

PARTIES OF THE PEOPLE  
PT. 2/6

# The Workers' Party of Belgium



Those organising for social transformation can look to the Workers' Party of Belgium (*Parti du travail de Belgique*, or PTB) for a source of inspiration, an unabashedly **socialist and anti-imperialist party firmly rooted in working-class life.**

By consistently organising around the issues that matter to ordinary people, like cost of living, health-care, pensions, and ecological breakdown, the PTB has expanded its membership and political influence, **becoming one of Europe's most successful socialist organisations.**



## History

The PTB was founded in 1979 by activists from the May '68 student movement. As a Maoist party, it **focused on meeting people's material needs** – for instance, through the now-famous network of community health centres called “Medicine for the People.”

Nevertheless, it remained marginal in Belgian politics for decades, hindered by its ideological rigidity, insularity, and the high level of commitment expected from members. This began to change in the 2000s after it underwent a conscious **process of “renewal,” aiming to become a “party where ordinary people feel at home.”**

**Consultative members:**

Pay basic dues, support the party, and receive information.

**Base group members:**

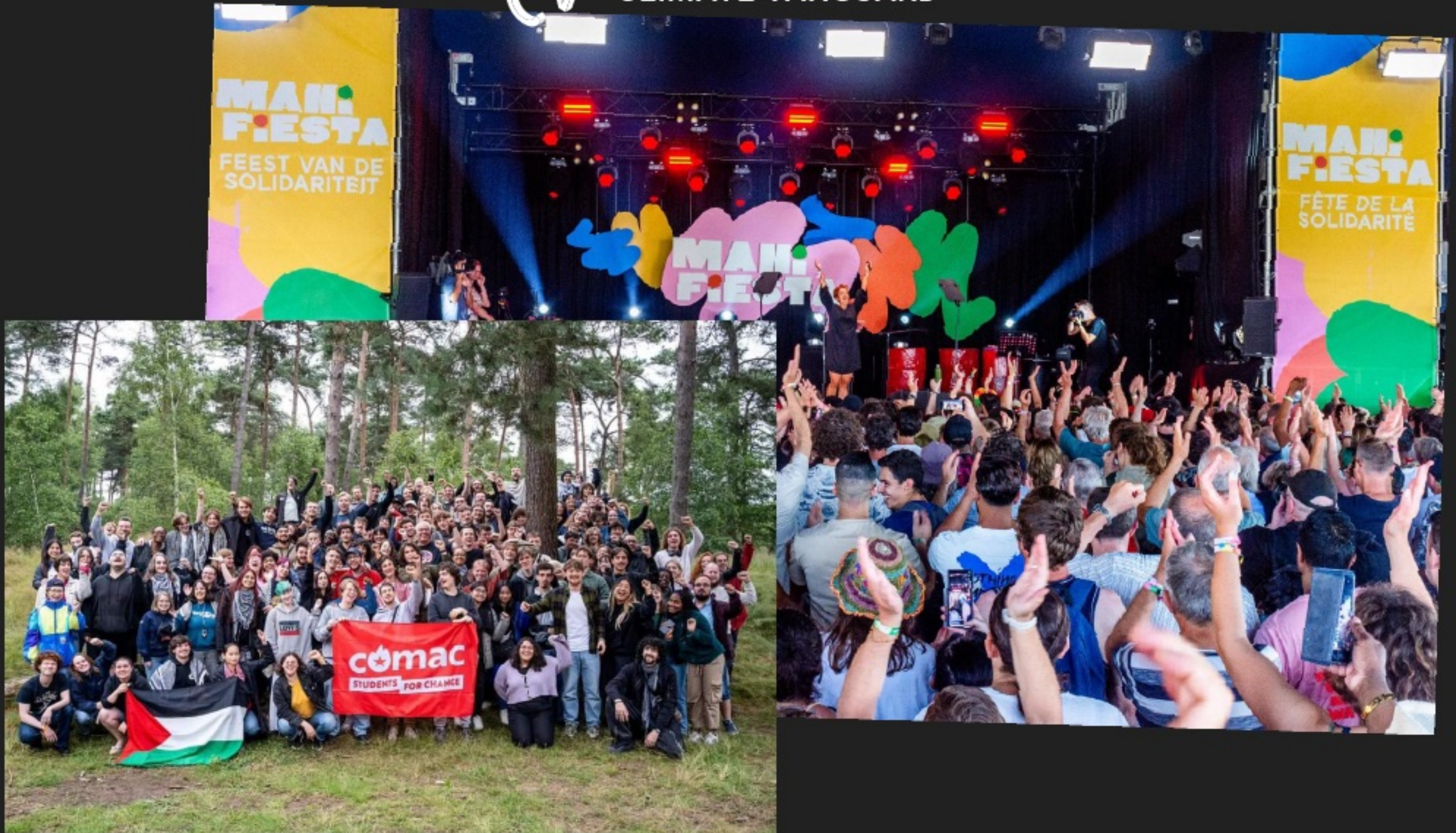
Active participants in local units based in workplaces, municipalities, or neighbourhoods.

**Militants:**

Highly committed members who dedicate significant time and energy to party organising.

# Membership

Key to the PTB's renewal was the introduction of an accessible three-tiered membership structure:



The PTB also has a **robust network of affiliated organisations**, including its student wing COMAC, youth organisation RedFox, and women's movement Marianne, as well as its annual festival, Manifiesta, which brings together thousands of people around a 21st-century socialist politics that is both politically serious and playful.

**Its dynamic structure both develops skilled activists and expands the party's mass base among the working class.**

**Today, the PTB has over 25,000 members** (up from 8,500 in 2014) and nearly 800,000 people voted for the party in the 2024 federal elections.



## Democratic Structure

Centralised party leadership is elected from the bottom up, with delegates from base groups choosing leaders at national congresses, and held accountable through internal democracy and recall mechanisms.

The national leadership coordinates strategy, political messaging, and major campaigns, which are adapted to local contexts by base groups.

The party deliberately cultivates leadership and collective empowerment among its members, who – especially those from the working class – are encouraged and supported to rise through the ranks of the organisation.



## Popular Campaigns

The PTB creates **people-oriented campaigns** through its *enquête* process, in which it surveys local communities before compiling results at the national level.

Whether it's taxing the rich or fighting the increase in retirement age, **the PTB frames its campaigns through the language of class struggle.** This is massified through its vibrant, modern aesthetic and strong social media presence, ensuring that its Marxist messaging pierces the mainstream.



## Base Building

The PTB has a strong legacy of meeting the people where they're at. This includes both joining picket lines and demonstrations, as well as running solidarity projects, like helping refugee families or supporting local food banks.

Especially well known are the PTB's 11 community health clinics, which provide free or low-cost medical care while integrating political education on the social determinants of health.

As a material force of change, base building provides the PTB with political credibility in working-class communities.



## Electoral Success

The PTB's social strength has brought **electoral success across different levels of government.** This has provided it with a mainstream platform through which it can agitate against the corruption of the political status quo.

**And they don't just talk the talk: the party requires elected officials to live modestly, close to the standard of a skilled worker,** and donate much of their parliamentary salary to the party.

Crucially, the parliamentary faction remains subordinate to the party leadership, ensuring representatives follow the party's political line.

**Note:** The PTB now holds 2 seats in the European Parliament, 15 in the national parliament, and 258 local and regional electoral positions.

# The PTB provides many lessons for organisers seeking to build an effective mass left party:

## **Empowered membership:**

Party structures allow ordinary members to develop leadership skills and take on responsibility.

## **Effective leadership:**

Strong, democratic leadership enables the party to act quickly and with discipline.

## **Positive Demands:**

Prioritise issues that matter to people and communicate them in accessible, relatable language.

## **Community Organising:**

Meeting people's needs strengthens relationships and trust.

This is part 2 of 6 in our series that analyses leftwing parties from around the world.

