

The Neutrality Dike depicted in this 1915 cartoon withstood "German contempt," "The Netherlands stayed out of World War I, even though German submarines sank Dutch merchant ships. The Dutch could not have survived attack by the Kaiser's army. Holland, wrote historian Jost Adriaan van Hamel in 1918, was a flat country of "seaports and river-mouths, padded only by some hinterland."



# The Dutch

Over the past several years, the news from the Netherlands has caused many Americans to wonder: Whatever happened to the sturdy Dutch? At The Hague, thousands of citizens have demonstrated against their government's belated decision to allow its allies to deploy NATO cruise missiles on Dutch soil. In Amsterdam, squatters have tossed rocks and bottles at the police. In the capital, sex shops and cafés that openly sell marijuana do a brisk business. In Utrecht, demonstrators greeted John Paul II in May 1985 by shouting "Kill the pope, kill the pope." All this is evidence, some American pundits contend, that too much permissiveness can cause even the most civilized societies to decay. Here, Thomas R. Rochon analyzes the evolution of the Netherlands' generous welfare state, and Stanley R. Sloan examines the nation's role in the Atlantic alliance.

## BEYOND PERFECTION

*by Thomas R. Rochon*

When she was a little girl in the late 19th century, the future Queen Wilhelmina paid a visit to Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany in Berlin. "See," said the Kaiser to the Dutch princess, "my guards are seven feet tall and yours are only shoulder high to them." "Quite true, your Majesty," replied Wilhelmina. "Your guards are seven feet tall. But when we open our dikes the water is 10 feet deep."

The story is well worn, but today, a century later, the Dutch still take pride in their ever-expanding complex of dams, dikes, and sluices—without which half of their land would lie under water. The sea barriers reflect the Dutch conviction that much can be accomplished when everyone works together. British writer Anthony Bailey calls this the "shoulder-to-shoulder-on-the-dike tradition."

That tradition fostered one of the world's most civilized industrial societies. Rich or poor, the 14.5 million Dutch enjoy manicured public parks, efficient mass transportation, and excellent schools and

universities. And, since World War II, the central government at The Hague has created something truly special: a *verzorgingsstaat*, or welfare state,\* unequalled in the Western world.

The *verzorgingsstaat* consists of a wide array of subsidies that provide everything from benefits for the aged, disabled, and unemployed, to salaries for ballet dancers and oboe players, to handouts for sports and youth clubs. Indeed, the Dutch state is so openhanded that there are now three welfare *claimants* (including social security pension recipients) for every four active workers.

During the 1960s, surveys showed, the *verzorgingsstaat* ranked behind only the dike system as the greatest source of Dutch national pride. But during the 1980s, there have been second thoughts.

### Big Brother's Question

Whatever it once did for Dutch pride, the state's generosity has hobbled the Netherlands' economy. Public spending—which consumes over half of the country's gross national product (GNP)—has discouraged private investment and slowed expansion. During the 1960s, the annual GNP growth rate averaged a robust 5.1 percent, and unemployment was negligible. By 1983, the growth rate had sunk below one percent, and joblessness at 17 percent was a severe problem. The economic underpinnings of the *verzorgingsstaat* were being washed away like a failing sea wall.

As growth slowed, the welfare state became harder to finance—and its costs deepened the economic crisis. The government deficit reached 10.7 percent of national income in 1983. Such a high deficit, warned a committee of economists led by former Royal Dutch Petroleum president Gerrit A. Wagner, reduces the supply of investment funds and “creates a growing burden of interest payments.”

Partly as a result of such anxieties, in 1982 voters replaced the center-left government with a right-of-center coalition of Christian Democrats and Liberals—who belong, despite the label, to the country's most conservative major party. The coalition, led by 47-year-old Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, was returned to power last year. By trimming some programs and eliminating others, it has cut spending

\*The term “welfare state” was probably first used in print by William Temple, archbishop of Canterbury and an ardent supporter of the British Labor Party. In *Citizen and Churchman* (1941), the archbishop asserted that “the state has a moral and spiritual function.” In place of “the Power State,” he argued, “we are led to that of the Welfare-State.”

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Shoppers throng "the Fifth Avenue of Europe"—Lijnbaan Square in Rotterdam, today the nation's largest city (population: 1.1 million).

and the deficit. The economy has improved. Unemployment has fallen to 14.4 percent; GNP growth rose to 2.1 percent in 1985.

But even in its trimmer version, the *verzorgingsstaat* bulks large. By the World Bank's reckoning, 59 percent of the Netherlands' GNP comes from government spending on goods and services—a far higher proportion than in Sweden and Denmark (47 percent), France (44), West Germany (31), and the United States (25).

U.S. policymakers debate the merits of food stamps and other components of a government "safety net" woven to aid the poor. The *verzorgingsstaat* offers much more.

Any Dutchman who loses his job, whether salesman, government bureaucrat, or Philips electrician, can count on receiving monthly unemployment checks that provide 70 percent of his previous wage or salary for a full year. If back spasms or some other officially sanctioned disability send him home, he receives 70 percent of his annual earnings in disability or retirement benefits for life. Small wonder that 796,500 Dutch workers are officially unemployed and, despite gains in health services, another 800,000 are classified as disabled.\* Thus, by official criteria, more than one-fourth of the entire labor force of 5.5 million is unfit for or out of work.

\*In the United States, by official count, seven percent of the work force was unemployed in November 1986, and some three percent was disabled.

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Not only does The Hague promise protection from financial stress, it guarantees the Good Life as well. In 1983, the Dutch Fine Arts Program supported 4,000 aspiring artists by purchasing their works, much as the U.S. government helps dairy farmers by buying surplus cheese. (Like the U.S. cheese, much of the Dutch art has collected dust in government warehouses.) To outlanders, as to many Dutch, such programs have seemed too generous by half. In a rather excited 1984 segment on CBS News's "60 Minutes," titled "Dutch Treat," correspondent Morley Safer intoned: "By the mid-1970s, the [Dutch] social welfare system had reached a crescendo of plans and programs, a reverse of 1984. Big Brother wasn't watching; he was asking: 'Can I do anything to help?'"

### Equal but Separate

The Dutch welfare state resembles the omnibus Scandinavian models. But it differs in a crucial respect. Sweden's and Norway's social programs grew out of a political compromise between socialism and capitalism—a "middle way," as U.S. columnist Marquis Childs called it. What spurred the architects of the *verzorgingsstaat* was not political necessity, but a perceived Christian imperative. Social policy had to deal with "two principles," wrote A. A. van Rhijn, the welfare state's draftsman, in 1944: "human worth and social solidarity. Both are, for me, anchored in religion."

Solidarity was the key word. The functions of the *verzorgingsstaat* had long been carried out by the various religious denominations, which had *no* shoulder-to-shoulder tradition. For nearly three centuries, Dutch society was riven by conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. The rival Christian strains became two of the country's four *stromingen* (traditions), along with socialist and conservative politics, commanding the allegiances of the Dutch.

The *stromingen* emerged from Holland's 80-year war of independence against Catholic Spain (1568–1648). The House of Orange expelled the Church hierarchy from the Netherlands and barred Dutch Catholics from public posts, from government minister to lantern lighter.\* They were also excluded from law, medicine, and other professions. From all this arose a pattern of group isolation. Catholics formed their own organizations. In 1881 they founded their own labor organization, the Roman Catholic People's Union, dedicated to shielding workers from "the social errors of our time." The union became the Catholic People's Party, formed in 1904 to seek government funds for parochial schools.

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\*Catholics won back the right to hold civil service jobs in 1795, but they still may not ascend the throne, occupied since 1980 by Queen Beatrix, a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. When Beatrix's sister Irene converted to Catholicism and married a Spanish prince in 1964, she was removed from the line of succession.



Some 14.5 million Netherlanders occupy a lowland area half the size of Virginia. One-third of them dwell in the Randstad, a string of cities along the country's North Sea coast. The Hague is, by tradition, the seat of government, but the constitution designates Amsterdam as the nation's capital.

The isolationist mentality spread. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Dutch society divided into distinct *zuilen* (pillars). Protestants and Catholics—and Socialists and Liberals—founded their own newspapers, magazines, and broadcasting companies. There arose Protestant, Catholic, and secular educational systems—which still exist, from nursery school to college—and separate trade

unions, employers' associations, insurance agencies, and even stamp collecting societies. Instead of one Red Cross organization, the Dutch had a White-Yellow Cross (Catholic), an Orange-Green Cross (Protestant), and a Green Cross (secular). Observed 19th-century Calvinist politician Abraham Kuyper: "Isolation Is Our Strength."

As historian L. J. Rogier noted, the Dutch raised separation to a "basic principle of life." They took pride in the saying, "One Dutchman a theologian, two Dutchmen a sect, three Dutchmen a schism."

Group allegiances were reinforced early in life. Sociologist I. Gadourek studied the schooling of young children during the 1940s and 1950s in the small tulip-bulb-growing village of Sassenheim. The Catholic school texts held that the 16th-century Inquisition was "a tribunal of the Church [whose members] were wise and pious bishops and priests," and that Martin Luther "rejected the Priesthood, the sacraments and the Holy Mass." Of Prince William of Orange, the Dutch Calvinist who led Holland's fight for independence against Spain, Catholic primers declared: "We must esteem [him] as the Founder of our independence, but we cannot approve all his deeds."

Dutch Reformed schoolbooks, by contrast, said that "the Inquisition was merciless," that Luther's 95 Theses summed up "the shortcomings and lies of the Roman Church," and that "the love we feel for our Queen now is like the love people felt for William of Orange, the Founder of our Dynasty."

### Goodbye to the Thrifty Housewife

Religious differences evoke less emotion today. Yet the notion of two nations persists. Some 40 percent of the citizens are Catholics; 34 percent belong to one of two Protestant branches, the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Church. Protestants in the northern provinces often consider the southern Catholics too fun-loving. Catholics think of northern Protestants as too stern and serious. When I told northern friends that my work would take me to the southern provinces, several said that I should expect people to show up late or not at all for interviews. Southerners laughed at this prediction, but agreed with it (though, in fact, nobody was late). All this in a country that stretches a scant 180 miles from north to south.

To a great extent, the *verzorgingsstaat* has supplanted the churches as the financier of social services. The change occurred during and after Nazi Germany's May 1940–May 1945 occupation of the Netherlands. World War II exposed citizens of every religion and class to poverty and other miseries. From then on, the Dutch, like all Western Europeans, as British historian David Thomson has observed, began to expect more from governments than guarantees of "constitutional liberties and universal suffrage." The new state must secure "the well-being and full employment of its citizens."

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Even before the Nazis capitulated, European planners began thinking about how that might be done. In 1942, Sir William Beveridge, as chairman of Britain's Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services, set out to revamp the British welfare system—"a complex of disconnected administrative organs." The comprehensive social insurance system he proposed provided for the unemployed, the sick or disabled, widows and orphans, the pregnant, and the retired. It was, the Beveridge report declared, "a time for revolutions, not for patching."

The Beveridge report became a blueprint for other Western European welfare planners. One was A. A. van Rhijn, the chairman of the Netherlands' Committee to Examine the Question of Social Security, who waited out the war in London with the Dutch government-in-exile. Van Rhijn essentially made Beveridge's plan his own. Moreover, he envisioned that the government would play a central role in the Dutch economy, using deficit spending when necessary to maintain high employment. "The ideal of the Minister of Finance," he wrote in 1944, "can no longer be that of the thrifty housewife."

The Dutch welfare state blossomed swiftly, and almost as Van Rhijn had planned it. Even before the Allies liberated the Netherlands in May 1945, Dutch officials in London moved to broaden future sickness and disability payments. After the war, the government enacted laws awarding the benefits that the Lubbers coalition would later have to trim. The Hague adopted the country's first general old-age pension (1957) and an unemployment act (1965) that originally granted jobless workers 80 percent of the last wage earned, for six months. Eventually the government extended child subsidies beyond the first two children (1963) and expanded the short-term sickness (1967) and long-term disability (1976) benefits. Disabled workers were promised 80 percent of their last wage, indefinitely.

### **The 45,000-Guilder Man**

The crowning achievement came in 1976. Sickness, disability, and retirement payments were tied to changes in the wages of all private-sector workers. As wages rose, so would the numbers on the checks flowing to people drawing unemployment and social security. Whether a Dutchman's income was high or low, whether it was earned or a granted benefit, it increased with everyone else's. This "coupling" would be, in the words of a government minister, "the mark of our civilization."

The Dutch, policymakers hoped, would move toward general prosperity like soldiers in a parade, with everyone marching in step.

The parade would turn out to be an expensive one. But for a time the Netherlands could afford it, thanks to several factors: the postwar demand for new homes and buildings, which put millions to



### MAKING ROOM

*In The Light in Holland (1970), British writer Anthony Bailey describes how the Dutch, living in Europe's second most densely populated nation (after Monaco), manage to preserve a sense of privacy, even in crowded Amsterdam:*

To me, being by myself means being in a room alone. The Dutch, like children in big families, can be by themselves in a room with six other people, or on a canal bank lined with people fishing almost shoulder to shoulder.

Stand on any street corner in Amsterdam at five-thirty in the evening and watch the phalanxes of bicycles go by—a sight not quite what it used to be, but still impressive enough. If you pick at random one serenely pedalling individual from the thick, staggered formation, you see that he isn't really looking at the city, the street, or the bicyclists around him. He seems aware only of a small portion of space, a bubble within which he and his bike exist, with a few spare inches outside his knuckles on the handlebars, his twirling feet, his steady shoulders. He is secure within this space, which encloses him and moves with him, the way energy moves through water, giving an appearance of fast forward motion to a wave. Then the traffic light has changed, he is gone, and others have whirled up to the junction, jousting with each other in a remote, impersonal way, ignoring an interloping car or . . . *brommer* [motorbike].

On any face—the face of a girl, the face of a dignified gentleman wearing a hat—you may glimpse the most private of smiles. Pedalling homeward, they have their own thoughts as their wheels revolve and as cars and trams and even *brommers* assail them from four, or even six directions, the man on the right, whatever his vehicle, having the right of way, which he—sometimes with more courage than sense—always takes, their reflexes operating splendidly though their minds are elsewhere.

These . . . rush-hour riders always fascinate me. They are a wonder, like salmon going upstream, demonstrating, as they do, that in the most crowded places a human being can go on being himself—can become even more himself.

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work; the labor unions' willingness to accept low wages; and the 1962 discovery of natural gas in the northern province of Groningen, which could be exploited to limit fuel imports at home and increase exports to Britain, West Germany, and other Common Market countries. Between 1945 and 1970 the Dutch, like the West Germans, would enjoy an "economic miracle." Annual growth rates climbed to an average of 4.8 percent. Some 1.5 million new homes went up.

Dutch firms competed worldwide for markets and resources, and prospered. By 1970, the "Big Three"—Philips (electronics), Unilever (chemicals and food), and Royal Dutch Shell (petroleum and natural gas)—employed 12 percent of the work force. Rotterdam, the world's busiest port, became the entry point for more than a

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fourth of all cargo shipped to the Common Market.\* The Dutch imported nearly all of their oil, iron ore, and other minerals, but their exports of gas, chemicals, and dairy products covered the costs.

The benefits of all this economic activity were not restricted to the rich. Even today, the typical Dutchman—let's call him "Jan van Dyck"—enjoys an enviable standard of living. All full-time employees age 23 and over must, by law, be paid at least 23,856 guilders (about \$10,735) a year. As a 40-year-old white-collar professional, Mr. Van Dyck earns some 45,000 guilders (\$20,250). He works some 38 hours per week for the government or one of the big corporations that power the Dutch economy. The Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reckons that more than half of all Dutch industrial workers are employed by the Big Three and 27 other firms.

### Not Climbing the Ladder

In a country that offers much to workers, and expects much from employers (who pay among the highest wages in Western Europe), Mr. Van Dyck has reason to want to be on a payroll, rather than be self-employed. He is guaranteed a 23-day annual vacation, and a holiday bonus equal to 7.5 percent of his salary.

Like all Dutch workers, Jan surrenders much of his income to the government. His income tax represents only about 40 percent of his total tax burden. The Dutch finance most of their welfare state in much the same way that Americans pay for Social Security: through employee and employer contributions to social insurance programs. Dutch workers contribute about 25 percent of their incomes to support the Old Age pension, the Widows and Orphans Fund, health insurance, employment insurance, and disability insurance.

Jan thus trades opportunity for security. As the OECD's 1986 profile of the Netherlands explains, the country's "labor market flexibility and mobility are probably affected by very high marginal taxes and generous income-related transfers." That is, Mr. Van Dyck is discouraged from climbing the economic ladder, because the government will take much of his added earnings. With The Hague taxing away about 34 percent of his salary, he has some 30,000 guilders (about \$13,500) to feed, clothe, and house his family each year.

But the rent on his two-bedroom apartment, 600 guilders (\$270) per month, absorbs less than a fourth of his take-home pay. And if the government taxes much away, it also gives plenty back, in the form of subsidies to various privately run social services.

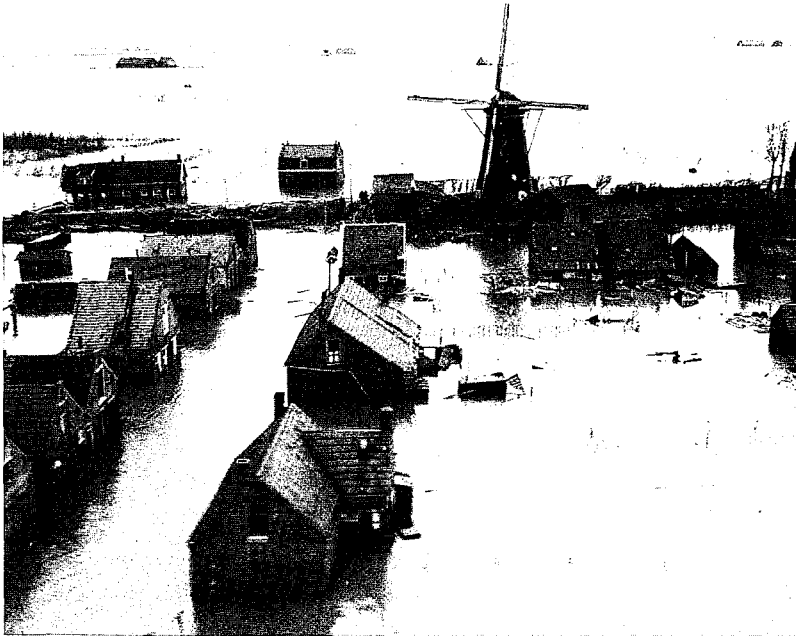
Van Dyck pays no bills when his dentist fills his wife's two cavities, or when the doctor gives his son Kees a tonsillectomy. Since

\*In 1984, Rotterdam handled some 250 million metric tons of goods—as much as the total tonnage moved through London, Bremen, Hamburg, Le Havre, and Antwerp.

gasoline costs about \$2.60 per gallon, Jan takes the train to work; he pays just 50 guilders (\$22) *a month* in train fare to commute, 24 miles each way every day, from Hilversum to Amsterdam. He pays only 15 guilders (\$6.75) a year for his membership in the local soccer club, 10 guilders (\$4.50) to attend a concert at The Hague's elegant Koninklijke Schouwburg theater, and 75 guilders (\$33.75) a year to belong to the Algemene Nederlandse Wielrijders Bond (ANWB), the Netherlands' private, government-subsidized automobile club.

The Dutch pride themselves on making such services work. The ANWB offers Europe-wide assistance to Dutch travelers. Jan need not panic if the engine of his only car explodes while he and his family are spending their month's vacation at the beach in sunny Alicante, Spain. If necessary, the ANWB office in Barcelona will have the Van Dycks flown back to the Netherlands, free of charge.

However efficient the Netherlands' bureaucracies may be, they can only provide slowly and at great expense (through land reclamation) what the Dutch covet most: space. Families like the Van Dycks live in boxlike rowhouses or apartments. Everywhere they go, they



*Some 1,800 people died in a February 1953 flood that inundated hundreds of coastal villages. The disaster spurred the Dutch to build the Delta Project—a recently completed two-mile barrier across the Eastern Scheldt.*

encounter signs of their country's cramped condition. Stairways are narrow and steep. Those lucky enough to own yards rarely find them big enough to play *verstoppertje* (hide-and-peek) or kick a ball. In some areas, people garden or sunbathe on plots rented from the railroad—just a few square yards of turf adjacent to the tracks. Not even death brings freedom from overcrowding. Often two, three, or even four corpses share a cemetery grave. After 10 years or so, the deceased are exhumed and cremated to make way for new arrivals.

Although public aid has supplanted private charity, the religious pillars still provide the administrative structures through which the Dutch government delivers many services. That is why the government, despite its generosity, employs just 16 percent of the work force—compared with 38 percent in Sweden, 30 percent in Denmark, and 18 percent in West Germany. The Catholic and Protestant denominations still run schools, hospitals, and broadcast stations. But they now receive 90 percent of their operating expenses from the state. The Dutch *verzorgingsstaat*, says Berkeley professor of social welfare Ralph M. Kramer, is “based on the principle of *subsidiarity*, with the government [acting] almost exclusively as financier.”

The pillars, of course, are no longer as influential, or as divisive, as they were when Gadourek studied Dutch schools in the 1950s. The curricula in Catholic and Protestant schools, for example, differ little. Indeed, Dutch parents like to brag that they send their children to the *best* local school, regardless of its affiliation.

### An End to Celibacy

In many respects the Netherlands has become more like other Western countries, which is not surprising. As residents of a trading nation, the Dutch are well informed about—and influenced by—world events. Half of all political news in Amsterdam's respected *NRC Handelsblad* is international. Even before college (about half of all Dutch youths receive some higher education), students learn two or three foreign languages—English, German, and sometimes French—which they practice on vacations abroad. And while the Netherlanders produce their own television programs, and 15 (government-subsidized) films annually, much of their entertainment is imported. *Top Gun* and *Ruthless People* (in English, with Dutch subtitles) were big hits last year in the movie houses. French films and British soap operas are popular TV fare. Three U.S. series (“The Jetsons,” “Family Ties,” and “Dynasty”) head the Wednesday night lineup on Nederland One. “The Netherlands,” an old saying goes, “trades and breathes over its borders.”

Thus the Dutch have escaped few modern fads, movements, or trends, among them the secularization common to all Western societies. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Dutch Catholic church grew

### DUTCH MINORITIES: THE THREE WAVES

A diverse array of entrepreneurs sells its wares in the lively open-air market on Albert Cuypstraat, several blocks from the Rijksmuseum in downtown Amsterdam. Surinamer salesmen hawk their fine necklaces, earrings, and other jewelry. Antillean merchants display their colorful Caribbean garb. Chinese-Indonesian chefs offer *loempia* (spring rolls) and *rijsttafel* (ricetable) at one of the many nearby "Chin-Ind" restaurants.

These businessmen are among the Netherlands' roughly one million resident ethnics (seven percent of the population). Although they come from non-European stock, most are Dutch citizens. And many represent the legacy of the Netherlands' old colonial empire in Asia and Latin America. "They are here," the Dutch say, "because we were once there."

For centuries the Netherlands has accepted immigrants, whether they were Huguenots escaping French Catholic persecution or Jews fleeing the Spanish Inquisition. But most Dutch *minderheden* (minorities) arrived in three waves after World War II.

Some 300,000 Eurasians migrated to the Netherlands after Indonesia won its independence from the Dutch in 1949. Though Dutch anthropologist Topaas de Boer-Lasschuyt described them as "melancholic, brown, big-eyed nowhere belongers," nearly all of these immigrants were, culturally and socially, quite Dutch. Among the Asians, only the 40,000 South Moluccans—who insist that the Dutch government help them recapture their homeland—resisted assimilation. To dramatize their quixotic cause, young South Moluccan extremists have resorted to terror, hijacking commuter trains (in 1975 and 1977) and on one occasion (in 1977) taking six teachers and 105 schoolchildren hostage.

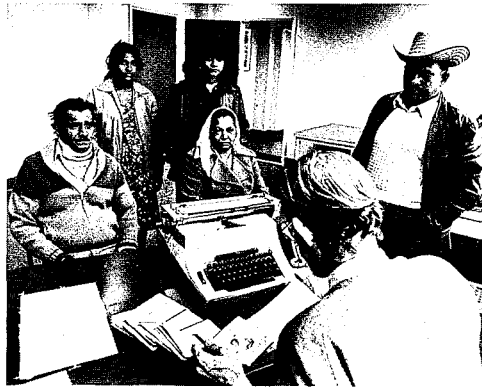
The second wave of immigrants arrived primarily for economic, not political, reasons. Lured by thousands of menial but relatively high-paying jobs in the factories of Amsterdam and Utrecht and on the docks of Rotterdam, some 300,000 Turks and Moroccans flocked to the Netherlands between 1960 and 1974. The Hague expected that many of the *gastarbeiders* (guest workers) would return to their homelands after several years. But as legal beneficiaries of the country's generous welfare state, the Muslim *gastarbeiders* found it hard to leave. Today, to reduce social outlays for non-Dutch minorities, the

more liberal. In 1966, some bishops published *De Nieuwe Katechismus* (A New Catechism), which cast doubt on church doctrine on the virgin birth of Christ and original sin, and suggested that the Last Supper was a symbolic myth. Churchmen advocated the use of contraceptives and an end to priestly celibacy; Catholic universities appointed Marxist professors to teach sociology, economics, and political science. TV networks once affiliated with the Dutch Reformed Church aired shows rife with religious satire, vulgar language, and scenes that many Americans would consider pornographic.

Despite such liberalization, or perhaps because of it, church at-

Lubbers government offers a *remigratie premie* (re-migration premium) of up to \$45,000 to foreign workers who waive their entitlements, leave the country, and agree not to settle in the Netherlands again.

The Netherlands' third wave comprises some 220,000 immigrants from the former Dutch American colonies of Suriname (which became independent in 1975) and the Netherlands



Antilles (which include the self-governing islands of Curaçao, Bonaire, Sint Maarten, Saba, and St. Eustatius) who came in the 1970s. Most are of black African descent. The Hague tried to disperse these newcomers, but most drifted into low-rent neighborhoods in the big cities. Some 35,000 Surinamers dwell in the high-rise apartment buildings of Amsterdam's Bijlmermeer district; fully half of the adults are unemployed.

The growing presence of so many non-European minority groups in the Netherlands has tested Dutch tolerance. "Netherlands for the Netherlands," cried members of the extreme right-wing, anti-foreigner Centrum Party during the election campaign of 1982. As elsewhere in Western Europe, many minority spokesmen have complained that their people suffer not only from (illegal) discrimination in housing and employment, but from age-old stereotypes as well. Some black Surinamers, for example, now find the popular Christmastime folk character, Black Peter (Sinterklaas's "Moorish" helper), offensive.

—Allison Blakely

*Allison Blakely, associate professor of European history at Howard University, spent a year (1985-86) in the Netherlands conducting research on the situation of blacks in the old Dutch empire.*

tendance, while still higher than in other Western European countries, has fallen. Some 27 percent of all Dutch adults attend services regularly (compared with 14 percent in Britain and 12 percent in France). Declining too is the churches' strength at the ballot box. In 1963, 83 percent of Catholics voted for Catholic Peoples' Party candidates; in 1972, only 38 percent did so. Many Catholics, and Protestants, have defected to the now more numerous secular parties.

No fewer than six new, nonreligious political parties and three leftist religious parties entered the Tweede Kamer, the lower house of the Dutch parliament, between 1959 and 1982. During the same

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period, the conservative Liberal Party doubled in size. The three major church-affiliated parties—the Catholic People's Party and two Protestant groups, the Anti-Revolutionary Party and the Christian Historical Union—responded to the secular onslaught by merging into the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) in 1977. The alliance would have been unthinkable 20 years earlier. A Christian Historical Union leader told me in 1978: "I sometimes fear that our partners in the CDA will swamp us and submerge our identity."

### Free Rides

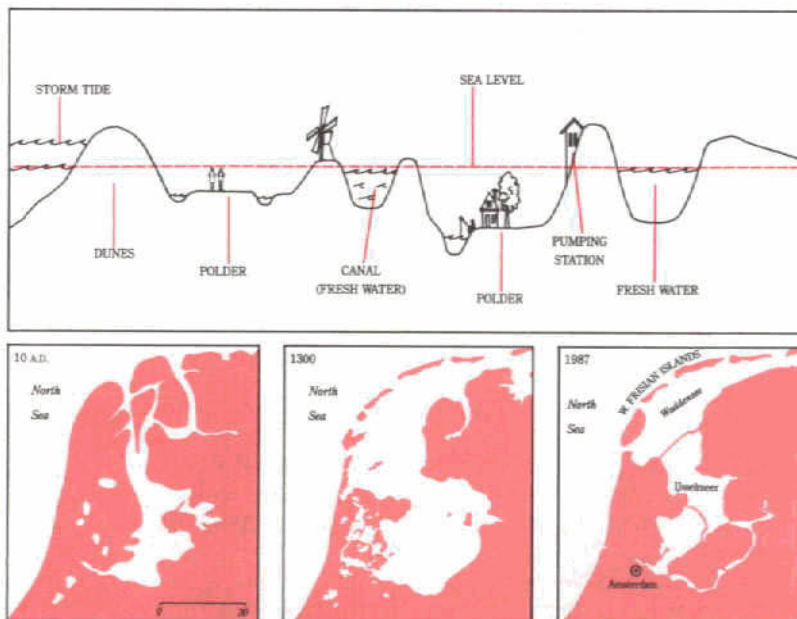
Over the last few decades, traditional Dutch morality has come under assault too. As elsewhere in the West, the prosperous 1960s saw the emergence of blue-jeaned advocates of "free sex," free drugs, and free rides in several senses. The Provos, a band of young anarchists who flourished in Amsterdam in 1964–67, championed an array of "White Plans" designed to improve everyday city life. Their White Chicken plan would have had the police distribute free bandages, medicine, and contraceptives on the streets. The Provos' White Bicycle initiative, which was experimented with for a time, called for Amsterdam to provide some 20,000 white-painted bicycles that would be strewn around the city like shopping carts for anyone's use. A small but radical youth movement still thrives in the Netherlands. Dutch authorities have tolerated the *krakers* (squatters) who occupy uninhabited buildings in several Dutch cities, in much the same way that Dutch Protestants and Catholics tolerated, for centuries, the practices of other groups. Amsterdam officials renovated some of the buildings and rented them, for about \$50 per month, to the *krakers*. "People needed houses and the government was failing to provide housing," explained a Socialist legislator, Klaas de Vries. "What else were [the squatters] to do?"

The *krakers* notwithstanding, the Netherlands is still, for the most part, a conservative society. Its rates of such social afflictions as divorce, juvenile crime, and unwed motherhood have remained lower than those in other Western European countries and the United States. Still, churchgoing rural folk are shocked by the drugs, pornography, and exhibitionism that they see during visits to the cities.

"Last week in Amsterdam I saw a bunch of kids, marching in the street, holding signs that profaned the name of God," a Calvinist farmer from the town of Ede told me. "Is this the result of too much freedom? Everywhere I looked I saw filth and decay. I could not believe I was in the Netherlands. I might as well have been in Paris."

Social change has affected social policy. The *verzorgingsstaat* was affordable as long as the Dutch nuclear family remained traditional and intact, and the economy remained robust. When the policy-makers crafted the various programs, they did so under the assump-

## PUSHING BACK THE NORTH SEA



Since the 17th century, the Dutch have reclaimed some 3,300 square miles (20 percent of the nation's land area) from lakes and the sea. The top sketch shows how the country's 1,200 miles of dikes and dunes enable canals, lakes, and polders (areas of reclaimed land) to exist below sea level.

tion—not unreasonable a generation ago—that there would be but one breadwinner per family if unemployment or disability were to strike. The government benefits needed to support only one household: the worker, his nonworking spouse, and their children.

But in the Netherlands, as elsewhere, many fathers, mothers, and offspring no longer share one dwelling, with a rent or mortgage bill that is paid by one wage earner. Divorces, though still low in number, have been increasing, rising from 5,600 in 1960 to some 34,000 last year. In 1960, some 20 percent of adult women worked outside the home; today over 40 percent hold a job, typically in an office or retail establishment. Although many working single and married women are part-timers, they are entitled to full benefits. In some families, husbands, wives, and young adult offspring are all receiving support from the government.

In all Western countries over the last 100 years, the state has, to varying degrees, taken over welfare functions once performed by families, parishes, guilds, and private voluntary organizations. In the



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Netherlands, which has a long tradition of private, church-based charity, this shift was particularly dramatic. But to an even greater extent than their Scandinavian counterparts, postwar Dutch regimes also have taken control of peoples' *incomes*. Now many citizens complain about a government that is "for you, but without you." Indeed, by levying high taxes and subsidizing virtually everything, the state in effect tells the people how to spend their money. When the Amsterdam council gave a subsidy to a motorcycle club to fix up its meeting house, a friend of mine referred to "the Hell's Angels subsidy."

Not surprisingly, abuse became endemic. The fastest-rising category of welfare claimant over the last 25 years has been the disabled. And the most-reported malady? Back pains. "People no longer see the system as a system," observed a 1985 Social Insurance Council Report, "but as something to be manipulated."

### Now, The 'Caring Society'

That this should happen in the Netherlands is ironic. The Dutch long stressed the value of hard work and looked to the family or to churches, not to the government, for succor in hard times.

In 1985, the Nederlandsche Bank conducted a study comparing economic trends in New England with those in the Netherlands. Why, the bank wanted to know, had the Northeastern United States fared so much better? One reason was that many of New England's temporarily unemployed helped themselves and the local economy by working as low-paid waiters, cashiers, and bellhops until better jobs came along. Seduced by generous unemployment benefits, their Dutch counterparts saw little reason to choose work over leisure. "There existed a kind of anti-private enterprise mentality in the 1970s," observes Finance Minister Ruding. "But we have learned our lesson, that the private sector is the root for real employment."

To ease the strain on the treasury, Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers's Christian Democratic-Liberal coalition has trimmed sickness, unemployment, and disability benefits. The government has also reduced the number of civil service jobs, lowered the minimum wage, and cut salaries in the public sector. Finally, it has broken the link between wage levels and benefits paid to welfare recipients. Between 1981 and 1986, the purchasing power of individual disability payments fell, on average, by more than 20 percent. The Dutch parade no longer marches in step.

Partly as a result, over the last three years the government has managed to cut public spending by nine percent and drive its annual deficit below eight percent of national income. The number of welfare claimants has continued to climb, due to a rise in the number of old-age pensioners. But the worst excesses seem to be over.

Not everyone, of course, is pleased. The opposition Labor Party

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protests that The Hague is destroying the welfare system under the guise of making it work. In 1983, civil servants struck against a proposed 3.5 percent wage reduction (they accepted 3.0 percent). That year, protesting cuts in the now-defunct Fine Arts Program, artists tossed a pie in the face of the minister of welfare, health, and culture at an exhibit. Gerard Veldkamp, a Catholic People's Party stalwart who created many *verzorgingsstaat* programs during the 1960s, has denounced the Christian Democrats for losing their "christian-social vision."

The Dutch would never return to an every-man-for-himself society. But they are rethinking the virtues and vices of their present programs. University of Amsterdam political scientist Kees van Kersbergen foresees a scaled-down, more production-oriented, and less regulation-entangled *zorgzame samenleving* (caring society) supplanting the welfare state. The "caring society" he envisions would try to help only those in need, not try to make everyone equal.

The Dutch experience has prompted foreign scholars to wonder about the future. Kent State University political scientist John Logue speculates that any omnibus welfare state may only work well as "a one-generational phenomenon, after which the values of individual responsibility and collective solidarity begin to weaken."

Heinrich Heine once said that if the world were about to end he would go to the Netherlands, where everything happens 50 years late. Having created what they once saw as the perfect welfare state, the Dutch today seem to be not behind the times, but slightly ahead in a more pragmatic effort to provide what all humane societies should provide: support for the truly needy, and opportunity for the willing and able.

