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# Modern Government Bureaucracy in the Netherlands 1813 – 1940

## *SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS*

In describing the history of the Home Office (which may be seen as a kind of 'motheroffice'), this thesis has attempted to account for the origin of the modern bureaucracy of government in the Netherlands. Besides, incidental use has been made of theories from the organization-sociology (Parkinson, Jaques, Crozier), whilst the stages into which the German sociologist, Max Weber, divided the process of bureaucracy – culminating in the 'ideal-type' of 'modern bureaucracy' – have been compared to the development actually established. By examining seven hypotheses in which a relation is assumed between the social economical position of public servants and the professionalization of officialdom, particular attention has been paid to possible alterations in the composition of the corps of civil servants.

In the Netherlands the growth of the government (in real terms) before 1940, was mainly realized between 1890 and 1910, during the First World War and during (the second part of) the thirties. Although parts of ministries sometimes were inclined to expand without a demonstrable reason, it immediately appears from the periods mentioned that the most important cause of the process of bureaucracy was an economic one. At the same time it becomes clear that circumstances of crisis played an important role in this. Between 1890 and 1910 the economic growth was in a great measure promoted by the rapid industrial development of the Netherlands, but the need of government measures which would limit the disrupting results of this development arose as well. During the First World War most branches of trade prospered, but nevertheless an extensive rationing system had to be set up. And during the thirties the government was the designated authority to restrict the results of the incessant economic depression as much as possible. In view of the foregoing, no more than a supplementary importance can be attached to the above-mentioned organization-sociological theories, which explain the appearance of bureaucracy exclusively from the organization of government itself.

Already from the establishment of the Kingdom, continual efforts have been made to curb the growth of the government agencies. Even special royal commissions were established for this purpose in 1818, 1828, 1830

and 1920. Without exception, they sought the solution in an improvement of the efficiency of the professional apparatus. Although the organization of government was often improved by their suggestions, they never led to a real decrease of public servants. In 1931, at the moment the depression made harder measures urgently necessary, this was finally seen by the 'Welter-commission'. This '*ad hoc*' royal commission no longer came with advice concerning the structure of the offices of General Government or their mutual distribution of tasks but made the proposal to strictly limit the expenses for the various chapters of the government estimates. The filling-in of the required economies could then be left to the various ministers.

Yet, in the thirties as well, there was no talk of a real reduction of public servants; on the contrary. As Minister of the Interior Thorbecke had already found a remedy in 1849, which was applied again and again since that time in periods of economies: with a generous gesture to the Second Chamber, the number of *permanent* officials was reduced, while in their place cheaper *temporary* staff were appointed. Whereas in 1849 Thorbecke had appointed ten 'extraordinary employees', at the end of the thirties the staffing at the offices consisted for twenty per cent of temporary officials and contracting parties of labour; with all results this had for continuity of policy and the subsequent delivery of directions on the registration. On government level a fundamental discussion was never held on the question which tasks did, and which tasks did not, belong to the state, while – as the Pop economy-committee finally had understood in 1929 – only the results of that could have made significant economies possible.

As a result of this the various economy measures in the 'Interbellum' became a toy of, on the one side politics and on the other side the professional apparatus, which was represented by the college of Permanent Under-secretaries. With regards to problems of staff and organization, this college had, from the turn of the century, increasingly gained the informal status of a shadow-cabinet. Both politicians and officials appeared to be sensitive to the capricious phenomenon of economic cycles. As soon as the economic tide took a turn for the better, one could hear in Parliament 'that the moment had started to break at which the general action of economies could be allowed to end'. Keeping in mind the phenomenon of the economic cycles of the twenties, the college of Permanent Under-secretaries managed moreover to get the enforcement of many economy plans postponed again and again in the thirties as well. Now these highest officials had their work cut out with the continual reorganizations of their offices. As far as that goes, in spite of the revision of the constitution of 1848, little had changed since the reign of King William I.

Till 1848 the Dutch form of government was based on what I have called a 'monarchical principle'. Indeed the King was committed to a constitution but had extensive prerogatives at his disposal. In the State Clerk's Office, which function was taken over by the King's Cabinet after 1840, all information concerning management came together; in the last resort the decis-

ons by which the King personally ruled the country, were prepared there. The government bureaucracy still bore a typical 'patrimonial' character. Civil servants still were literally 'servants of the King'; some of them had already served William I while, at the time of Napoleon, he held the reins of government over the secularized archbishopric of Fulda. Fixed working hours seem to have existed only on paper and for the higher officials seldom lasted longer than six hours a day. There was no talk of a legal status for civil servants; in disputes between officials or official bodies the King appeared as the highest administrative judge. Especially the righteous personality of William I may be thanked for the fact that the autocratical government during the years 1813 – 1848 in practice did not have any disadvantageous results for the civil servants. If, for example, it had lain with the States General, the civil servants from the South would never have received half the 'tractements of non-activity' which the King gave them – if they behaved themselves loyally.

Disadvantageous results were present indeed for the organization of government. Particularly under William I the distribution of tasks between the offices was changed again and again. He used to be engaged down to the smallest details with the duties of his ministers and besides was unremittingly looking for the most efficient forms of government. Based on divergent advice he handled ever changing criteria for the structure of the apparatus of government. Fortunately a royal commission, formed in 1818, brought the King to the establishment of a number of 'general regulations' in 1823, in which certain demands for the organization of the offices were made and modern criteria for the granting of an appointment in the government service appeared (first and foremost ability and experience, secondly 'private needs'). Nevertheless the organizational problems remained large.

They were even strengthened by the fact that the old Republic of Seven United Dutch Provinces and the former Austrian Netherlands were united under the House of Orange since 1815. It may be called an achievement that the prescribed annual change of royal residence has been stuck to up to the year of the Belgian Revolt. The removal of eight to nine hundred households of officials (by 'officials' in this case also should be understood members of the States General and many hundreds of 'copyists') from The Hague to Brussels and vice versa not only cost three to four per cent of the total government estimates but caused practical problems as well. Some officials, for example, had a permanent station, while the communication between both royal residences during the wintermonths often lapsed lamentably.

As a result of the Belgian Separation public expenditure was finally reduced by about thirty per cent. The loss of the southern provinces found expression in the organization of the central apparatus of government. In this way the 'Board of Administration' at the Home Office which was introduced in 1823 was already abolished in 1832. The members of this board, who

were called 'administrators', had replaced the 'directors' (who had been operating as departmental chiefs since 1814) and had been allowed to consult directly with the King and ministers of other offices in regard to their own field of policy. They were appointed with the rank of adviser, introduced in 1828 and were succeeded at the head of their 'administrations' by lower paid departmental chiefs with the rank of 'referendary'; this last rank dated from 1816 and was originally only meant for staff-functionaries without a guiding role.

After the liberal revision of the constitution of 1848, the modern bureaucracy was brought nearer in two stages, to take shape almost completely by the end of the First World War. In the 1870's many improvements were made in the registration at the offices, while for the admittance to the then still very extensive Home Office, examinations for clerks were introduced which had to guarantee a certain level of education of its officials. These developments have been summarized with the terms standardization and professionalization (although the working hours at the offices remained short till 1918: on an average five and a half hours a day). Round about the turn of the century, between 1895 and 1910, there has been a second period of great improvement in which a considerable increase of scale of the bureaucracy of government took place. During this period the 'tractements', which in 1890 were stripped of the last emolument (sharing in the legal charges) achieved the character of fully-fledged salaries. Moreover identical examinations for clerks were made obligatory for all offices. It was a time in which specialization between, as well as in, the offices increased strongly.

The less personality-tied character of the organizations of offices (caused by the objective working of the examinations for clerks and the established increase of scale), some general improvements of 'tractements' and the granting of periodical rises in salary, brought about that with this specialization there was again talk of a quick rationalizing of the central apparatus of government in this period. Through the continued growth of the number of civil servants during the First World War and the extension of their working hours to a minimum of 36 hours a week in 1918, the offices of General Government finally got a buildup which almost corresponded to Webers' description of 'modern bureaucracy'. Only a settlement by law of the legal status of civil servants would be lacking till 1929.

The crisisapparatus built up during the years 1914 - 1918, by which especially the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce (formed in 1905) had shown an unprecedented growth, was abolished within the shortest time possible after the war. Nevertheless in the twenties the ordinary public servants continued in office on a level that was considerably above that of before the war. This happened in spite of the wish of the majority of members of the Second Chamber to return to the situation of before 1910, wherein a balance had existed between the public revenue and the national expenditure. The mainly vain made attempts to economize in the 'In-

terbellum' were already discussed. It is striking that the institution of the Ministry of General Affairs in 1936 arose from considerations of economy. In 1917 when the formation of a special 'Ministry of Crisis' was considered, the socialistic leader Troelstra had already expressed his preference for 'a powerful figure in government' in the shape of a *Prime Minister* equipped with particular qualifications who could co-ordinate the policy of crisis. In the beginning of the thirties the Pop economy-committee came up with the same idea. The institution of the Ministry of General Affairs and the appointment of Colijn to Prime Minister finally were results of this.

After 1877 when the Ministry of Public Works, Commerce and Industry was split up from the Home Office, the division of offices had been permanently under pressure since the end of the nineteenth century. In 1899 the Minister of Public Works, Commerce and Industry, Lely, pleaded in vain the establishing of a Ministry of Labour (possibly: of 'Labour and Industry'). In 1905 it was further decided to class all economic and social interests under one department of 'Agriculture, Industry and Commerce' by which it is true a mere technical Office of Public Works arose (such as Lely and some of his predecessors had had a clear picture of in their minds), but the *political* ever more important social legislation *officially* remained a supposititious child. In 1918 two independent ministries of 'Labour' and of 'Education, Arts and Science' were finally established by which not much more remained of the Home Office than a premature Ministry of General Affairs.

For reasons of economy the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce was abolished at the end of 1922. The care for industry and commerce became the charge of the Ministry of Labour which for this reason was called 'Labour, Commerce and Industry'. All matters concerning agriculture were placed under the charge of the Home Office, the name of which changed into 'Home Affairs and Agriculture'. Since then the question whether it was desirable to have one or two ministries for all social and economical matters, kept occupying minds from time to time. With the institution of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Labour in 1931, the care for social interests like public health, provision of work and unemployment benefit was originally still classed under the Home Office. In 1933 a definite choice was made for two separate ministries of 'Social Affairs' and 'Economic Affairs'. It is remarkable that after the elimination of the controversy between social matters and economic interests a new contrast arose immediately. At the Ministry of Economic Affairs (between 1935 and 1937 divided into the Ministries of 'Commerce, Industry and Navigation' and 'Agriculture and Fishery'), 'agriculture' (permanent under-secretary Van Rijn, Louwes) and 'commerce and industry' (general manager Hirschfeld) were generally diametrically opposed to each other.

The arguments for making certain departments independent of their offices or for the creation of new ministries appeared to be very different in

character in the course of years. Sometimes they were supplied by pressure-groups, as in the case of the Central Bureau of Statistics (established in 1899) and at the realization of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Science. The most fundamental part of practically every argument was the necessity for an extension of government care, on existing fields of policy as well as with regard to new developments. In increasing measure personal capacities or ambitions of candidate ministers played a role in reorganizations as well. Thus in 1901 Minister of the Interior Kuyper exchanged the department of Agriculture at his office for the department of Labour at the Ministry of Public Works, Commerce and Industry because he wished to be involved in social legislation. The splitting up of the Ministry of Economic Affairs into two ministries in 1935, just as the reuniting of these, two years later, was totally explained by Hirschfeld as being due to the capacities (or lack of these) of the administrators involved.

In spite of the motives a radical reorganization or the institution of a new office was mostly clinched during the formation of a government. Owing to this the Council of State had – if it was consulted – mostly only marginal influence on the procedure; by discouraging a plan, this highest college of advice could break open the formation of a government, in which one had often laboriously come to agreement. Parliament had no grip at all on the organization of government; the right of establishing ministerial offices remained reserved to the (constitutional) King. Only by disagreeing with the legal provisions, which had to be made on account of a certain reorganization, could the Chambers show their displeasure.

As regards the civil servants, it can be concluded that their recruiting has never been a problem. Apart from extreme cases of collaboration, King William I was not inclined to blame candidates for a function for their attitude during a former episode in the government of the country. In view of his own attitude during the French domination there was no choice left. Soon after 1813 'Orangemen' worked together with functionaries who had won their spurs under King Louis Napoleon or even during the Annexation. Only the recruitment of suitable 'servants' (later one spoke of 'officials') appeared to be sometimes difficult. However not due to a too small supply in the labour force but in view of the required feeling for professional relations and the necessary notion of norms; excessive drinking and larceny by the serving staff often happened.

According to Minister of the Interior Thorbecke, the revision of the constitution of 1848 had to have consequences for the composition of the corps of officials. During his first ministry he probably tried to achieve a *unique* 'changing of the guard' in order to bring the staffing at the government into line with the demands of the liberal state. This caused a violent conflict between him and King William III, who (with a great deal of foreign examples in mind) twice unsuccessfully tried to undo the constitution of 1848. Thorbecke managed to place his own protégés in his own office

but these appeared, without exception, to be extremely capable. In 1853 the cabinet of Van Hall, in fact, adopted the train of thought behind the policy of Thorbecke. In connection with an intended alteration of the Electoral Law and the Municipal Corporations Act, it replaced the head of the department of Civil Service at the Home Office, Jhr. Van Tets van Goudriaan (promoted by Thorbecke) by an official whose ideas corresponded better with those of the cabinet. Although the appointment of protégés still happened later as well, for example under the anti-revolutionary Minister of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce, Talma, (who just was praised on account of his 'impartial policy of appointment'), the so-called *merit* or *classified system*, in which officials were permanently appointed on account of their supposed or apparent capability, has never really been threatened in the Netherlands. It was just by the introduction of the already mentioned examinations for clerks that extra emphasis was placed on this capability.

In 1934 the level of the secondary education in the Netherlands had risen to such an extent that the examination for clerks could safely be abolished. In the meantime, the government with the rise of political extremism, saw itself confronted with a fairly new problem. Since 1933, it tried to bring the political disposition of its staff somewhat under control by the so-called 'Prohibition for Officials'. This happened in a questionable manner. In May 1940 it would appear that the democratic system was not saved by it.

Until the establishment of the First Resolution of Salary for Civil Servants (B.B.R.A.) in 1918 the salaries for officials were on the whole too low. Thereby late into the nineteenth century, officials remained 'gentlemen of standing who gladly wanted to have something to do' and on account of their prosperity could be content with small pay. The low pay thus had an aristocratically working effect, whilst the professionalization of officialdom was greatly retarded by it. With the low (initial) salaries, the officialdom of The Hague formed, certainly after the Belgian Separation, a rather closed circuit. In spite of some general increases in salary in the second part of the nineteenth century, for the impecunious outsider it was practically impossible to settle in The Hague as an official or as an aspirant official. In this manner inhabitants of The Hague predominantly and people from Holland proper became civil servants. Some 'prosopographical' reconnoitring has brought to light that in the second part of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, more than 42 per cent of the Dutch civil servants came from The Hague and in total, even 70 per cent came from North and South Holland. Because the system of *adjunction* dating from the time of the *ancien régime* survived in a decreased form for a long time (where earlier there had been talk of a *right*, the succession of a father by his son – who had worked himself in free – was now considered to be a *favour*) far into the nineteenth century the bureaucracy of The Hague could be typified as a 'family-government'.



During the union with 'Belgium' between 1815 and 1830 circumstances did not essentially differ from the situation described above. The underrepresentation of people from the southern part of the country in management and officialdom on central level, which formed one of the causes of the Belgian Revolt, at the Home Office however was not as grave as one would expect. In 1830 more than forty per cent of the permanent staff there consisted of 'Belgians'. As the Home Office had been led continuously by a minister from the South since 1817 (just as the ministries of 'Public Works' [1815-1820] and 'Roman Catholic Public Worship' [1815-1826]), a certain distortion is likely to exist. Still the inhabitants of the southern provinces had, keeping in mind the percentages in the foregoing paragraphs, probably no more reason to complain than the population of other regions round about.

Since the abolition of the *ancien régime*, under which officials should be members of the Reformed Church, religion did not formally play any single part anymore in the policy of appointments. In practice the number of Catholics among the civil servants remained, nevertheless, much lower, in view of the composition of the Dutch population, than it could have been. Catholic emancipation was greatly obstructed by the Belgian Separation, which in the eyes of many had shown the unreliability of all 'papists'. In 1888 there were still only ten percent of the officials at the Home Office Roman Catholic, while more than 84 per cent were Protestant-Christian of some sort.

From about 1890 there gradually came a change in the composition of the corps of civil servants. Thanks to the industrial revolution commerce and industry grew and the salaries of officials came under pressure. Before, in the nineteenth century, it had been possible to bind specialized officials at the 'technical' Office of Public Works, Commerce and Industry to the government with bonuses. When the bonuses no longer appeared to be sufficient, the officials salaries were finally greatly increased in 1918 with a simultaneous extension of the number of working hours. Ironically enough this happened under the predominantly liberal cabinet of Cort van der Linden, while the extension of the number of officials and the raising of their salary had always been fought against with great emphasis by liberal politicians. Much earlier, conservative and confessional statesmen had already shown their comprehension of the new type of official which had arisen since some decennia; a type which did not come from a well-to-do 'family of officials', which had not found its way to some university bench in a traditional manner and which was employed especially by the relatively young offices or departments of offices (the management of Agriculture, the department of Crisis Affairs).

After the First World War the time of the official robes was finally over. The professionalization of officialdom caused a big change in the social status of the civil servant. For the first time in the history of the Kingdom, an official was going to earn a fully-fledged salary. But against this, just

like every other wage-earner, he must deliver a normal number of work-hours. By doing so he no longer distinguished himself from a functionary in the private sector.

Although, following the example of the German '*Reichsbeamten-gesetz*' of 1873, at last a law for officials (of which the scarce material conditions were worked out in the Universal Regulations for Civil Servants (*A.R.A.R.*) in 1931) came about in the Netherlands as well in 1929, in view of the modern bureaucracy of government after 1920 phenomena of regression were more present than those of perfection. As minister of Finance, Colijn carried through a reduction of salaries by ten per cent in 1924 which was followed by numerous other restricting measures in the thirties. As a result of this a pattern which had arisen in the second part of the nineteenth century soon returned: the ever growing group of officials without wealth of their own looked for and found on a large scale additional offices in commerce and industry.

The nature of these additional offices reflected the long standing (and before 1940 never abolished) segmentation of the corps of officials into higher, middle class and lower officials. The professionalization of officialdom was partly undone by the holding of additional offices. Also in view of the great number of temporary officials and labour contracting parties that were employed by the offices, the bureaucracy of Dutch government in the opinion of Weber, which in comparison to surrounding countries had come in working order exceptionally late anyhow, came to a remarkable end before the Second World War.