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Summary

The student's state. A two hundred year political history of public student support policies in the Netherlands

This dissertation contains a history of public financial student support policies in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, from their establishment in 1815 until today. It focuses especially on the political and administrative decisions that led to actual policies.

This history is divided in seven episodes during which policies had different goals and took different shapes. King William I of Orange, who ruled in the period 1813 to 1840, was allowed by the Congress of Vienna to rule a territory the size of modern day Luxemburg, Belgium, the Netherlands and its colonies. Like the eighteenth century enlightened despots before him, he tried to unite the culturally, religiously and politically differentiated peoples under his rule into one nation; industrious, tolerant and loyal to the crown. He granted financial support to students who prepared themselves for careers in sectors that had great impact on the population's cultural and spiritual life, such as churches, education and the arts. These students were educated in a national, royalist and utilitarian spirit. Other grants were allowed to students who wished to make a career in the developing industries and agriculture in order to stimulate national prosperity. Despite, or as a result of these attempts to popular upbringing, the Belgian people revolted against the Dutch king and gained their independence. This event and the following financial difficulties took the vigour out of these policies.

In the 1840s, a number of problems accumulated. The Netherlands faced a public bankruptcy, student numbers exceeded demand on the job market and the strict social hierarchy was in conflict with attendance of lower class students attracted to higher education by student grants. A period of strict austerities followed, in which nearly all student support facilities were abolished. In the following liberal period, principle objections to state interference in social life prevented a large sized grant policy. Only a few grants were available for exceptional talents. When the quickly developing confessional lower education

threatened to overshadow the religiously neutral public education, however, liberal governments spent unprecedented amounts of public money on training of public school teachers. This led to a conflict between liberal and confessional members of parliament, although confessional ministers of Home Affairs hardly succeeded in reforming this policy.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century the relative restraint on public student support was challenged by confessional politicians who demanded a fair share of public support for confessional education, and the worker's movement who demanded better accessibility to education for worker's children. The extension of suffrage increased these pressures. During the First World War, as the Netherlands remained neutral, internal political conflicts were resolved in an atmosphere of consensus. The government obliged itself to support students of confessional education types to the same extent as public education students. Subsequently, in November 1918 revolution across Europe and civil unrest in the Netherlands forced government to give in to the demand of social reform. The first minister of Education, Arts and Sciences set out to develop a general accessible grant provision, which he wanted to grow until all demanding talented youngsters were provided for. Meanwhile, in the Netherlands as well as in the colonies overseas, support was granted to train public colonial administrators and local farmers for colonial economic and administrative development. Expenditures to student support grew at a pace unheard of. However, new public financial problems forced government to cut down expenditures in the 1920s and 1930s. The general accessible grant provision was frozen and reformed into a system of loans.

The Nazi occupation authorities during the Second World War used student support to exclude Jewish students, to discipline the remaining ones, to promote Nazi ideology and to train school teachers to spread the German and Italian language. These policies were meant to turn the Dutch people into a loyal part of the new Germanic European order that national socialists envisioned. However, after the German defeat at Stalingrad, the occupation force started to indiscriminately arrest young people for forced labour. Most young men were taken abroad or retreated from public life. As a result, Dutch secondary and higher education almost came to a stop during the last years of occupation, despite attempts to attract new students with public grants.

After liberation the Netherlands faced an enormous economical challenge. In order to repair war damage, to catch up on its international technological arrears and to improve trade balance, a large scale industrialisation policy was launched. The kingdom needed an unprecedented amount of educated workers. At the same time, war devastation and inflation had impoverished large parts of the population. As a result, only the government could provide the fi-

nancial means necessary to maintain large amounts of students. This problem led to political conflict. As the now powerful social democrats demanded collective care for all students, conservative politicians refused to undermine the responsibility of families for the upbringing of their children. The result was a system of extended public child benefits to parents of nearly all Dutch students, in order to keep children financially tied to their families. It was a measure aimed at maintaining traditional family relations in times of stormy modernisation. In addition, for lower income groups the pre-war system of student loans was extended and completed with gifts. Around 1960, almost all students' parents received child benefits and about a third of students received student grants.

During the 1960s, this system became widely controversial. It disproportionately benefited people in higher social classes and it maintained financial ties between young people and their parents. The egalitarian atmosphere, inspired by economic prosperity and modern social thought, made these policies unpopular among students and political constituencies. Conservative political thought lost ground. Between 1967 and 1986, government gave in to these pressures and tried to create a policy that improved the accessibility of education and provided adult students with full financial independence. However, the end of continuous economic growth in the 1970s and a difficult administrative struggle between different departments involved, led to a very long decision-making process. Eventually, a compromise was reached in which child benefits were taken over by the Department of Education and Sciences and aimed directly towards students themselves, completed with additional grants for students from lower income groups.

Since 1986 this compromise was widely contested. A large influx of new students, almost endemic public financial restraints and changing public attitudes towards collective support for relatively privileged young people led to continuous reform. Grant amounts were lowered, entitlement durations were shortened, a larger share of the system became to consist of loans and the benefit for higher income groups was reduced. Following this logic of increasing individual responsibility, government is currently trying to turn the general available grants into a system of loans. All of these reforms were and are politically and technically enormously complicated. Ever since the introduction of child benefits in the system in 1953, it has been impossible to tell whether student support is a form of education policy, income policy or social support. It has had close links with all three of them, causing reforms in one of these aspects to have unacceptable effects in the other. Public student support policy has become a complex administrative knot, still struggled with today.

