and Mendel match from a higher level of understanding. Would Hegel and Engels have testified this development in biology, they would have added this negation of the negation to their list of examples of dialectics in nature in ‘Wissenschaft der Logik’ (Hegel, 1816) and ‘Dialectics of Nature’ (Engels, 1886). In the thirties Marxist scientists spoke in these terms about the wonderful dialectical synthesis in biology.

This was the proud and selfconscious Marxist view on biological science at the moment that Lysenko imposed himself in the Soviet Union. The Lysenkoists declined all theoretical thinking: mysterious particles such as ‘genes’ were a bourgeois fantasy, ‘everything’ in the plant had hereditary abilities, and proper ‘education’ could induce hereditary changes of plants and animals. Lysenko’s views meant a blow to Marxist thinking in genetics. In 1936 the Marxist American geneticist Herman Muller mocked Lysenko’s views in Moscow: if you are right, and education and surroundings change heredity, then centuries of misery, suppression and deprivation must have made the less fortunate classes and races inferior to the well-to-do classes and races! Muller’s rebuke was articulate—but ineffective. Lysenko’s views promised a shining future after generations of training and hard work.

The ‘dialectical materialist’ Lysenko-version of biology, known as ‘agrobiology’, was scientifically baseless—nothing more than an ideological digestion of agricultural techniques. It was not a ‘paradigm’ that could be maintained in the face of Mendel’s genetics. It was a delusion, that blocked every debate. It could not become dominant on its merits, but only with the submission of science to the state. In 1948, Lysenko’s delusion was prescribed to all communist parties which had emerged victorious after World War II. Even in petty bourgeois Holland the Communist Party drew, one year after the liberation, 11% of the votes: it was for a short time the biggest party in Amsterdam with the biggest circulation in the country for its newspaper. The party had followed its own road after the upheaval of the Comintern in 1943, and organized mass meetings with huge pictures of social-democrats like Troelstra and the Jewish philosopher Spinoza. In February 1941 the party had organized a mass strike against

the persecution of Jews, months before the war between Germany and Russia: a fact that Moscow never wished to admit. Parties like the CPN had to submit to Stalin as soon as possible. One of the means of this submission was the Manichean theory of ‘the two sciences’, or ‘the two ways’, or ‘the two roads.’ A third was never possible. Lysenko’s theory of the ‘two sciences’ was a product of this framework.

## 2. The ‘two sciences’ (Lysenko) and the ‘two roads’ (Zhdanov).

In August 1948 the notorious session of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences took place in Moscow. President Lysenko exposed his biology that would make it possible to force the development of every animal and plant in the direction that mankind wished. He didn’t stop there, and distinguished between two biological sciences: a ‘proletarian’ versus a ‘reactionary’, capitalist one—and then took a giant step forward. This struggle between the sciences was not restrained to biology—it was universal. The mission was to follow the example of biology, and to unmask the reactionary basis of ordinary chemistry, physics, mathematics, astronomy, and so on. In 1947 the political line of the ‘two roads’ had already been exposed by Zhdanov. There was, on the one hand, a road to darkness, the road of US-imperialism; and there was, on the other hand, a road of light and peace: the road of the Soviet Union. A third road, a ‘third way’, could not exist. The time was ripe for the ideology of the ‘two sciences’.

Lecourt found an important explanation for this in the internal situation in the Soviet Union, in which organs of the state unveiled a fierce class struggle (twelve years after the abolishment of classes in 1936). He considered the ideology of the ‘two sciences’ as an obligatory state ideology, forced upon a potentially oppositional layer of the new cadres in agriculture and industry. Opposition meant ‘the end of ideology’: the trials, prisons and gulags. In Lecourt’s opinion Lysenko was not an active, leading figure, but an instrument of forces beyond him: “We saw that ‘dialectical materialism’ made itself *from outside* master of Lysenko’s ideas (1935-1936), and now we see that the state intervened *from outside* to express the ideology of the ‘two sciences’. (...) There is no drive within Lysenko’s theory of practice, that points to the universal conclusions of 1948.<sup>35</sup>”

From August 1948 moreover, this ideology was forced upon all communist parties by the Kominform. Every communist in the world was supposed to spread this ideology. A complication was that leading Marxist scientists were convinced of the scientific truth of genetics. A further complication was that for many parties the background of the question was vague and unknown. Hence the confusion and the sectarian debate everywhere, that was aimed at by Moscow.

Lecourt gives a saddening image of the discussion in the French communist party. The resistance against fascism, the struggle against the threat of atomic war, the striving for a better society with an honored role for science: it appealed to many intellectuals. On the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1948 (shortly after the VASKhNIL conference), a World Congress was

---

<sup>35</sup> Dominique Lecourt, *Proletarian Science? (Qu’est-ce que c’est que la science prolétarienne?)*, note 3, from the end of chapter 5 about the two sciences and the ideology of the Soviet state.

held in Wroclaw (Breslau): 'Intellectuals and peace'. Its decision was that "the biggest possible spectra of intellectuals must be collected in a front for the defense of the mental heritage of the peoples". On the same 26<sup>th</sup> of August one of the biggest and most harmful ideological struggles broke loose in France, because of the Lysenko Affair, that eventually ended with the isolation of the communists.

We may ask: how far was the ideology of the 'two sciences' primarily meant for internal purposes as Lecourt stated? Its use abroad had very serious consequences. The imperialist subjugation of the capitalist states by the United States was now again accompanied by the ideological subjugation of the communist parties to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In post-war Europe communist parties experienced new coalitions, ideas and orientations in the struggle against fascism. Now the hegemony of Moscow was restored with tremendous force. The Lysenko Affair and the theory of the 'two sciences' played an important role in the restoration of the blind discipline within the communist movement. This did not take place by chance: it was intended.

### 3. A Dutch Treat: Lysenkoism in Holland.

In the Netherlands there was a heated debate on a small scale, but the reflection in the theoretical papers of the Communist Party was very restrained. The party had lost the vast majority of its cadres in the struggle against Nazism. The physician Gerrit Kastein, the author of the lucid exposition of genetics, had been a leader of the communist Military Command, was seized and interrogated by the Gestapo and jumped out of the window at the Binnenhof of The Hague. Many of the party's intellectuals were silenced forever. In 1949 only one page in the theoretical monthly *Politiek & Cultuur* was filled by a young member, Ger Harmsen, who followed the French PCF. The issue mostly consisted of some articles about Mitsjoerin (Michurin), Lysenko or Lepeshinskaya. There was little enthusiasm in the party for such an abstract scientific theme, but the scarce party intellectuals were still motivated to make a choice, and their choice was Lysenkoism. However this brief, inconsequential flirtation with Lysenkoism was soon looked upon with regret, and in 1966 a retrospective opinion was published by the Bulgarian Polikarov, who criticized the whole affair<sup>36</sup>.

An important example of the wider Dutch debate can be found in *De Vrije Katheder*, the resistance paper of artists and intellectuals that tried to maintain a coalition of communists and progressives. A loud and clear opinion appeared of the biologist A.F. Willebrands who, after considering various arguments, drew the conclusion that "the merits that Lysenko undoubtedly must have had, cannot hide his shortcomings. The hope must be put forward that these shortcomings will soon be discovered in the Soviet Union."<sup>37</sup> Willebrands knew the work of Lysenko quite well, and could evaluate and criticize 'agrobiology' in the framework of genetics. In the next edition the communist answer was put forward by Ger Harmsen, who used merely ideological arguments in his confession against genetics. The editors promised discussion, but it never took place. In the social-democrat monthly *Socialism & Democracy*

---

<sup>36</sup> A. Polikarov, *Philosophical aspects of modern physics*, *Politiek & Cultuur*, 4, 1966.

<sup>37</sup> Bertus Willebrands, *De Vrije Katheder*, December 1948. Ger Harmsen answered in the periodical of January 1949.

the Groningen geneticist M.J. Sirks attacked Lysenko. Sirks received an angry reaction from the communist daily *De Waarheid* (Truth).

The discussion in the Dutch *Association of Scientific Workers* was more significant. In 1948 it became a habit that the postwar coalitions in every field of society got rid of the communists. In the Association there were members, mostly social-democrats, that wanted to promote members who put science first, in place of those who favored politics and ideology. In June 1948, Marius Jacob Sirks published a lead article in *Science & Society* (*Wetenschap & Samenleving*) that continued in the July and August issues, about the Lysenko Affair<sup>38</sup>. The opinions of Lysenko on agricultural science and his condemnation of ‘capitalist’ biological theories about genes and chromosomes, were convincingly contradicted. Sirks exposed that the August Session of the Academy “had ended all true genetic research, and also ended something that is holy to us, the spiritual liberty that is the foremost requirement of scientific research. (...) Is it strange that such a thinking atmosphere that is poisoned by power politics arouses unbounded aversion of us all who think of the freedom of science to draw conclusions without prejudices as a holy good? Is it strange that we are disturbed about the destiny of our colleagues and friends in the great Russia, that have refused to bend their scientific conscience for the power of a single person, who is supported by a system?”

This text was directed to members of the Council of the ASW, notably the astrophysicist Marcel Minnaert and the anthropologist Wim Wertheim, both of whom had communist sympathies. The latter still wrote a year later<sup>39</sup>: “the endeavors in the Soviet-Union to change favorably the genotypic composition of plants and animals during their lives by phenotypic influences, could perhaps lead to results that would in the long term be scientifically acceptable”. But in general they kept silent. The reaction came from Zonnenberg, a Catholic research worker in the Council. His article was rejected by the editor of *Science & Society* because he was not supposed to clarify the subject being an economist. Zonnenberg got support from the biologist De Mol, who showed him plants that were ‘permanently’ changed by the influences of the environment, and after eight months his article was published. He suggested that Sirks had made a too easy dismissal of Lysenkoism: the Russian results should be considered without political prejudices. Sirks replied: “The main question is that a political party (...) forbids scientific research, puts the professionals out of office, closes laboratories and silences people<sup>40</sup>.”

At this point Philips Nat Lab research worker Voogd and the Delft microbiologist Roelofsen also joined in. Voogd concluded that the opinion of Zonnenberg flagrantly violated the

---

<sup>38</sup> M.J. Sirks: *A dramatic crisis in Russian biology* I, 81-85; II, 97-99; III, *The Storm of the 31th of July 1948*, 113-115; *Wetenschap & Samenleving*, first Annual, 1948. The quotation comes from the concluding page 115. The last article appeared at the time of the crisis!

<sup>39</sup> W. Wertheim: *Ability and surrounding* (Aanleg en milieu), *Wetenschap & Samenleving*, 1949, 135. The topic of Wertheim was to stimulate education for the students from the lower classes of Dutch society.

<sup>40</sup> Quotes from: J.M.E.M.A. Zonnenberg, *Biology without politics*, W&S, 1950, 101-103. In his personal archive was a letter from the Dutch communist and engineer S. J. Rutgers, a founder of Russian heavy industry in Siberia in the thirties, who was convinced of Lysenko’s case. The biologist W.E. de Mol had provided Zonnenberg with the results of mutants after Röntgen radiation. M.J. Sirks, *Biology without politics*, W&S, 1950, 139. J. Voogd, *The ASW and the Lysenko Affair*, W&S, 1950, 158-159. P.A. Roelofsen, W&S, 1950, 159-160. J.M.E.M.A. Zonnenberg, *Politics without biology*, W&S, 1950, 160.

foundation of the ASW. Roelofsen, meanwhile, mentioned the experiences of the International Botanical Congress, that had been flabbergasted after the Russian delegation had exposed the Lysenko point of view. Zonnenberg held his ground, and made an appreciative quotation of Stalin. In doing so he placed himself outside of the scientific community of the ASW. These experiences stimulated the withdrawal of the Dutch ASW from the *Worldfederation of Scientific Workers* that had decided to join the communist dominated *Worldfederation of Trade Unions* in the beginning of 1950. The early, convincing argumentation of Sirks had made it very difficult for some prominent natural scientists with communist sympathy to defend Lysenko: they were primarily scientists and not ideologists<sup>41</sup>.

One of the well known natural scientists from Dutch soil, the mathematician Dirk Jan Struik, entered into the debate in the United States, and he tried at first to reconcile<sup>42</sup>. The Englishman John Haldane, another icon of the progressive movement, resolutely declined the opinions of Lysenko<sup>43</sup>. In general Marxist scientists, sometimes after some hesitation, chose their scientific over their political convictions. The communists, who were already besieged by the policy of the Cold War, isolated themselves from their natural allies by their sectarian behavior.

#### 4. The advice to the CPN and what happened in the eighties.

In my essay on Lysenko I wrote a long chapter about the relationship of Lysenko's 'agrobiology' and Stalin's thought. I treated five traits of Stalin's 'dialectical materialism': the relation of dialectics to nature (1), the dominant role of the productive forces in the building of socialism (2), the application of dialectics to agricultural science (3), the relation between theory and practice (4) and the relation between materialist dialectics and science (5). I proved, of course, that Stalin's 'dialectical materialism' was neither dialectic nor materialist: it violated the nucleus of all Marxist thought.

I summarized the outcome of my inquiry with Stalin's view that: "*If the laws of dialectics are the proper laws of nature, then every science is the application of these laws on a particular domain. Then all sciences must be laid under the 'sieve' of 'dialectical materialism' to smooth roughness and to correct mistakes. If a certain science, like genetics, resists such a sift, than this false science has to be reconstructed on the basis of the dialectical laws. The new 'scientific' terms and laws of that domain can simply be derived, with some skill, from the philosophical system of categories of 'dialectical materialism'. In this opinion 'dialectical materialism' is a 'science of sciences'. And if the communist party is the carrier of 'dialectical materialism', and represents as such 'the ideas of the working class', then this leads inevitably to the 'two sciences'—the 'proletarian' (on the sieve) and the 'reactionary' (through the*

---

<sup>41</sup> Leo Molenaar, *We can't leave it to the politicians any longer; The history of the Association of Scientific Workers (1946-1980)* (Wij kunnen het niet langer aan de politici overlaten; De geschiedenis van het Verbond van Wetenschappelijke Onderzoekers (1946-1980)), Rijswijk 1994. Leo Molenaar: *Marcel Minnaert, astrophysicist; The Skirt of the Universe*; (De Rok van het Universum, not yet translated into English), biography, Amsterdam 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Dirk J. Struik vs Charles H. Blake, *Communism and genetics*, The Tech Engineering News, April 1951.

<sup>43</sup> J.B.S. Haldane, *In defense of genetics*, The Modern Quarterly, 4, 1949. In the same periodical a reconciling position of J.D. Bernal.

sieve). ‘Dialectical materialism’ is a closed system, guarded by power, immune for every criticism from within or from outside. It has been just that: for decades<sup>44</sup>.”

Marx prophesized that—“In her mystical form dialectics grew a German (add: Russian) fashion, because it seemed to glorify the existing. In her rational shape dialectics is (...) an annoyance and an atrocity, because it encloses with the positive understanding of the existing the understanding of its negation, of its necessary decline, because it considers every form in its development and its transiency, because it can’t be bluffed, and because its nature is critical and revolutionary...<sup>45</sup>” My advice to the program committee of the CPN, that one year later I would join, was to reject this ‘dialectical materialism’ as an obligatory ideology of the communist party.

In my conclusion I wrote that in the preceding pages *everything* appeared to be ‘dialectical materialism’. Whether the opinion was Darwin’s, Mendel’s, Stalin’s, or Lysenko’s, the label could easily be applied to an opinion, and just as easily removed. And because this label could be applied to anything, in the end it applied to *nothing*. The mysticism of this ‘dialectics’, that glorified the existing power, had caused many scientists to loathe this way of thinking. The French geneticist Monod, winner of the Nobel Prize, wrote in a *Prologue* of the French translation of Medvedew’s book on Lysenko that ‘dialectical materialism’ was a kind of animism, a mockery of science. This has become the dominant opinion of socialist and communist scientists. Still the Lysenko Affair doesn’t automatically lead to such a conclusion. Stalin’s ‘dialectical materialism’ was a mysticism, glorifying his reign, that had not much to do with the original dialectics of the founders of communism and socialism. One could of course trace how it was possible that such a degeneration took place. Because Stalin broke himself loose of former opinions, but for many people, among them quite a few intellectuals, his writings stayed within the continuity of Marxist thought. My own position is that I would defend materialist dialectics in such a debate. About the relation between materialist dialectics and science: it is useful and popular to interpret and propagate dialectics as new results of science *afterwards*, as did the books of Prenant and Kastein, but it would be more creative to use dialectics consciously as a method of thinking prior to the elaboration of experiences and data, prior to making suppositions.

About ‘the communist party and materialist dialectics’ I wrote at the time: “In the Lysenko Affair the communist party came forward as the carrier of ‘dialectical materialism’. The party however cannot be a ‘carrier’ of such a philosophy. For at least two good reasons. The first is that materialism and dialectics, the world view and the method of thinking, are in the possession of everyone; they are part of our cultural heritage, not exclusively destined for communists. The second reason is that one cannot expect that communists would be the carriers of a specific way of thinking. Communists unite on a political world view, that is made explicit in a political program and the according practice. So on the one hand the support for materialist dialectics is broader, on the other hand smaller.” This was a part of my plead to make the CPN a program party.

---

<sup>44</sup> Leo Molenaar, note 1, *The Lysenko Affair (1927-1981)*, Komma, 94-95.

<sup>45</sup> Karl Marx, *The Capital*, in the *Prologue* to the second edition of Volume 1.

What then were the immediate and long-term results of the 1984-program (no irony intended) of the Communist Party of the Netherlands? The article about Lysenko was greeted enthusiastically by the older leadership—I was proposed for membership in the Executive Committee to experience the results up-close. As for the longer-term life of the party, the dispute over Lysenkoism can now be seen as a symptom of the problems which would soon lead to the collapse of the Dutch communist party. Terms like ‘Marxism-Leninism’, ‘dialectical materialism’, and ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, were absent in the new Party Program.

The program stated that the party would be inspired not only by Marxist, but also feminist thought as well. After many years of chaos there was not much left of the Dutch communist party or its daily paper. Members and subscribers had not been accustomed to intra-party debates, and the liberty to fight with one another could perhaps be blamed for helping to tear the party apart. The old leadership had given way in 1982, and its successors could not handle the stress<sup>46</sup>.

The new program did, however, make a fusion possible between pacifists, radicals and leftist Christians, and the fusion of these four groups, and important individuals who joined, produced a new parliamentary party, *GreenLeft* (GroenLinks) in 1989, just a few months before the collapse of communism in Eastern-Europe. It was fortunate that we could make these decisions in 1984, as opposed to amidst the Kladderadatsch, the blowing up, of the big brothers.

Leo Molenaar, [molenaar@erasmiaans.nl](mailto:molenaar@erasmiaans.nl), [www.leomolenaar.nl](http://www.leomolenaar.nl), [www.huisvanerasmus.nl](http://www.huisvanerasmus.nl)

---

<sup>46</sup> Michael Waller and Meindert Fennema, *Communist Parties in Western Europe, Decline or Adaptation*; Fennema: *The End of Dutch Bolshevism? The Communist Party of the Netherlands*, 158-178, Cambridge 1988.