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IMPLICATIONS FOR
NETHERLANDS-SOUTH AFRICAN RELATIONS**

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It should be noted that any opinions expressed in this article are the responsibility of the author and not of the Institute.

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Dutch society has, for a long time, been a fragmented society. Actually, ever since the independence of the country, that's to say the beginning of the end of the 16th century. A fragmented society, but a very disciplined society. In fact, the discipline was necessary in order to prevent fragmentation from growing into chaos.

The fragmentation of Dutch Society is not so much an ethnic fragmentation, as we find in Belgium, where the French-speaking Belgians face the Dutch-speaking Belgians (the Walloons and the Flemish), and it is not a regional fragmentation either. It is more a religious fragmentation, and since religion has a great influence on the culture of the group concerned, it is also, in certain respects, a cultural fragmentation. It is often overlooked abroad that Holland has always contained a large and strong minority of Catholics, amounting to nearly 40% of the total population. This fact, I find, still comes often as a surprise to many outsiders, accustomed as they are to think of Holland as a typically Protestant, even Calvinist, country.

In a way, that impression of Holland being a Protestant, even Calvinist, country is correct, in that the Protestants have undoubtedly, for more than three hundred years, constituted the power elite in the country, not only in matters of government but also in those of commerce and generally of civilisation. They have been able to put a stamp on Dutch society and civilisation. And they were able to do that, partly because the Catholics were, for more than two hundred years, treated as second-class citizens. So 40% of the Dutch nation remained deprived of any influence on the political and cultural development of the country. Even after their formal political emancipation, that occurred during the Napoleonic era in the beginning of the 19th century, it took the Catholics almost another century, if not more, to become emancipated socially, that is to say, to fill the proportion of functions in the administrative, judicial and educational establishments to which their numbers entitled them.

The Catholics could only achieve this social emancipation through internal discipline and solidarity. As a minority, though a large minority, but nevertheless a minority, in a country ruled by Protestants, they organised their whole life around their own church, meeting their non-Catholic compatriots no more than was strictly necessary. The Catholics could only hold their own, and eventually participate in the Dutch system, by imposing a much stronger discipline on themselves than the Catholic church in most Catholic countries needed to do.

So eventually, the Catholics became a power in the country, for many decades constituting the largest political party. (For if almost 40% of all voters vote for one party, that party easily becomes the largest party in the system which we have in the Netherlands, being the system of proportional representation.) So the Catholic party was for many decades the largest party in the country.

Much the same can be said of another minority - a more recent minority - that of the fundamentalist Calvinists, which we call in Holland the Gereformeerden. Now the difference between the Catholics and the Gereformeerden is that the Gereformeerden identify themselves with the nation, which the Catholics for many, many centuries, did not do for obvious reasons. The Gereformeerden identified themselves with the nation, more specifically with the birth of the nation, the rebellion of the Dutch against Catholic Spain. The Gereformeerden saw themselves as a body of Gideonites, keeping the Lord's commandments and through identification, they saw their own country as a kind of new Israel, a beacon for the rest of the sinful world.

But they also lacked temporal power. After they split from, I can't say the official church, because we have no State church, but from the large Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (they split in two stages around the 1830's and around the 1880's) and formed the Gereformeerde kerken, they lost the chance of having temporal power for a certain time. In a country that, for all practical purposes, was ruled by an oligarchy of rather liberal pragmatic Protestants, the Gereformeerden had little influence on the state of affairs and the affairs of state, although more on its civilisation, because they identified themselves, as I said, with the nation.

After the introduction of parliamentary democracy, in the course of the former century, the Gereformeerden also tried to achieve factual equality through internal discipline and isolation. "Our strength lies in isolation", is a famous pronouncement by one of the Gereformeerde leaders, whose name will be familiar with some of you, Dr Abraham Kuyper.

So we see that a large part of the nation, 40% Catholic and approximately 12% Gereformeerden, was organised along what has been called "the pillar system" : a Catholic pillar, several Protestant pillars (the Gereformeerde pillar being a very strongly disciplined one, the Hervormde Protestant

pillar more loosely organised), the Liberal pillar still more loosely organised, though nevertheless a pillar, and as the Social-Democrats became more and more part of the political system, they also organised themselves in a pillar.

Now, the characteristics of a pillar are, first, its isolation from other pillars - there was little or no communication between the sectors of population groups that constituted a pillar - there certainly was hardly any intermarriage. Second characteristic - the great loyalty which those belonging to a pillar felt towards their leaders, who could almost unconditionally count on their following. Now this so-called pillar system has ruled the country for many, many decades. Although the pillars remained more or less isolated from each other, their respective leaders formed the coalition cabinets that ruled over the country since the beginning of this century. These leaders, although belonging to different pillars, were of course in close communication with each other. They formed, so to speak, to remain in architectural terms, the architrave - the only link between the pillars.

Now this system has been responsible for the great stability which was characteristic for Dutch political and social life during many decades. This system even survived the traumatic experience of World War II - traumatic for those who have lived through these years. After five years of German occupation, political life flowed back into the familiar beddings, or to use the architectural expression, jelled again into the pillar system. The Social-Democrats, who had renamed themselves the Labour Party (after the British Labour Party), tried after the war to break through the pillar system and to reorganise political life along different alignments, but they failed dismally in the first elections after the war, that was in 1946.

It was only after 20 years, in the course of the Sixties, that this system began to break down. What were the causes of this breakdown? I will mention several causes (there may be more). When I mention them, not in order of priority or of importance, I also wish to make clear that they are not completely separate from each other, they interlock and mesh with each other and certainly have mutually reinforced each other.

The first, very logical one, is the change of generation. In the Sixties a new generation came to the front and also, in many respects, to power. It had not consciously gone through the pre-war years and war years and sometimes not even the Cold War years. Now a change of generation in itself is not enough to cause such a breakdown as happened in the Sixties. After all, the pillar system had survived many succeeding generations, so in itself it is not enough of an explanation, though it is part of the explanation.

The second cause is the war experience. During the war, more people than the members of the political elites who had formed the coalition cabinets, met either illegally or semi-illegally or even sometimes in concentration camps or in hostage camps and got to know each other much better, not only personally, but also got to know their own cultures. So there was a kind of permeating influence, vice versa, among the intellectual elites in the Netherlands during the war.

The third cause I want to mention, is the explosive expansion of the mass media and especially television. I stress television much more than the written press, because the written press existed also in the pre-television era, but at the time of the written press, everybody read his own newspaper and not the newspaper of the other group. So there was no inter-pillar influence. Television is a different story, because you switch on television, and you get suddenly somebody on the screen from a certain culture or sub-culture. Though you've known about that sub-culture, you've never met a person like that or listened to him. And so you have a much stronger mutual influencing of the different sub-cultures, not exclusively the religious ones.

The fourth cause is prosperity. It also started in the early Sixties and went on well into the Seventies. That prosperity gave people leisure to read about things, to go out and meet other people. That also has been instrumental in breaking down this old system.

The fifth cause is the better educational facilities that came about with the rise of the welfare state. Whole layers of population who had never been accustomed to go to university, went to university, and that also had, of course, its effect.

Another cause is democratisation. Now democratisation, again, is a natural phenomenon : once you start with democracy, democratisation sooner or later is inevitable. Certainly, democratisation went very quickly during the Sixties, and it meant that the younger generation started to question the tenets of their leaders, which is, I think, the hallmark of democracy, after all : you don't swallow unconditionally everything that is being told to you. They not only questioned the tenets and the policies of the leaders of the elites, but more often than not they rebelled against their leaders, and in the Sixties there was a change of political leadership in practically all parties.

The last, there may be more of course, but the last cause I will mention, is the process of secularisation. Many people left church, both the Catholic church and the Protestant churches, or, at least, no longer followed unconditionally the words of their spiritual leaders.

Now these causes led in combination to what we can call, what I call, the "cultural revolution" in Holland. To be sure, many of these causes were prevalent in other Western countries also. I don't have to remind you of the rebellion starting in the Berkeley campus in California and then the rebellion of the Sorbonne in May 1968 and the rebellions in the German universities and elsewhere, in Germany in particular, degenerating into the violence, the murders, of the Red Army Fraction.

Now in Holland, this so-called "revolution" was perhaps less violent, certainly less violent than in Germany, but its effect may have been deeper and longer-lasting. Since Dutch society had been so self-disciplined, once the restraints had slackened, the pendulum swung perhaps more to the opposite side in Holland than was the case elsewhere.

The hold of the churches on their following largely broke down. This was most spectacularly the case in the Catholic church. Within ten years, the number of religious callings went down to about 10% of their original number. Many priests could no longer stand the hardship of celibacy. The use of the anti-conception pill, forbidden by the church, became more general in the Catholic provinces than in the non-Catholic ones. The Dutch Roman-Catholic church, which had been ultramontanic in its obedience to Rome, became the greatest rebel of the world church, as was shown in the Vatican Council of the early Sixties. In the Protestant churches, a

similar process was observable, though less sudden and radical, because the Protestant churches give more room leeway to dissent than the Catholic church usually does.

Even the secular Labour Party was affected. In the Sixties, the so-called New Left took over power in the Labour Party, challenging many of the tenets held by the previous generation that had been responsible, or rather co-responsible, for Dutch post-war policy of reconstruction, but also for Dutch foreign policy. Holland had left its century-old neutrality and had become an enthusiastic member of the Western Alliance NATO and of the European Co-operation groups such as the European Community. The Labour Party had been largely responsible for these choices and was therefore responsible for the post-war foreign and security policies of the Netherlands. Now the New Left that had taken over power during the Sixties advocated, and still advocates, that Holland should be, again, a beacon in a sinful world. They don't use these biblical words, because they are a secular party, but it is interesting to note that many of the Labour Leaders are of Calvinist origin. This missionary zeal has a great appeal on some of the Christian Democrats also.

Now this upheaval had of course its effect on the whole political system. Within ten years, the Catholic Party, which, as I said, had for many decades been the largest party, lost nearly half of its votes, tumbling from 32% in 1963 to nearly 18% in 1972. So in nine years it nearly lost half its votes. The three major denominational parties - the Catholic party, the so-called Anti-Revolutionary party (the party of the Gereformeerden) and the Christian Historical party (of the more Hervormde people) had amounted in 1963 to about 50%, but tumbled down to 30%. This was, for Dutch circumstances, a landslide, an ongoing landslide actually, because there were several elections during that period.

This upheaval has, of course, also affected the country's foreign policy. This theme, the new Dutch foreign policy after the Sixties, calls for a dissertation in itself. That I will not give to you. At this stage, I will limit myself to one subject : the Dutch attitude towards South Africa. I will try to give an all too short analysis of this attitude, without taking sides. I see my role here more as that of someone who is trying to explain that attitude than as that of a schoolmaster, let alone a Dutch uncle.

This being said, I want to stress first that the change in attitude among the Dutch towards South Africa antedates the "cultural revolution" of the Sixties. In fact, the watershed has not been that "revolution" of the Sixties, but World War II. As I said before, World War II has been for many Dutchmen a traumatic experience. Now, one of the effects of that experience was that, having seen 90% of their own Dutch Jews deported and not seen them coming back because they were gassed, many Dutchmen have become allergic to any discrimination on a racial basis. No doubt, these feelings contained a large element of guilt-feeling - not having been able to prevent effectively the ultimate consequences of one racial policy (the Nazi policy against the Jews), many Dutch reacted with all the more fervour, with a vengeance you might say, against what they considered to be another policy of racial discrimination.

Another yardstick that many Dutchmen continued to use for a long time after World War II was the question whether people anywhere in the world had, during the War, been more or less pro-German. Now they had reason to believe that some of the members of the Government that had taken power in 1948 in South Africa had not, right from the start, been unconditionally on the side of the Allies. Now, whether right or wrong, this impression also had some influence on the attitude toward South Africa on the part of those, and there were many, who maintained strict standards on this issue. I might add that the Dutch Gereformeerden, who had taken a disproportionately large part in the resistance against the German occupier, were not the least strict on the question what side people had been on during the war. And I think that accounts largely for the dramatic break between the Gereformeerde kerken and their fellow believers in South Africa.

These attitudes, I want to stress, had already affected public opinion and, through public opinion, government policy before the upheaval of the Sixties. It was a conservative Foreign Minister, Mr Luns, who is now Secretary-General to NATO, who decided in the middle Sixties, I think it was in 1965, to give 100 000 guilders to the so-called Defence and Aid Fund of Canon Collins, "for aid to those persecuted under the apartheid legislation in South Africa". Now I have reason to believe that Mr Luns did not do that mainly, or at least not primarily, out of real compassion with those persecuted, but he thought it was expedient, for reasons of domestic politics, to do that. I want to remind you again of the political system in Holland : governments are always coalition governments, mostly

based on a small majority and, therefore, finding it often necessary to court the opposition on points that may not be vital to their own survival - not to speak of courting those members of their own parties (the government parties) who may be susceptible to certain slogans from the opposition.

Now soon after this gesture of Mr Luns (there is no causal link), the upheaval of the Sixties started to pour fuel on this fire. One of the characteristics of that upheaval has, as I have already said, the need felt to rebel against practically everything the former generation, and certainly the so-called "establishment", had stood for. As far as foreign policy is concerned, this meant that instead of identification with the "West" in general, for which the former establishment had been responsible, the alliance with the United States and the European co-operation, came a need for identification with the "anti-West" - not so much the Soviet Union because that had already been discredited also in the eyes of the leftist generation in the Sixties, and certainly after the intervention in Czechoslovakia - but an identification with Third World in general, and with specific succeeding Third World countries in particular.

Coupled with an urge to manifest solidarity with those oppressed all over the world - oppressed politically or oppressed economically - it was almost natural that South Africa's policy of apartheid or separate development, or whatever name you want to give it, but in Holland it's still called the system of apartheid, that this policy became even more the butt of attacks than before.

Now again, this is not typical just for Holland. All over the Western world, there was this need for identification on the part of the younger generation with revolutions, a kind of romantic identification with revolutions and peoples oppressed. Nor was South Africa the only butt of the hopes and anger and frustrations of a younger generation. But in my country there was perhaps, as far as South Africa was concerned, something added to this, and this was the realisation of a kinship between the Hollanders and Afrikaners. Not despite of, but because of that kinship, the opposition in Holland against what happened in South Africa was perhaps stronger than elsewhere. And here again, a certain guilt complex may have played, and may still play, a role.

Now you don't have to tell me that this attitude, as in most moral attitudes that are translated into politics, entails a certain amount of hypocrisy, and also an unwillingness to be informed about the facts belying the image, and, even more, an unwillingness to consider the consequences of any alternatives. This all belongs, so to speak, to the game of those who do not bear any responsibility.

It is not for me to judge whether or not the situation in South Africa gives a certain objective justification to these reactions - be they ever so divorced from a realistic policy that really wants to achieve results. It would, however, be a mistake to judge these reactions only on the basis of their inevitable by-products of double standards and superficialness, and to overlook the core of genuine indignation and concern caused by the perception of what happens in South Africa.

I agree with what my compatriot Frits Dekker wrote about two years ago in the publication of this Institute, a paper that he had submitted to a Workshop on the Dutch Foreign Policy towards Africa, and I quote one passage with which I agree :

"However great the religious and political diversity of the Dutch population, there are only marginal differences in the attitudes of the various groups and political parties to human rights and development. In a parliamentary democracy such as the Netherlands, any government which attempted to deviate from this policy would be committing political suicide."

There may be disagreement on methods, on the best way to achieve results, there is no disagreement on the substance and goals of a policy that gives high priority to human rights. And as far as development aid is concerned, the importance that is given, within the framework of the total Dutch foreign policy, to development aid, has had as a consequence that the Dutch interest in black Africa has grown. These interests have historically never been very great, the interests went to, as you can imagine, more to the south-east Asia, where the great empire of Holland lay during three centuries. But if development aid, as a Dutch development aid does, concentrates on the least developed countries, and if, of the 31 officially recognised least developed countries, 21 are in black Africa, you can imagine that Dutch interest in black Africa has grown.

This increase in interest is also a result of Holland's membership of the European Community. The greater part of the aid which is given by the European Community under the Lomé Convention between the Community and its formerly colonial states goes to black Africa, because most of these nations and countries are in black Africa. This also has created a tie of, what I would call - using, with your permission, a Marxist term - a tie of "objective" interest between Holland and black Africa, which, of course, has also its effect on the Dutch attitude towards South Africa.

In finishing my talk, I am returning to the present situation in my country, of which the attitude towards South Africa is only a symptom. Sociologically and, therefore politically, things are still in a flux. At present, a centre-right cabinet is in power, based again on a small parliamentary majority. That cabinet calls itself a "no-nonsense" cabinet, using the British word, and it must be said that it has in fact introduced draconic measures in order to cut public expenditure which had grown out of all proportion. The cabinet, with these measures, has weathered all opposition thus far, even a three-week strike by the civil servants, causing a near-breakdown of many public services. This in itself shows how things have changed in Holland because it was inconceivable a couple of years ago that civil servants would ever go on strike.

According to public opinion polls, that "no-nonsense" cabinet of today has lost its parliamentary majority, but elections are still two years off, and my personal guess is that this government will sit these two years out and may even, if present policies are shown to bear fruit - it's a big if, I admit - maintain its majority and rule for another four years.

But it would be a mistake to assume that the more conservative composition and the more conservative policies of the present cabinet would also entail a more forthcoming attitude towards South Africa. To be sure, this present government is opposed to a unilateral oil boycott of South Africa, which the Second Chamber of Parliament has voted, in 1979, but the succeeding Governments have not implemented that resolution. This government is also opposed to a unilateral oil boycott, for which the left is clamouring and which a left-of-centre government, if it will come to power again, might wish to introduce, but to believe that this "no-nonsense" government would be ready to revoke measures taken by previous governments such as, for instance, the cancellation of the cultural agreements with South Africa,

would be to underestimate two factors : one a tactical factor which I have already mentioned, but I want to repeat, and the second a much more fundamental one. It would underestimate, first, the extent to which right-of-centre governments are usually eager to gain support of the left-of-centre opposition on issues that are not considered vital to the cabinet's general policy, or even stronger, the cabinet's survival (and South Africa is not vital for a Dutch cabinet's general policy or even less for its survival). And second, and much more fundamentally, it would underestimate the extent to which the feelings in South Africa, uninformed and hypocritical as they often may be, are genuine.