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5

**The Disconnection of
Social Policy and Crime in
The Netherlands**

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1: Introduction

I am particularly thankful to the organisers of this seminar for inviting me to present a paper, for two important reasons.

First of all this invitation gives me the opportunity to present in an international forum the research project which I and some of my colleagues finished last year concerning high crime levels in some of the old working-class neighbourhoods in the city of Rotterdam¹. It was a research project in which we tried to address the issues being debated in this seminar: the relationship between social policy and traditional petty crime. In doing this we took on board international and particularly British and American work in this field. Here, I am thinking of the works such as those by J.Q. Wilson and E. Currie in the United States, and J. Young, R. Kinsey and others here in the United Kingdom²

Secondly, this invitation has come at the right time because a split has developed in Dutch government circles concerning the relationship between social policy and crime. To state it in bald terms the Ministry of Justice, headed by a minister of Christian-Democrat origins, supports the view that there is no connection between social policy and crime, whereas the Ministry of Interior, headed by a social-democrat Minister, supports the proposition that crime prevention should be part of Holland's comprehensive policy of **social renewal**, which aims to improve the social and economic life chances of the disadvantaged in Dutch society.

For both these reasons I was particularly keen to accept the invitation to speak at this seminar.

In the first part of my presentation I want to outline the basis of the official policy that has been pursued in the Netherlands until recently. As well as providing a descriptive analysis, I shall also assess its position within the political and intellectual debate that's going on in the United States and in this country.

The second part contains an analysis of the debate which is taking place between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior concerning the relationship between social policy and crime. There has not as yet been a public political discussion of their divergent views. It has instead taken place behind the scenes. We hope by publishing the results of our research to bring the question out into the open and to the fore in public debate in the Netherlands.³ I shall be introducing the results of this research in my paper and I hope it may be of some value in terms of policy development in Holland and elsewhere.

2: The Official Policy in The Netherlands Concerning Petty Crime

To get an idea of Dutch policy in this field one has to look at the policy plans, produced by the Ministry of Justice; *Samenleving en criminaliteit* (Society and Crime) in 1985, and *Recht in Beweging* (Law in Motion) in 1990.

These two plans contain what may be called a policy theory on the causes of and the background to the growth of crime. This theory suggests that the explosive growth of crime since the 1960s is the result of five significant social trends:

- decreased influence of all sorts of traditional social institutions which previously regulated individual behaviour such as schools, the church and the family;
- the increased affluence that has led to an accumulation of goods which can be vandalised or stolen;
- the decreased willingness of people to conform to rules of the state and other authorities;
- the long term unemployment of a substantial number of young people;
- and the diminution of formal and informal supervision in a lot of social situations (eg shops, housing estates, trains).

This 'theory' is a mixture of two common criminological theories:

- the social control theory, which says that young people develop criminal behaviour as a result of failing to make appropriate links with established social institutions;
- the opportunity theory, which says that the display of such behaviour is dependent upon the supervision that is exerted on people.

Dutch policy is not only influenced by certain criminological theories it also reflects a certain political ideology. This ideology can be ascertained by analysing the policy plans in greater depth and by examining the image of society and the image of man which they project.

The image of society which is projected is dominated by the view that Dutch society after the Second World War can be typified as a traditionally compartmentalised society, that is to say a society wherein the different christian-democratic and liberal, 'pillars', of traditional western European society exert a great influence on social and cultural life. Their institutions

were responsible for the internalisation of norms, supervising observance and ensuring compliance. Given the dominant role these institutions played in daily life, the opportunities in that society for disorderly and criminal conduct were small. It is suggested that this society has now gone. Its fabric was disrupted in the 1960s by growing affluence, the desire for democracy, the anonymisation of social life, and the growing emphasis on collective and individual rights.

The corresponding image is that the post-compartmentalised society is occupied by a human species that unilaterally claims human freedoms and rights but isn't willing to observe rules on behalf of good mutual relationships or in the interest of the public good and whose decisions about their observance are based solely on considerations of personal gain or loss.

There is a clear connection between this view of the development of post war society and the model of crime causation on which Dutch criminal policy is based. The criminal is thus seen as an undisciplined or a dissolute but calculating being, who constantly undermines the values and norms of the society in which he lives and who exploits the opportunities for crime which it presents.

This approach also underpins Dutch criminal policy in terms of its response to disorderly and criminal conduct. As well as numerous repressive measures - three types of preventative action have been adopted:

- action relating to specific locations such as supermarkets or flats;
- action relating to groups of people such as foreigners, youngster or dropouts;
- action relating to specific forms of crimes such as theft, violence or vandalism;

The measures which have been developed within this framework can be divided into two categories:

- techno-preventive measures such as the establishment of bicycle sheds, the re-ordering of collective space in housing estates and the provision of information on padlocks etc;
- socio-preventive measures, ranging from increased supervision in trams, flats etc, to the construction of links between unattached youngsters and institutions such as schools and workshops.

Obviously, this policy and its scientific and ideological roots can be criticised in a variety of ways. I do not want, however, to repeat here all the criticism that has been developed over the years against the social control and the opportunity theories. This would also not be the

appropriate place to discuss the historical reconstruction of society in The Netherlands with respect to the evolution of its crime problems. It would be more useful here to set this policy within the context of the international debate on crime problems and the way to deal with them. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it is obviously valuable to link what's going on in The Netherlands to what happens in the western world as a whole. Secondly Dutch policy needs to be stripped of the politically neutral image which it has claimed hitherto. This claim to 'neutrality' is particularly significant in relation to understanding the possible political conflict that the policy of social renewal could produce with regard to tackling crime and security. Dutch criminal policy has always been presented as embodying a scientific approach, a claim which has been made possible by a consensus among the larger political parties concerning the nature of the problem and available solutions. The whole crime issue has thus been neutralised and depoliticised - at least up until last year.

Within the context of the debate in the United States and in the United Kingdom there can be no doubt at all that the actual policy in The Netherlands is a conservative, right-wing policy, based upon the ideas of people such as J.Q Wilson. This conclusion can be drawn from an analysis of the following central themes in the Dutch policy:

- the emphasis on the individual as a calculating being;
- the accent on the repressive and preventive control of crime and criminals;
- the omission of social, economic and cultural factors in explaining crime and in developing policies to contain it.

3: A Breakthrough in the Political Debate?

It would be useful at this juncture to describe the policy of social renewal in The Netherlands. This policy has been developed by the social-democratic party, the PvdA (Labour Party). Its philosophy is that a number of groups in society live in a disadvantaged position, socially and economically. They suffer from unemployment and many problems in their day to day living. One of these problems is petty crime and vandalism.^{4 5}

Other disadvantages are not identified in this explanation of crime and the policy does not have anything approaching a theoretical model to explain crime. Nevertheless, in an implicit way - that is to say in the ideas concerning the tackling of the problems - something like an explanation emerges. It becomes clear that the problem of crime is related to lack of opportunities in education, housing and employment and the poor management of neighbourhoods, including inadequate building maintenance, street cleanliness and security standards.

With this range of social issues being considered in relation to crime prevention there appears to have been some sort of break with the policies pursued up until last year. Firstly, there is the emphasis however small on the social and economic causes of crime. Secondly, the policy suggests that crime problems should be handled within the context of neighbourhoods. This change from past practice may explain why the Ministry of Justice has opposed the proposals for 'renewal'. To some degree they are a threat to the established theory and policy this Ministry has developed and practised in the past. They are also a threat to the institutional monopoly the ministry has obtained for itself in this field since the end of the 1970s.

In practical terms, however, the threat posed to the Ministry of Justice by the renewal programme is small. The Ministry of Justice still has its own budget for developing projects in large cities, so that it can continue to pursue its established policies⁶ and, so far, the Ministry of Interior has not succeeded in developing its original plans to implement its comprehensive social renewal package in relation to crime prevention. Looking at its circulars on this issue one can only conclude that it is following policy previously mapped out by the Ministry of Justice. So, there is no question at all of a true 'renewal' of Dutch crime prevention and practice. To go back to my original statement, the only real conflict between the two ministries at present is an institutional one; ie: which Ministry is responsible and financed for preventing crime.

It will not be easy to resolve this power dispute, and make a scientifically and rationally based choice between the different policy approaches which are a product their diverging of ideological backgrounds. I should, however, like to make a number of points to assist this process based on the research undertaken by myself and my colleagues.

4: The 'Boulevard Zuid' - Project in Rotterdam

This project started in 1986 within the framework of the policy plan Society and Crime (1985). It was developed as a result of rumours concerning the growth of crime on the longest shopping street in Rotterdam: Boulevard Zuid. As a result of our initial research, however, a different picture emerged:

- the crime problem in this street was not that big and varied considerably between different categories of shops and different locations;
- for many shopkeepers the issue was not just crime but the economic and material decline of the street as a result of - in their opinion - the deteriorated and still deteriorating conditions in the adjoining neighbourhoods;

- a relatively high percentage of the known offenders over recent years actually lived in the surrounding areas.

After a lot of debate with the policymakers and the interest groups who are involved in the area, the project split into two parts. Firstly, notwithstanding our preliminary findings, a lot of measures would be taken to contain crime and to suppress the general fear of crime in the street including providing crime prevention information, a bicycle shed, and an alarm system. We hoped to evaluate their impact. Secondly, it was decided to broaden our research area into the surrounding neighbourhoods.

To give shape to this research, we examined the considerable body of literature which has been developed in the United States and in the United Kingdom on the subject of 'communities and crime'. This resulted in us developing the following sub-projects.

First, of all we undertook a review of the demographic, economic and institutional history of these neighbourhoods since their development at the beginning of this century. Our conclusion was that all the conditions for a severe crime problem were fulfilled: a mobile and heterogeneous population since the 1960s mainly as a result of the immigration of people from Turkey, North Africa and so on; a radical worsening of the socio-economic status of the inhabitants (high rates of unemployment, etc); the disappearance of churches, which were powerful traditional institutions, and a general deterioration of the environment including public space, housing, schools etc which was the unintentional result of an important reconstruction programme.

We then analysed 'criminal maps' of the city which are produced by its police force on the basis of recorded crime. From these we could see that our expectations were correct: The neighbourhoods we were examining came very high in the list of the 90 neighbourhoods in the city, in terms of the theft, violence and vandalism they were experiencing, moving between the 10th and 15th place in the annual crime league table. The residents themselves saw a close connection between the living conditions in these neighbourhoods and their crime problems, and they saw it as a problem linked to demographic changes, economic decline and environmental deteriorations in their surroundings which had occurred over the last decade, despite the massive efforts of the local authorities to renew the housing estates etc. To summarise the situation, the crime problem in these neighbourhoods is just part of their general poor quality of life.

5: Conclusion: Linking Research and Policy

To some degree, contrary to our expectations, this conclusion was eagerly accepted by the city's policymakers. They advocated the development of neighbourhood strategies on the

basis of the findings and not surprisingly, obtained the consent of the social-democratic policymakers in The Hague, for the adoption of this largely new approach.

But who should be responsible for planning and developing the policy proposal? Should it be made a part of the social renewal policy or not. Should it be implemented by the Ministry of Justice or the Ministry of Interior?

In our view, it is first of all important to stress that tackling crime problems like those in the neighbourhoods we are discussing is a long term process. The problems have grown up over many years as a result of major societal changes and can not be resolved quickly. This does not mean, however, that nothing can be done in the short term.

Because of the need for a long as well as a short-term perspective, the social renewal movement would be the most appropriate framework for the development of an effective and fair policy to contain the sort of crime problems which we came across in Rotterdam rather than the approach of control adopted by the Ministry of Justice. A long-term social policy perspective enables measures to be undertaken in the field of employment, training, housing and so on, but does not prevent the adoption of short-term situational crime prevention measures where these are appropriate. In practical terms, therefore, the budget for preventing crime should be with the Ministry of the Interior. This is not just because this government department is responsible for the implementation of the social renewal policy but principally it is the Ministry of the Interior which is in the best position to work closely with local authorities in developing the kind of integrated, multi-disciplinary approach that is needed to get results both in the long and short term.

In reality, the Ministry of Justice still has the leading role in relation to crime prevention. It is interesting, however, to note that recently in a brochure on crime prevention in neighbourhoods it has adapted its policy, or at least the articulation of its policy, to the ideas of social renewal. It nevertheless still refuses to use the expression, demonstrating that the conflict is essentially to do with institutional rivalry, with the Ministry of Justice trying to hold on to its monopoly in this field. Ministry of Justice policy now shows a broader understanding of the background to crime in the bigger cities, and accepts that substantial heterogenous population mobility, the economic decline of neighbourhoods, environmental deterioration etc, can bring about crime problems, and widespread feelings of anxiety in relation to crime. It now accepts that the development of opportunities in training and employment and the provision of recreational facilities can be very important in relation to the prevention or reduction of crime. However, the Ministry only relates these measures to individual criminals and states that such measures form a totally different approach from the policy of control which it has pursued over the last five to seven years. It is not surprising that only this relatively narrow social crime-prevention policy is advocated in its crime prevention brochure. The Ministry of Justice still largely adheres to its traditional position and it is only in its own bureaucratic self-interest paying some limited lip-service to the ideas of 'social renewal'.

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- 7 See the brochure 'Preventie en buurtheer' (Prevention and Maintenance of Neighbourhoods), issued recently by the Department of Crime Prevention, Ministry of Justice.