

Tensions between scientific ethos and political engagement:

Belgian university professors and the Lysenko Case

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Introduction

This contribution concerns, as indicated in its title, three issues: political engagement (communism), Brussels University (*Université Libre de Bruxelles*) and the Lysenko case. T.D. Lysenko (1898-1976) was a Russian plantbreeder with no scientific formation in biology or genetics who, in the mid 1930's, launched Michurinism, a term to cover his own principles as formulated since 1927. He based his claims on the accomplishments of the legendary cultivator Michurin (1855-1935) who, starting from cross-pollination, had created new - or 'better' - breeds of fruit. Michurin however didn't develop any theories about this. According to Lysenko's 'theory', the hereditary influences and characteristics of plants could be modified and almost eliminated by the manipulation of external, environmental factors: changes in temperature and humidity or even the use of psychology - on trees for example - could provoke adaptations within the plants. This could improve their growth; cereal production could be increased that way and new varieties developed (transformation of winter cereals in spring cereals). Such modifications, due to environmental changes, could be passed on to the next generation of plants. This, of course, was completely conflicting with the existing principles of plant genetics and Neo-Darwinism (t.i. the synthesis of earliest genetic findings and darwinism: genmutations - not adaptations - are the driving force behind the evolution of species, assisted in this by the principle of natural selection)¹. Lysenko rapidly gained party support and a growing influence on research institutes, academics, journals, etc... This was very much the case from 1948 on, after the triumphal extraordinary session of the Soviet Academy of Agricultural Sciences of which Lysenko had been the president for some time. Opponents who objected that

¹T.BOTTOMORE, ed., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983, p. 294-295; J.& D.KOTEK, *L'Affaire Lyssenko*, Bruxelles, Editions Complexe, 1986, p. 18-34, 50-57.

his experiments were scientifically worthless were soon put to silence. For many years no defender of the chromosome theory of heredity was allowed to speak in public or appear in print. Lysenko kept his authority until Khrushchev's dismissal in 1964, after which Lysenko's mistakes were quietly acknowledged by Soviet authorities².

Western biologists who were member of the communist parties in their own countries were asked to pay the same loyalty to the theories of Lysenko as their Soviet colleagues. This led to frequent tensions, suspicion, arguments and splits between the party and these academics, but also between them and their fellow scientists and colleagues. At the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*, Jean Brachet and Paul Brien, two eminent biologists and university professors, stand as an example. In Britain it was John Haldane and in France, amongst others, Marcel Prenant. In fact, the Lysenko case can be used as illustration of the manner in which relations between communist intellectuals and communist parties evolved, and especially in periods of tension, as was the case from 1947 on, during the Cold War.

Intellectuals, university professors and communist engagement

The socialist movement has been discussing the function of the 'intellectual' for over a hundred years - since the origin of the term. The classic marxist opinion on this matter was that of intellectuals standing on the side of the capitalists, being of bourgeois-origin, as shown by their mentality and 'way of life'. From a social-economic point of view they tended more towards the working-class, as they were subject to the power of capital as well. Intellectuals, it was believed, lacked common class interests and thus showed very swerving political attitudes, depending on the circumstances. Nevertheless, intellectuals were thought to be usefull as ideologists of the party, their task consisting of spreading socialist consciousness among the labour-class. A clear line was drawn between those intellectuals who had joined the party as individuals and those

²L. KOLAKOWSKI, *Main Currents of Marxism. Its Origin, Growth, and Dissolution. Volume III. The Breakdown*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978, p.103, 137-138; A. KOJEVNIKOV, "Games of Stalinist Democracy. Ideological discussions in Soviet science, 1947-1952", in: S. FITZPATRICK, ed., *Stalinism. New Directions*, London, Routledge, 2000, p.142.

who stood outside the party; the intelligentsia as a whole was looked upon with suspicion³.

One could state that the attitude of communist parties towards sympathizing intellectuals was hospitable during the periods when the communist movement in the West made alliances with other radicals, socialists and liberals in the battle for democracy and national independence as was the case in the years 1936-39 and after 1941. The relation was more tense in periods of revolutionary sectarianism and diplomatic isolation of the Soviet Union as from 1928 to 1935 and during the Cold War. In France many intellectuals became member of the *Parti Communiste Français* during the twenties. Ten years later, as a consequence of the 'bolshevisation' of the party which generated an internal anti-intellectual tendency, many distanced themselves from it. Nevertheless the party kept, even during those years, close relations with some famous intellectuals such as Henri Barbusse, Paul Langevin, Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard and Paul Nizan... They had become members or communist sympathizers for various reasons, going from admiration for the U.S.S.R. and the lack of possibilities of left-winged engagement outside the communist party to aspiration for artistic innovation.

1945 the reasons for the attraction of communism on a second 'intellectual generation' (Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Annie Kriegel, André Stil, André Fourgeron, a.o.) were as diverse as in the past. There had been the combat of the Russian army against Nazi-Germany with the enormous loss of lives and the activity of the communist parties in the resistance; there had been the battle against Nazism, the admiration for Stalin and his country. But also romanticism, adventurism, opportunism and patriotic, nationalist, emotional motives that had emerged during the war and in the resistance - when nuances were not admitted - filled many with a real worship for the dead and the heroes⁴.

³A. BLEICH, M. VAN WEEZEL, *Ga dan zelf naar Siberië! Linkse intellectuelen en de koude oorlog*. Amsterdam, Socialistische Uitgeverij, 1992, p. 180-184.

⁴D. CAUTE, *The Fellow-travellers. Intellectual friends of communism*. Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1973, p. 8-13; P.ORY, J.-F. SIRINELLI, *Les intellectuels en France, de l'affaire Dreyfus à nos jours*. Paris, Armand Colin, 1992, p.77-92, 151-158.

In Belgium, as well, isolated intellectuals had in the course of years joined the national communist party (*Parti Communiste Belge*, PCB). The existence of certain networks gave these entries at the same time a more structured character. The environment of the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* (ULB) played an important part in this. The ULB was a meeting-place for communist academics in Belgium. The university-community in Belgium was - and still is - strongly ideological determined. Research on the postwar period has shown that there was a clear relation between the origin of the diploma (which university) and the 'direction' of further engagement (left or right, progressive or conservative) in Belgian academic intellectuals. Very few 'pre'-intellectuals did not extend their ideological 'predisposition' (this is the cultural capital inherited from their family) to their choice of a university/educational establishment (catholic or secular). Studies are an important source of network-formation. Networks that arise in a given university in a specific generation, will probably be consolidated later on. Political socialisation during student-life will influence the later political profile. The importance of the education in the process of developing a political conviction should thus be underlined. Education has an important part in the development of the 'habitus'; it provides an individual with numerous models of perception and cognition, ways of living and acting; in brief with all explicit or implicit aspects of the dominant culture.

A third step in socialisation (after family and education) comes when the intellectual enters the professional world: political orientation will often be influenced by the way in which authorities control people and guarantee their jobs. This too concerns the positions occupied by university professors. Criticism of the leading structures (of state, of university administration...) will be reduced because of fear of endangering one's job. The development of a revolutionary consciousness in intellectuals can thus depend upon the existence of a 'power-base' that is out of reach of the authorities: a communist party for example, serving as an institutionalised 'intellectual counterculture'. This, of course, depends on the degree in which they are offered a part in it.

Communist university professors find themselves in an ambiguous position. Those intellectuals have originally many ideological 'class related reasons' not to join the party of communism (as they belong to the middle or the higher classes and live/work in elitist

environments). They are ‘revolutionary’ academics whose employers, on the whole, are forces tending to preserve the status quo and standing for continuity. These intellectuals occupy a position which, in the past, has brought about tensions between their scientific situation/ethos and political engagement. This is illustrated by the Lysenko case which in the years 1948-49 had, as said above, effects on university professors in France, Great Britain, as well as in Belgium⁵.

Back in 1932, there was an earlier example at the ULB of such a conflicting situation. This one concerned supposed communist activities of members of the staff and their further career prospects. Communist presence at Brussels University was still rather an exception in the years 1920-30. The commotion made about the case of Paul Libois bears witness to it. There had been labour strikes in the Walloon part of Belgium and some of the press drew attention to the possibility that Paul Libois, at that moment still a young university assistant, was involved in a revolutionary plot. In response to this single case, a campaign burst out against communist infiltration at the ULB. Libois was sanctioned by the university authorities. Some years later though he would be appointed as professor in mathematics and geometry. This first well-known communist member of the academic staff at the Brussels University joined the party in 1932 after a study trip in the Soviet Union. He quickly became one of the party’s intellectual oracles and authoritarian leaders. He became member of the PCB’s leading structures and was communist senator in the Belgian Parliament from 1946 to 1950. Libois was clearly a model to many ULB-generations of students and assistants who underwent his influence in the university classrooms.

By the 1950's, engagement in the PCB in Brussels University had become quite a ‘normal’ thing to do. The moral authority of the French communist party probably played an

⁵E. SCHANDEVYLL, “Een bijdrage tot de studie van het intellectuele veld in België: communistische intellectuelen tijdens de Koude Oorlog (1945-1956)”, in: *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis* (at the printer’s); P. BOURDIEU, *Opstellen over smaak, habitus en veldbegrip*. Amsterdam, Van Gennep, 1989, p.13; R.J. BRYM, *Intellectuals and Politics*. London, Allen & Unwin, 1980, p. 14-32; J. GOTOVITCH, “Préface”, in: C. FONTAINE, *Bob Claessens. Le temps d’une vie*. Bruxelles, Cercle d’Education Populaire, 1977, p. 10-11.

important part in the afterwar communism in the ULB as this community was strongly focused on France. Many professors and assistants were now members of the party and the communist student organisation had a strong basis in some of the other university organisations as *La Libre pensée* and the *Association Générale des Etudiants*. Some prominent professors came out openly for communist engagement, especially in the Faculty of Sciences.

Much has been written on the supposed relation between the belief in manipulability of society, characteristic in some scientists and the relative optimism which characterises communist thought. It is believed that a connection exists between the relative 'mechanical' approach of certain interpretations of Marx's ideas and scientific rigueur. For many academics and intellectuals 'left' stood for rationality, planning and progress. Marxist analysis was maybe the way to prevent a new economic crisis and a new World War.

These ULB-intellectuals had built up their careers on a completely autonomous basis, outside the party. This was also the case for Paul Libois; he had developed his scientific career at the university but at the same time he had a 'political profession' within the communist party. He was part of the direction, together with a majority of permanent party-officials, people to whom the party was the sole employer. In this Libois was an exception: most of the intellectuals in the party were just (passive) members and were never or only in a small degree, a part of the party bureaucracy. Prestigious intellectuals were put forward by the party leadership, but at the same time looked at with suspicion. As to their social origin, habitus and on the basis of their intellectual capital and position in the academic field, these intellectuals mainly belonged to the 'dominant fractions of society'. These intellectuals who had joined 'the party of the labour-class' soon experienced the contradictions inherent to their position: they submitted voluntarily to the imperatives of the party they had joined for various reasons, yet their 'professional intellectuality' (intellectual creativity, social criticism and reflexion, free research) was of no use to Stalinism or to the communist apparatus.

The part of intellectuals in society was a theme though that was not neglected in communist training. Communist parties gave 'lessons' about intellectuals during which they referred to the social position of Marx and Lenin themselves. After the war and the resistance, the PCB was facing a massive increase of members which impelled adequate political training.

This was very difficult since there was a shortage of efficient and experienced officials due to the war. The first party congress after the war didn't pay any attention to educational or intellectual topics, as the national recovery carried off all attention. It is only in 1947 that cultural subjects gained more interest and that, for example, special conferences were organized for intellectuals in the party. Later on, the party policy towards intellectuals became more submitted to the politics of the Russian party-ideologist Andreï Zhdanov. His report of 1947 divided mankind in two camps: the corrupt and decadent world of imperialism that soon would collapse under the weight of its own contradictions and, facing that, there was the world of socialism, peace and progress. 'Bourgeois-culture and science' was reactionary; those who looked for positive values in it, served the interests of the class-enemy and were to be condemned⁶.

The Lysenko case

Lysenko took an important step in the formalization of the doctrine of the so-called 'proletarian science' that related to biology as well as to philosophy, linguistics, physiology, political economy, etc... It was the Lysenko case however that often - and especially in the context of Cold War propaganda - has been singled out as the most extreme example of the application of Soviet ideology to science. Many different ideological principles were pronounced though, often contradicting each other, and the final outcome often depending on internal conflicts between scholars themselves, power relations and on the personal interest of Stalin. Broadly speaking, the natural sciences were submitted to the demands of the

⁶J. GOTOVITCH, *Du rouge au tricolore. Résistance et parti communiste*. Bruxelles, Editions Labor, 1992, p.544-545; A. DESPY-MEYER, "La peur du rouge à L'Université libre de Bruxelles", in: P. DELWIT, J. GOTOVITCH, eds., *La peur du rouge*. Bruxelles, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1996, p. 120-121; P. STOUTHUYSEN, "Zonder meer, en zonder voorwaarden. Het politieke engagement", in: E.WITTE, a.o., eds., *Roger Van Geen. Een kritisch-optimistische kijk op onderwijs, wetenschap en maatschappij*. Brussel, VUB-Press, 1997, p. 45-49; D. CAUTE, *Communism and the French Intellectuals 1914-1960*. London, Andre Deutsch, 1964; J. GOTOVITCH, *op.cit.*, 1977, p. 10-11; L. KOLAKOWSKI, *op.cit.*, p. 117-145.

industry/agriculture and primarily, the humanistic sciences to those of the party propaganda. Lysenko's mission was to revolutionize biological science in accordance with Marxism Leninism and to expose the 'bourgeois' theories of Mendel and T.H. Morgan. Genes and chromosomes were merely a bourgeois invention. This theory was very suitable for an ideology which maintained that human beings could transform nature in any way they had a mind, in an optimistic and voluntarist way. Russia had belonged to the avant-garde in this field of science in the years 1920-30, but Lysenko turned the clock back for about a hundred years. His theory was not mere vulgarization, but had clear political and ideological functions. Since its first announcement in the 1935's, it created a discord amongst scientists and between them and politics. Lysenko eventually managed to get Stalin on his side. Lysenko's solutions did look promising and Stalin saw in Lysenkoism an opportunity for justifying his own fiascos in industry and agriculture: they were due to the fault of 'bourgeois-minded' scientists and intellectuals. By 1948 the debate was completely politicized: many 'real' scientists were being accused of Trotskyism and - having often studied in the West and undergone Anglo-Saxon influence - of not understanding Soviet realities. The nationalist element was amplified by a grudge against scientific elitism. Lysenko was an example of the 'good' autodidact scientist - just as Michurin had been - who didn't need a laboratory to make new inventions as he worked instead with the raw material immediately on the ground. A non-scientific theory had thus been able to impose itself as the one and only in a part of Soviet science, and during about 25 years nothing else was being taught in that field in the universities of one of the largest states in the world. Criticism and verification of the results were very difficult, as all important positions were controlled by Lysenko's men. Successes that didn't exist were invented, enormous losses were covered up⁷.

Meanwhile Western communist intellectuals were being summoned to celebrate Russia's accomplishments in both the cultural and the scientific field. In the years of

⁷A. KOJEVNIKOV, *op.cit.*, p. 142-143; L. KOLAKOWSKI, *op.cit.*, p. 102-103; J.& D. KOTEK, *op.cit.*, p. 10-17, 42-51, 81-83.

emergence of nazism and threat of an extension of fascism in Europe, it hadn't been to difficult to mobilize intellectuals around their respective communist parties in which discourses had been adapted to the circumstances, and to strike a very humanistic note. This was surpassed by plain patriotic talk during the war, in the name of the battle against Germany.

In 1935, during the 'humanistic years', Marcel Prenant had been only too pleased presenting Neo-Darwinism as a direct application, in biology, of the theories of Marx and Engels. Both 'sciences' were but two sides of the same coin, the truth of progress. With his book (*Biologie et Marxisme*), and until Lysenko came along, Prenant was the scientific spokesman of the party. The British professor Haldane who wrote in the communist *Daily Worker* went the same way. He had prefaced the English edition of the book of Marcel Prenant (1937) and published two works: *Heredity and Politics* (1938) and *The Marxist Philosophy and the Science* (1939). Naïvely these 'party biologists' didn't realize that at the same moment, Neo-Darwinism had lost most of its credit within a fraction of the Soviet leaders.

With the beginning of the Cold War, Russia entered a phase of defensive folding-up, characterized in the U.S.S.R. by the return of terror and repression and abroad by the necessity of 'exploiting' to a maximum Western communist parties for their own goals. Western communist biologists were caught between Lysenkoism and Neo-Darwinism, between their political engagement and their scientific convictions. It is not a surprise that someone like Marcel Prenant, who tried not to defend one thing nor the other, was condemned by everyone: non-communists, biologists and political commentators found such an attitude not worthy of a respectable scientist. These marxist geneticists were said to have betrayed the ideal of neutral and objective science. The communist party leaders in turn, looked for something else than halfhearted support for Lysenko. Intellectuals in whom political engagement outweighed their scientific conscience, tried to stay silent on the matter. The party leaders however asked for clear-cut positions on the case by each of its members concerned. (Tacit) support of Lysenko wasn't enough if it wasn't accompanied, or rather preceeded by a total condemnation of classic genetics. In turn, the radical criticism of

Lysenko by Chevalier and Monod, two other biologists in the PCF, was inevitably accompanied by the resignation of their party membership⁸.

In Belgium, at the end of 1948 Jean Brachet was summoned by the PCB directorate to write an article for their paper, the *Drapeau Rouge*, in response to what was going on at that time in the PCF concerning the Lysenko case. His writing would have to praise the merits of the Russian 'biologist'. Jean Brachet was one of the party's 90.000 new adherents (in comparison with 1939) who joined the PCB after World War II, amongst whom were quite a few intellectuals. Brachet was not a novice. In 1934-35 he had done research with Joseph Needham in Cambridge and in 1937 he had worked in Princeton where he had met America's greatest scientists. Brachet's work at the ULB had been brutally stopped in 1942 when the Germans occupied the university. He had been taken hostage in company with some of his colleagues (a.o. Paul Brien, magistrates and other intellectuals whose attitude displeased the occupier). His work gained a great reputation after the war. Intent on developing a research centre of international stature, he carried out scientific missions in Great Britain and the United States in 1945-46 and was a visiting professor in Paris and Philadelphia. Jean Brachet was given the very prestigious Belgian *Prix Franqui* in 1948, one year before the emergence of the Lysenko case in the PCB.

Meanwhile, the Belgian communists had quit the national government. It was Cold War now: the PCB, too, took its distance and changed its attitude towards intellectuals: from allies and guides of the proletariat, they became instruments in the service of Stalinist propaganda. The 'freshly' awarded Brachet was prepared to make concessions for the benefit of his party, but not to the point of sacrificing his scientific convictions or prestige. Demanding one of the founding-fathers of molecular biology to criticise the role of chromosomes and genes in the hereditary process, is impossible. Carefully, Brachet tried to explain to Libois - responsible for communist intellectuals in the ULB - that in spite of Lysenko's triumph in the Soviet Union, he himself preferred to stick to Neo-Darwinism. In any case, he wasn't prepared to write articles or to give lectures without at first being able to

⁸J.& D. KOTEK, *op.cit.*, p. 104-174.

document himself about the ‘new genetics’, and this didn’t mean reading naïve and incoherent propaganda texts. A ‘study trip’ to the Soviet Union to meet the Russian biologist in live flesh was imposed on Brachet who then became fully convinced of Lysenko’s being an imposter. In a following interview with the *Drapeau Rouge*, Brachet ingeniously managed to remain neutral on the subject of Lysenko and Michurinism; his honour as a sound communist militant was obvious, as well as his reputation of scientist. During a press conference in Brussels, nevertheless, he was asked for the first time in public to take an explicit position on the matter. His criticism of Lysenko and his ideas fell on stony ground with the party but Libois and his colleagues kept quiet, in the hope still to be able to ‘recuperate’ him. Facing Brachet’s indecision however, they finally decided to convoke him before the commission of discipline of the party. Many of his colleagues of the Faculty of Sciences were members of it. He was excluded from the communist cell of the ULB. In the attempt to avoid the ultime humiliation, he eventually resigned from the PCB⁹.

Paul Brien was another biologist in the PCB at that time. Unlike his younger colleague Brachet, Brien indeed was blinded for some time by the Russian theories, witness his contributions to the *Bulletin des Anciens Etudiants de l’ULB* and the theoretical journal of the PCB *Communisme* in the beginning of 1949, in which he described the triumph of Michurinism in the Soviet Union as the logical conclusion of a profound scientific debate: Lysenko had gained support because his techniques were seemingly the most performing, in comparison with those of Neo-Darwinists. He denied the fact that ‘classical’ geneticists and biologists in Russia had been persecuted.

Brien taught zoölogy at the ULB and was a prominent figure in the Belgian intellectual community. He was member of some of the most important institutes and associations and won several rewards for his work (the *prix Lamarck*, the *prix de Biologie Agathon de Potter* of the Royal Academy of Belgium, etc...). In the 1930's he had been the president of the *Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels Antifascistes* and for a short while co-

⁹J.& D.KOTEK, *op.cit.*, p.175-187; “Notice sur Jean Brachet”, in: *Académie Royale de Belgique. Annuaire*, 1979, p. 9-19.

opted senator for the PCB (1936). After World War II he occupied important positions in UNESCO. He had travelled to the Soviet Union in 1935 and in 1945.

Brien's own scientific conviction - he was, contrary to Brachet or Haldane and Prenant, rather a Neo-Lamarckist than a Neo-Darwinist - which was inclined to an interpretation of evolution in which an important part was attributed to the environment, probably was partly responsible for his enthusiasm for the theories of Lysenko. Lamarck (1744-1829) - who had inspired Lysenko in an early stage - had stressed the importance of the modulating action of environment on living creatures as it influences their physiology and comportment when they adapt to it. Some of these adaptations were said to be hereditary. As a competent biologist, Brien didn't deny the part of chromosomes and genes in heredity and the part of coincidence in the mutations that create new races, yet he argued that 'genes weren't everything'. As Lysenko stated, manipulation of the environment too could provoke new races, following the needs of men. In short, Michurinism was the experimental confirmation of the ideas of Lamarck.

Nevertheless Brien remained quite careful towards Lysenko. He wrote this in *Communisme*: "*les conceptions mitchouriennes que nous présente Lyssenko dans un langage, il faut le dire, assez obscur, s'inscrivent dans le courant de la biologie contemporaine. Mettant l'accent sur le caractère global (...) de l'hérédité et sur l'importance du milieu, Lyssenko s'attarde peu à rappeler la signification des gènes. Il ne peut les ignorer*". Brien ended wishing that Lysenko's 'discoveries' would be further analysed and verified. Even if they were not fully accepted, they would stimulate important test studies and be a valuable contribution to the growth of theoretical concepts in biology. The end of the illusion for Brien came at the moment when he tried to repeat some of the famous experiments in his own laboratory and didn't succeed in proving the so-called extraordinary results that had been achieved in Russia. Brien left the party some years later, but meanwhile an end had been put to false notes and biological hesitations. Following France, in 1952 an *Association Belge des*

Amis de Mitchourine was created that would promote the techniques of Soviet biologists through courses, films and a special periodical, *Agriculture Nouvelle*¹⁰.

Western biologists didn't all react in the same way to the 'Michurinisation' of their respective parties. Between the radical rejection of it by people as Monod and the quasi-automatic adoption of it by others, there was the attempt of compromise by Brachet and Haldane who quit the party quite rapidly and by Prenant who stayed much longer. There were the hesitations of Brien and the silence still of others. It has been said that the adhesion of communist biologists to Lysenko has been, in a way, inversely proportional to the degree of their own scientific competence. Inexperienced researchers were enthused by the 'new biology', non-geneticist biologists (and Neo-Lamarckists) gave it a halfhearted support (Prenant, Brien), pure geneticists kept silent or revolted against it. The most important difference between these biologists has however everything to do with the degree of communist engagement in each of these biologists. Their motivation for being a communist and having joined the party in the first place, their level of responsibilities and economic (in)dependence on it, are factors which influenced their individual reaction to the Lysenko case¹¹.

When the Russian revolution had occurred, Paul Brien was still a young man and therefore much influenced by it. As well as the 'young' Paul Libois, he travelled to the Soviet Union in the 1930's. Both probably belong to those intellectuals with whom the 'discovery' of the Soviet Union was followed with that of Marxism and who joined the PCB with the fervour characteristic of these 'children of the bourgeoisie who came and put themselves in service of the party of the labour-class'. They put their names and social environment in the service of the party, in a lesser degree their artistic or scientific practice in which the party was not really interested. In sum, these people had joined the party before the

¹⁰P. BRIEN, "La Génétique et les théories de Lyssenko", in: *Communisme*, 2/1949, p. 128, and in: *Bulletin de l'Union des Anciens Etudiants de l'Université libre de Bruxelles*, 3/1949, p.23-29; J. KOTEK& D. KOTEK, *op.cit.*, p. 187-192; "Notice sur Paul Brien", in: *Académie Royale de Belgique. Annuaire*, p. 82-86, 93.

¹¹J.& D. KOTEK, *op.cit.*, p. 202-204.

war and were already communists before they became anti-fascists. Furthermore they didn't limit their engagement in the postwar period to a simple PCB-card or membership. Brien's commitment can be retraced as well in various Soviet sympathizing organizations, as the *Amis de l'Union Soviétique* and *Amitiés Belgo-Soviétiques* where in the 1950's he created a cultural centre which would publish some specific bulletins as *La vie culturelle en URSS*, *la pédagogie en URSS*, *La médecine en URSS* and *Nouvelles des Lettres soviétiques*. As we see, Brien's commitment to the communist party wasn't, in a first stage, really affected by the Lysenko case. He must have thought, as Prenant did, that a dismissal would give arguments to the Stalinist party leaders as well as to the party's enemies. The first would say that a misplaced intellectual vanity had outstripped his fidelity, the second could present his dismissal as a symbol, in the name of the freedom of thought¹².

Brachet in turn belongs to the 'late' generation of post-war communists, although his family had already set a long tradition of left-winged engagement. Jean Brachet belonged to a great university family. His father Albert Brachet, a world-known embryologist and rector of the ULB, had died in 1930. Later Jean's two-years younger brother Pierre set the example. He had graduated at the ULB as Doctor of Science and had played an active part in anti-fascist resistance. As a young socialist journalist, he had left Belgium for Spain at the beginning of the civil war, where he joined the republican army. He died in 1936 at the age of 25 before Madrid. His heroic death had quite an impact on the ULB-community of those years and set an example for many students and members of the staff. Jean and Pierre's mother, Mme Brachet, would now take over the torch of engagement. She dedicated herself to the foundation of a hospital and children's home in Spain. Jean Brachet's joining of the communist party probably was prompted by gratefulness for its part during the resistance and by the prestige of the Soviet Union after the defeat of Nazi-Germany. It certainly also was dictated by a sense of 'obligation' due to family tradition and maybe of debt to his brother who had invested himself totally and fatally in the battle against fascism long before Jean

¹²J. GOTOVITCH, *op.cit.*, 1992, p. 443-446; M. PRENANT, *Toute une vie à gauche*, Paris, Encre éditions, 1980, p. 311.

himself took the step. Jean Brachet would stay ‘a man of left’ all his life, but rather in the way a progressive and generous aristocrat can ‘be of left’¹³.

The political attitude of Brachet and his equals may explain some of the aspects of the Lysenko case in Belgian and other academic environments. It was especially to those academic intellectuals and university professors that the theory of the ‘two sciences’ was addressed: to unite and to control them. Intellectuals are particularly sensitive to theoretic and philosophical questions. The Lysenko case allowed the Western communist parties very quickly to cut themselves off from national society and to form, in this way, a kind of ‘communist anti-society’, a necessary instrument during the Cold War. At the same time it was a good opportunity for the party to get rid of ‘undesired elements’. The war and resistance had drawn many to the communist party, in a degree that, in the post-war period, the PCB almost became ‘overcrowded’, amongst others with people who weren’t ‘real’ communists but mainly resisters and/or sympathizers. Those people didn’t really come in handy in the climate of the Cold War. In this new kind of ‘war’ the communist parties preferred faith and dedication to numbers. This is indeed in accordance with the philosophy of communist parties as vanguard parties, consisting of a small, leading and unconditionally loyal group of people. From this view, the Lysenko case was a kind of test to measure the degree of loyalty of communist scientists; intellectuals who were too independent and obstinate could be shaken off. Many university professors and intellectuals did indeed leave the communist party as a result of the Lysenko case, as the tensions between scientific ethos and political engagement became too hard for them to accept¹⁴.

¹³G. SMOLSKI, “L’ULB devant la guerre d’Espagne”, in: *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 1987, 18, p. 420-422; “Notice sur Jean Brachet”, *etc.*, p. 27.

¹⁴J. & D. KOTEK, *op.cit.*, p. 210-217.