

Under the heading “The U.S. Ambassador is leaving: the last Belgian leaves Belgium,” satirical weekly *Ubupan* on May 8, 2013, devotes its front-page article to the upcoming departure of the Ambassador.

The article reads: “So long and goodbye, Mr. Ambassador. On July 13 (sic), the most popular of all U.S. Ambassadors in Belgium will leave his job, which he occupied for four years whereas an Ambassador’s term usually lasts two – this shows the popularity of the man, i.e. Howard Gutman.

“During four years, he literally crisscrossed Belgium, visiting all 589 communes and villages. This marathon will end on May 5 in Fourons. Let us pay tribute to this American who is more Belgian than Belgians. With his departure, the last genuine Belgian is probably leaving.

“He knows the country better than any Belgian politician. While these politicians are shutting themselves away in their offices, Gutman drove long distances, walked in mud, and climbed fences to meet with people, who were surprised that an Ambassador was interested in them.

“He is a remarkable man who ‘sold’ Belgium throughout the world – actually better than some delegations in which politicians from Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels clash behind the scenes and come back empty-handed. Which Belgian politician has ever said that ‘Belgium is a wonderful country, full of resources and of smart, welcoming, and enterprising people?’

“What we have are Ministers who only focus on Flanders, others who consider that only Wallonia matters, and some who try to demonstrate how pleasant the Brussels region is. Howard Gutman did the job that any politician elected by the people should do.

“This reminds us of this anecdote about Philippe Moureaux, the former PS Mayor of Molenbeek.

“During a radio debate, Françoise Schepmans, who is now the MR mayor of Molenbeek, had asked Moureaux what his projects were for a particular street.

“Moureaux did not know what she was talking about but, in a very clever manner, promised all kinds of things to embellish that street. The problem is that this street was not on the territory of Molenbeek, which Françoise Schepmans, the daughter

of Jacques Schepmans, pointed out to Moureaux with a smile that was a cruel as her dad's.

“Some claim that Howard Gutman is a demagogue, but the reason why they claim this is because we are no longer used to seeing politicians mingle with the people who elected them. We now only have politicians who are afraid of getting their hands dirty. They are afraid of their voters, especially in times of crisis.

“The famous French statesman Clemenceau frequently went to pubs. He knew how to listen and considered that what he heard from people in pubs informed him on his country better than any police survey. At that time, the far right only attracted 1 percent of the voters. People did not need a party like the National Front, the Vlaams Belang, or even Bart De Wever who owes his success to the suffering of people who do not feel listened to by ‘normal’ politicians.

“Formed in a genuine democracy – i.e. in the United States – Howard Gutman has understood that being in direct contact with the people was the best way to improve the U.S. image in Belgium. Even people from the far left and those who are systematically anti-American must admit that what Gutman did is impressive.

“This is why we want to say ‘goodbye and thank you, Mr. Gutman.’ We heard that you may work for a Belgian business or, in any case, work on improving economic relations between the United States and Belgium, a country that once was one of the third leading powers in the world. It was at the time of Leopold II, a man who was also capable of listening and of lending out his hand when necessary.

“There is only one thing I regret, i.e. that you never offered me that pin with the Belgian and U.S. flag. Not that I am trying to force your hand, but it would be nice to have a souvenir from an American who was as charming as the boys who came to Belgium twice last century. We must be grateful to them for their sacrifice and for having preserved our democracy, in which our politicians are allowed to do just what they want.”