CHAPTER 3  The Netherlands and the Dutch Caribbean: Dilemmas of decolonisation

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Decolonisation in the late-twentieth century differs markedly from the classical post-war decolonisation phenomenon. At that time, colonies were fighting to gain their independence. Today, provided that they have achieved a satisfactory degree of autonomy, ex-colonies might spend their energy on efforts to prevent being forced into independence.

The history of the Dutch empire is a case in point. The most important colony, Indonesia, gained its independence in the 1940s after a bloody struggle against Dutch troops. The relationship with the two remaining colonies, Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles, was reformulated in 1954 with the signing of the Statuut or Charter of the Kingdom. Under this the Netherlands and the two West Indian territories became autonomous partners in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Since the late 1960s the Netherlands have urged their partners to become fully independent. Suriname, indeed, became an independent republic in 1975. The Netherlands Antilles, however, have so far refused to take a similar step.

The object of this chapter is to review the post-War relations between the Netherlands and the Dutch Caribbean as well as to analyse the present situation and possible future developments. At present, the dilemma’s of decolonisation linger most acutely in the ties between Aruba, the Netherlands Antilles and the Netherlands. Therefore, we will pay most attention to this relationship.

A profile of the Dutch Caribbean

For a short period of time, in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century, the Netherlands were, to quote Immanuel Wallerstein, ‘a world hegemonic power’. To the West the Dutch made their first inroads in the Americas around 1595. This resulted in the conquest of the New Netherlands, North-East Brazil, dispersed settlements on the Wild Coast, and various Caribbean islands. In the late-
seventeenth century only six Caribbean islands and the colonies in the Guianas remained. In 1812 Demerara, Berbice, and Essequibo were ceded to the British: now the Dutch Caribbean only comprised Suriname and the six islands of the Netherlands Antilles.

Suriname became a Dutch colony in 1667 and except for two short periods of British sovereignty continued as a part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands until the country’s independence in 1975. Suriname was developed as a typical Caribbean plantation colony and remained so until the late-nineteenth century. The main crops cultivated were sugar and coffee. Slaves provided the necessary labour force. After the abolition of slavery (1863) indentured migrants from British India and the Dutch East Indies formed the mainstay of the plantation labour force. In the early-twentieth century the plantation economy collapsed definitively. Small-scale agriculture and bauxite mining provided economically viable alternatives. After World War II Dutch development aid assumed increasing importance.

Plantation agriculture left a very obvious legacy, namely the ethnic plurality of the population. Of a populace of approximately 400,000 (not counting 200,000 Surinamese and their descendants living in the Netherlands), some 35 per cent are of British Indian descent, 32 per cent Creoles (descendants of plantation slaves), 15 per cent Javanese, and 10 per cent Maroons. The remaining 8 per cent consists of Amerindians, Chinese, and Europeans.

Presently, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, St Eustatius, and St Maarten make up the Netherlands Antilles. Aruba, formerly the second most populous island of the Netherlands Antilles, gained a separate status (status aparte) in 1986. Except for intermittent occupation by the Spanish, the French, and the English, the Netherlands Antilles have been a Dutch colony since 1634. From the beginning, these possessions never constituted an entity; their history being to a large extent the history of six separate islands. By calling these islands ‘Curaçao and its dependencies’ the Dutch sharply defined the relation between the main island and Bonaire and Aruba. Only in the twentieth century did the subservient position of the latter change.

A 600-mile distance accounts for a marked divergence between the Leeward and Windward Islands. The history of the latter islands is, apart from personal ties between their respective elites, one of separate development. Only in this century have the fortunes of the two been intertwined.

Small-scaledness and heterogeneity may be said to characterise the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. Curaçao, the largest island, is one-twentieth the size of Puerto Rico. The smallest island Saba
measures only 13km². In 1985 the total population in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba is estimated at some 248 000 people; Curacao with approximately 147 000 inhabitants, Aruba with 68 000, while less than a thousand persons live in Saba.

The Dutch Antilles have never been plantation colonies in the typical Caribbean sense. This is reflected in the population composition. Although slaves were imported, a major numerical imbalance between a small white planter elite and the black slave masses, as in Suriname, did not take place. Yet, similar to other Caribbean countries, an antagonism between Afro-Antilleans and Euro-Antilleans developed which is still of significance today. Coupled with the tumultuous social and economic changes experienced in Curaçao and Aruba during the twentieth century, these historical processes account for the appreciable racial, as well as social and economic heterogeneity of the Antillean population.

The oil industry has had a great influence on the social, economic, cultural, and political life of Aruba and Curaçao. Thousands of labourers from all over the Caribbean as well as white collar workers from the United States and the Netherlands flocked to these islands, causing a population boom. In turn, these immigrants intensified the ethnic plurality of Aruba and Curacao.

**Historical background**

The Second World War can be considered a watershed in the relations between the Netherlands and her colonies in the East and the West. In a famous radio broadcast in 1942, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands announced more autonomy for the overseas territories: the Netherlands East Indies, Suriname, and the Netherlands Antilles. This proclamation, a consequence of the growth of nationalism as well as of mounting international pressure, was however, too little, too late, for the Dutch East Indies. In 1945 nationalists proclaimed the independent Republic of Indonesia. Despite military intervention the Dutch could not regain control and had to concede to the official and mutual proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia in 1949. Coupled to a series of humiliating diplomatic defeats in the international arena, the Dutch thus experienced a major decolonisation trauma.

By contrast, Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles managed to change the constitutional bonds with the Netherlands through negotiation alone. In 1954 the Statuut or Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands approved new relations between the Netherlands,
Suriname, and the Netherlands Antilles. This document was considered at the time as the conclusion of the colonial era and as a step towards the full independence of the two territories in the West. The Netherlands, Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles were now to be regarded as three equal partners jointly constituting the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Only defence and foreign affairs remained the preserve of the government of the Kingdom, residing in The Hague. The latter was also responsible for ‘due administration’ in the three parts of the Kingdom. Although the *Statuut* provided for the possibility of future constitutional changes, they could only be implemented with the consent of all three partners. Unilateral changes, secession in particular, were not acknowledged.  

With the *Statuut* signed all three partners relegated the topic of independence to the bottom of the agenda for a decade and a half. Yet in 1969 two events in the overseas territories re-opened the question. First, a series of general strikes in Suriname led to the downfall of the cabinet there. Both political stability and internal order were threatened. Yet, as it turned out, Dutch intervention was not necessary, though under the *Statuut* could have been called upon. Things changed with the, euphemistically called, ‘events of Willemstad’ (Curaçao) in May 1969. A strike in the industrial sector caused major social unrest. In the face of a looting mob, the Antillean government reacted by calling upon Dutch forces to restore order. In accordance with the provisions of the *Statuut*, the Dutch complied.  

‘May 1969’ revived the debate regarding the future constitutional structure of the Netherlands Antilles. Not only did the discussions centre upon the relations with the Netherlands, they also focused on internal relations between the islands. The Netherlands, meanwhile, particularly in view of international criticism wanted to rid itself of its last colonies in a decolonising world. Also, as a consequence of increasing migration from Suriname to the Netherlands, the possible independence of Suriname became an issue in the Dutch parliamentary elections of 1971. Political parties in both government and opposition implored Suriname to ready itself for independence in the near future. Meanwhile, the Surinamese government showed no signs that it would welcome independence. Then, in 1972, in both Suriname and the Netherlands, new governments came to power. In the latter the coalition included the strongly pro-independence PvdA, as well as the block of Christian-Democrat parties. However, it was the Surinamese parliament, not the Dutch administration, which ultimately chose for independence. In 1974, Surinamese premier Henck Arron, leader of a coalition of Afro- and Javanese-Surinamese parties announced that Suriname was to become
independent before 31 December 1975. His Dutch colleague, Joop den Uyl (PvdA), was happy to co-operate. Arron’s bold announcement, however, served as a catalyst, and left Suriname more divided than ever, particularly along ethnic lines. The major Hindustani (British-Indian) party headed by Jagernath Lachmon strongly opposed the plans of the cabinet. According to figures provided by the Hindustani opposition, in 1975, 80 per cent of the Javanese and 99.9 per cent of the Hindustani population were opposed to independence; the Creole population was 50 per cent for and 50 per cent against.6

The Dutch, for their part, were prepared to bankroll independence, inspired both by a sense of guilt arising from a colonial past and to smooth the negotiations. Apart from development aid, one of the more important issues at stake was the problem of nationality and consequently of free migration. In 1970, 29 000 Surinamese were living in the Netherlands; five years later this community numbered more than 100 000 persons. The net migration from Suriname to the Netherlands in 1974 and 1975 alone was 50 000. The treaty provided for a five-year transition period, during which free migration remained possible. From 1980 onward the strict regulations for all foreign nationals would be applied to Surinamese as well.

Despite some hitches in the negotiations, the Surinamese government and the Netherlands were able to arrange a swift and ‘model decolonisation’ including a so-called ‘golden handshake’: development aid worth 2.3 billion guilders or US $ 3000 per capita. Dutch premier Den Uyl was moved to call the independence of Suriname ‘the finest hour of his administration’.

A change in Dutch-Antillean relations was not achieved as swiftly. Despite Dutch pressure the Antilleans were reluctant to plan their independence. As prime minister Juancho Evertsz is reported to have commented to his Surinamese colleague, Arron, when the latter asked why the Antilles did not become independent, ‘Henck if you allow yourself to be hung, it does not mean I will do the same.’ Evertsz did not believe that the Dutch Antilles were socially economically, or culturally viable as an independent country. Some Dutch politicians openly agreed with him thus providing Evertsz’s and succeeding generations of Antillean politicians with an argument to postpone independence well into the future, if not indefinitely.

A second material consideration at the time was that in Aruba the separation movement was regaining strength. Earlier, during the 1940s, some Arubans had desired separashon from Curaçao and, as they saw it, its suffocating tutelage and administrative inefficiency. Moreover, racial tensions between mainly latino Arubans and black Curaçaoans were said to play a part. Separation by Aruba would
entail a direct relation with the Netherlands instead of participation in the Antillean federation. Both the Netherlands and Curacao refused to grant Aruba this separate status since it would imply breaking the unity of the six Antillean islands.\(^8\)

The events of ‘Willemstad 1969’, however, directly impinged on Aruba. The Aruban elite feared that the neighbouring social unrest might spread to black industrial neighbourhoods on their island. Moreover, Aruba had to pay its share of compensation for the appreciable material damages. In an ensuing conflict over a new governor, Aruba felt that some Curacaos had forced the withdrawal of Aruba’s favourite candidate. The new black governor, B. M. Leito, was seen as unacceptable to many Arubans.\(^9\)

During the late 1970s Betico Croes, leader of the Movimiento Electoral di Pueblo (MEP), articulated such concerns and became the champion of Aruba’s quest for a separate position within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. A referendum held in March 1977 showed that 57 per cent of the Aruban electorate supported the idea of a status aparte. Only after mounting Aruban pressure did the Dutch agree to recognise Aruba as a separate partner in the discussion regarding the constitutional future of the Antilles.\(^10\)

A tripartite committee was formed to make an inventory of existing problems and to research alternative relations between the six islands of the Netherlands Antilles, as well as between the Netherlands Antilles and the Netherlands.\(^11\) This commission was unable to attain unanimity as the Dutch delegation wanted to maintain the Statuut and keep the islands together, while the Arubans wished to change the situation. A second problem revolved around the division of seats in the Antillean parliament (Staten). During the first Round Table Conference (RTC) of 1981 little progress was made as Curacao did not want to change the distribution of seats if this entailed losing its majority. However, all parties recognised the right of self-determination of each island, and Curacao no longer opposed a separate status of Aruba.

The Netherlands also came to the view that a united and simultaneous decolonisation was no longer possible. Accordingly, a newly-appointed commission suggested a transition period in which Aruba would attain a separate position within the Kingdom, ultimately leading to its independence.\(^12\) However, new problems arose regarding future relations between Aruba and the remaining five Antilles. A second RTC (1983) was organised to resolve the issue. Dutch prime minister, Ruud Lubbers, and minister of Antillean Affairs, Jan de Koning, adopted a ‘take it or leave it’ approach. The partners had to accept or reject the proposals in toto.
Rejection would mean a deadlock for years to come. Aruba bowed under pressure from Lubbers, with the result that Aruba obtained its _status aparte_ as of 1986, followed by independence in 1996. Cooperation between Aruba and the other Antilles, as agreed upon at the RTC, initially had a shaky start, yet recently seems to have improved.

Changes in economic fortunes further complicated the political process. The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba have a very open and dependent economy based heavily on imports. The three main economic pillars include the oil industry, tourism, and offshore financing. Particularly the first has been hit hard by the international recession and structural changes in production. In the 1980s the oil industry reached a crisis: the Lago Oil and Transport Company (Exxon) terminated its activities in Aruba in 1985 and in the same year the imminent foreclosure of the Shell refinery was averted only when the company sold its refinery to the Curaçaoan government, which subsequently leased it to Petroleos de Venezuela SA.

These economic problems reinforced already existing doubts among the Antillean population as to the wisdom of going it alone. Arubans, in particular, realised that political dreams and ‘victories’ do not pay the rent. Now economics, instead of _separashon_, held the floor. Many called for postponing the _status aparte_. Croes, meanwhile, threatened that thousands of his countrymen would migrate to the Netherlands if the latter would not come to Aruba’s rescue.13

In a change of fortunes inconceivable a few years earlier, Croes and his pro-_status aparte_ party, MEP, lost the elections of November 1985. Henny Eman, grandson of the first _separashon_ leader, became the first premier of the state of Aruba. On 1 January 1986 Aruba officially obtained its _status aparte_. Indicative of the prevailing mood, the festivities were rather sober because of the economic situation. Further, Betico Croes, ‘father’ of the _status aparte_, had been seriously injured in a car crash some hours earlier. He would never regain consciousness and died eleven months later, unable to see Aruba take its first steps alone into an uncertain future.

**Alternatives to full independence**

The question as to whether the _Statuut_ needs to be maintained or alternative constitutional constructions formulated has become rather pressing to the Dutch as 1996 comes nearer. In that year, officially at least, Aruba becomes independent. Although it was not stated explicitly during the RTC of 1983, Dutch politicians also
hoped that the future constitutional status of the five other Antillean islands would be settled by 1996. None of the Dutch politicians we talked to supports an independence on the model of Suriname, i.e. without any unique constitutional ties to the Netherlands. Opinions vary, however, on what the constitutional future of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba should be. Alternatives range from the one extreme of independent states joined in a commonwealth to the other of a construction similar to the French Départements d'Outre Mer (DOM) or overseas provinces.

The option of a gemenebest (commonwealth) sui generis is proposed by Willem de Kwaadsteniet, spokesman of the CDA, the largest political party in both cabinet and parliament. What exactly this new relationship would entail is open to negotiation. It may include juridical, financial, educational, and cultural elements. The question of the head of state as well as defence is open for discussion. Officially, this plan enjoys the support of the Dutch Minister of Antillean and Aruban Affairs as well as of individual representatives of the major political parties. Yet, some are hesitant to lend their support because of uncertainty regarding the contents of such a future treaty. Others stress that provisions for external security need to be included before the islands will even consider a commonwealth pact.

Opponents squarely state that these ideas implying independence will not be acceptable to the Antilleans and Arubans. As one informant puts it ‘I don’t think that anything which looks, even if only on paper, less binding than the current Statuut will be in demand [in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba]’. And indeed, survey after survey confirms this statement: the islands do not want to weaken their constitutional ties with the Netherlands. The commonwealth proposal therefore seems caught in a vicious circle from the start, with the Netherlands wanting the Caribbean partners to draft a proposal, and most Antillian and Aruban politicians refusing to discuss the idea openly.

Yet the Aruban electorate may have turned the tables. In the 1989 elections the Eman administration was surprisingly, but soundly, beaten. The MEP regained power. Even though social and economic considerations seem to have guided the majority of the voters, the MEP victory promises to have constitutional implications as well. The new Aruban government, headed by MEP leader Nelson Oduber, has officially declared that independence will be a top priority. This might bring a commonwealth construction closer.

All other alternatives preclude full independence and basically call for minor or major changes in the present Statuut. Some
recommend modernisation or reform of the current Statuut, creating a so-called ‘light’ Statuut. This idea has been on the agenda since 1972, yet so far has never been elaborated. The creation of a ‘light’ Statuut revolves around Art.43 dealing with the preservation of internal order, proper administration, and defence against external threats. Resistance against rewriting of the Statuut exists in both the Antilles and the Netherlands. In the latter country, the Minister of Antillean and Aruban Affairs does not think a ‘light’ Statuut is a realistic option: ‘we either have a Statuut or we don’t’. In the same breath, however, he declares that the current Statuut has served its function, thus illustrating a prevailing dilemma in the political world. Although some Antillean politicians are opposed because they do not accept anything ‘lighter’ than the current Statuut, other leaders, like Antillean Premier Maria Liberia-Peters and Aruban opposition leader Eman, are willing to consider slight changes.

The most extreme variant would make the Netherlands Antilles a Dutch (overseas) province. To the almost unanimous opinion of politicians in all three territories such an option is not preferable. The larger islands certainly would not want to take such a regressive step. However, it is not out of the question that in the case of further fragmentation of the Antilles, smaller islands such as Saba, Bonaire, or St Eustatius would eventually opt for the status of thirteenth province of the Netherlands. Both Saba and Bonaire have already explicitly expressed their interest in such a construction. If some, or all, of the islands indeed choose to become a sort of DOM, each island would become a separate municipality with a so-called ‘Art.12’ status, meaning under the financial tutelage of the state. Such a construction would entail more Dutch influence. As a consequence, it could provoke the possibility of growing Antillean resentment against a renewed Dutch involvement in local affairs.

What is at stake?

When discussing the decolonisation of small islands in general, and the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba in particular, one wonders why the metropole wants such mini-states to become independent. What is it that drives policy? The sociologist, Harry Hoetink, suggests that Dutch policy makers fear two things: ‘Willemstad 1969’ revisited and mass migration from the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba to the Netherlands. We think two more ‘fears’ can be adduced: the financial costs and the trauma of the Suriname experience.
Responsibilities and image

At the beginning of our interview with the Dutch Minister of Antillean and Aruban Affairs, Jan de Koning, his Excellency volunteered his view on decolonisation. De Koning preferred the term ‘decolonialisation’ to decolonisation’. This was not meant to be a play on words. He emphasised that, with the signing of the Statuut, colonial relations, had been superceded: a fact recognised by the United Nations when it agreed to exempt the Dutch from their reporting duty. The Minister underlined that the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles, and Aruba are equal partners, even though the former nation supplies financial and technical assistance. Moreover, in the area of foreign relations, the Antilles and Aruba are included in relevant negotiations and signing of treaties. In short, the Caribbean partners possess a high degree of autonomy, in spite of the fact that both socially and culturally the colonial past may have left its traces.

Of course, De Koning’s remarks are justified. Yet the emphasis on this point of view is revealing of a Dutch concern with their image in the world. Many Dutch felt that the ‘events of May 1969’ severely tarnished this image. Even though no shot was fired and the Kingdom was required by Art.43 of the Statuut to restore order, the whole episode left a bitter taste for two reasons.

The first was that at the time many, especially young, Dutch people believed that the Netherlands should be providing a lead in Europe and the United States in improving relations with the Third World. Suddenly, the country seemed to have reverted to its old role as a colonial power ready to intervene when its interests were threatened. Today, some politicians, like Minister De Koning, still talk about ‘May 1969’ as a nightmare for both the Antilles and the Netherlands. Yet, the majority of our spokesmen do not think that the international community still brands, or did so in 1969, the Netherlands as a colonial power.16 On the contrary, in the climate of today pushing the Antilles into independence might, in itself, be considered a repulsive colonial act.

A second difficulty concerning Art.43 is that the Kingdom have to guarantee ‘proper administration’ in its overseas territories. In the face of failing internal administration, the Kingdom (read the Netherlands) may be called upon to subdue internal unrest; ‘May 1969’ suggests that this provision is no dead letter. Most Antillean politicians do not resent the ‘colonial’ connotations of the article, but would not mind if it were removed. As Henny Eman of Aruba put it ‘That [internal defence and adequate administration] is our own responsibility; we will never call upon the Netherlands for help as far
as this is concerned'. The Dutch are still uneasy though. Despite the interventionist obligation of the Statuut, they are not supposed to exert any influence on politics in the Antilles. Yet, with the constitutional and economic problems of the islands, Dutch involvement has intensified, to the dismay of politicians in the Netherlands. Alongside this growing involvement, disaffection about the political system in the Antilles has increased proportionally. Antillean politics, with its relatively large social and economic inequalities and patronage, is not always appreciated by the more puritan officials and politicians in The Hague.

Besides internal order, Art.43 also covers the external security of the Antilles and Aruba. External defence is a 'hornets' nest' as the Antilleans and Arubans cannot defend themselves. Yet the Dutch are unable to do much more than show the flag in the hope it will thwart potential aggressors. The current Dutch presence in the Caribbean provides some stability in a volatile region, much to the satisfaction of the United States and Venezuela. Major problems, however, could develop if the Statuut is changed or revoked and no adequate defence is guaranteed. The ensuing vacuum could be filled by powers threatening Antillean sovereignty. At present, threats by neighbouring nation-states seem to be relatively small. More serious is the impossibility of defending the territory against drug trafficking. The islands are strategically located along the main drug routes. In the absence of adequate territorial defence, there is every prospect that the islands will become transfer points. Obviously, the United States considers this as a security threat. Small wonder, then, that the US opposes any change in the status quo which would make the islands even more vulnerable.

Art.43 will become one of the major issues in any discussions regarding constitutional changes. Minister De Koning and former Premier Biesheuvel concur in identifying Art.43 as the reason why the Netherlands want to discard their responsibilities vis-à-vis the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. Yet Biesheuvel argues that external security is the disputed point, whereas De Koning thinks the obligatory Dutch guarantees of internal security and proper administration are the main problem, since they interfere with the existing autonomy of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. The latter problem seems easier to resolve than the external defence issue.

In short, Art.43 serves as a prime motive to decolonise, but also as the bottleneck in discussions about any future relationships between the Netherlands and the Antilles and Aruba. In any case, it is clear that the reluctance of the Caribbean partners to discuss constitutional changes is already paying off. In the late 1980s the
Dutch are finally willing to consider including defence, in one form or another, in a future commonwealth.

Migration

At present, the inhabitants of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba have a Dutch passport and thus are entitled to unrestrained settlement and social benefits in the Netherlands. Independence, that is taking away Dutch nationality, or closing of the borders, may limit mass migration to the Netherlands. Luckily, the fortunes of the Antilles are not a popular issue in the Netherlands and political parties there do not capitalise on latent xenophobia. To the contrary, all parties deny that racism or xenophobia play a part in their decision making. Instead, other arguments, such as the brain drain and the poor employment situation for Antilleans and Arubans in the Netherlands, are put forward to defend measures limiting the number of incoming migrants. For example, the liberal-conservative VVD annually calls in parliament for stricter admission rules, yet it never receives support from any other major party. The VVD seems fearful in this instance of a repeat of the Surinamese exodus in the 1970s.17 On the eve of independence, or shortly after, 150,000 people (one-third of the total Surinamese population) were living in the Netherlands. According to the VVD this led to political and economic disaster in Suriname while excessively burdening the Dutch welfare state because Surinamese immigrants, as Dutch citizens, were entitled to social benefits.

On 1 January 1988, 61,000 Antilleans and Arubans, out of a total population of 280,000, live in the Netherlands, where the total ‘ethnic’ population is nearing 800,000 individuals, or approximately five per cent of the total population. Unemployment among these Antillean and Aruban migrants has reached 40 per cent. Not only does this make their position in the Netherlands vulnerable. It also engenders local resentment against ‘these foreigners’ because of pressure on the Dutch entitlement structure. Even though support for racist parties is weak, it nevertheless seems that for many Dutch citizens the limits of tolerance and acceptance of foreigners have been reached. This, too, may influence Dutch policy making.

The official VVD argument, however, is that migration is bad for the islands themselves. A brain-drain will leave the Antilles and Aruba with a shortage of trained executives. The problem with this valid argument (vide Suriname) is that it can easily be abused as a cover for less noble motives to limit migration.

On the other side of the ocean, the Antillean and Aruban
governments use the migration issue to put pressure on their Dutch counterpart. They sometimes threaten that immigration to the Netherlands will escalate if the Dutch, for example, refuse to increase their financial assistance to balance the islands’ budgets or if the Netherlands tell them to prepare for independence. Such threats, which indeed do put fear into many Dutch politicians and citizens alike, seem to be one of the few trumps the Antilleans and Arubans are holding in their negotiations with The Hague. Of course, this could also be a self-defeating argument, prompting the Dutch to curtail free immigration.

**Finances**

The Dutch may not administer an empire anymore, but they have remained a nation of book-keepers. Is Dutch financial support a factor in decision making regarding the future of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba? One would say yes. One of the most important goals of the former Aruban administration was to become financially independent: 'money should not cloud decisions on your constitutional future'.

In these islands development aid per capita is among the highest in the world. The Netherlands disburses about a quarter billion guilders per year for its partners overseas. (This amount excludes defence, administration of justice, and occasional budget support, which some Dutch decision makers fear will become structural.) The sum is fixed at five per cent of the Dutch development aid budget, which in turn is fixed at one per cent of the total budget. Per capita it means Dfl 1000 or US $ 500, compared to US $ 5 per person in the English Caribbean.¹⁸

Most Dutch politicians we have talked to confide generously that money is of no consequence in the debate, and some even call the amount of financial support 'peanuts'. Only the VVD representative expresses some reservations: his party thinks that the remittance of money from the Netherlands to the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba is 'excessively high'. Two arguments are used: poorer countries in the world may have stronger claims, and second, the Dutch themselves have experienced painful cuts in the social and educational budgets. In other words, the money might be used to balance the budget in the Netherlands.¹⁹

Antilleans counter these arguments with their own reasoning. First, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba have a more than 300-year-old historical tie with the Netherlands, which makes them special. This argument is especially supported by some older Dutch politi-
cians. Second, the Antilleans rightly claim that they are in the process of cutting their budget much more drastically than their Dutch colleagues.

Development aid sustains a high standard of living in the Dutch Caribbean. Of course, this may be disadvantageous in the intra-Caribbean competition for investments and employment. However, as the Antilleans correctly stress, this standard is not only a consequence of development aid but—much more—of past industrial activity, particularly in the oil sector.

Even though most Dutch spokesmen state that they want the amount of aid to remain the same, some of them suggest that the donor country should have a larger voice in the spending of the monies. This is a new development as during the past two decades it was considered ‘not done’ to present the money with strings attached. In the late 1980s even social-democrats support Minister De Koning’s viewpoint that the Netherlands should direct and control the spending of its development aid. The funds should then be used exclusively to stimulate social and economic development, not on, say, theatres or community development projects.

All Dutch politicians deny that possible independence of the Caribbean partners, most likely followed by a commonwealth construction, would have consequences for the amount of Dutch aid to the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. A VVD spokesman even suggests that aid may be reduced if the status quo is maintained, rather than if the islands become independent. The Antilles and Aruba, however, express some reservations about Dutch guarantees for development aid. After all, for political reasons the Dutch suspended all economic aid to Suriname. A post-independence treaty may not be as solid as the present Statuut. In short, the islands may rightly feel that the Statuut offers more guarantees for financial support than any other treaty between the Netherlands and the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba ever will.

**Suriname**

Developments in post-independence Suriname assume increasing importance in the discussion on decolonisation of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. The recent history of Suriname is a particularly discouraging example for the Dutch Caribbean islands. Following the exodus shortly before and after independence, migration peaked again in the years 1979–80, just prior to the formal ending of free migration. Another 32 000 Surinamese opted for settlement in the Netherlands. At the time many may have thought of returning to
Suriname before too long. However, net migration (partly illegal) from Suriname has continued, whereas repatriation rates are insignificant. While involving a cross-section of Surinamese society, this emigration has been disproportionately high among the educated elite. This, in turn, implies that there is a serious shortage of executives both in the economy and in public administration.

Political developments have been equally discouraging. Despite genuine attempts to overcome ethnic antagonism and to build a viable democratic state, the administration of Henck Arron rapidly lost popular support. On 25 February 1980, a group of sixteen NCOs led by Sergeant Desi Bouterse seized power in a somewhat improvised coup. Initially, the military regime seemed to have the backing of the population, yet this support rapidly dwindled. The year 1982 was a turning point, and culminated in the so-called December murders when fifteen prominent members of the opposition were killed. Henceforward, terror was an important ingredient of military rule. Following a period of relative calm, the military were again challenged. This time it was not the city but the interior of the country which was the cradle of resistance. The Maroon ‘Jungle Commando’, headed by former Bouterse bodyguard Ronnie Brunswijk, initiated a guerrilla war against the National Army in the summer of 1986. Both this guerrilla war and mounting popular discontent forced the regime to accept a return to democracy. Free elections were held in November 1987. The electorate dealt a devastating blow to the military, who obtained less than five per cent of the popular vote. The coalition of the once discredited ‘old parties’ regained power, winning 40 seats in the 51-member National Assembly.

Seasoned politicians such as Arron and Lachmon formed the new government. However, the role of the military has not yet come to an end. Not unlike the situation in other Latin American countries, the army in Suriname has not relinquished all its political power. Indeed, a continuing role for them is guaranteed in the 1987 constitution.

Meanwhile, the economy has steadily deteriorated. On the eve of independence Suriname was a relatively rich country, with a per capita income of US$ 1073, well above the average for the region. This income kept rising after independence, not least on account of Dutch development aid. Yet real economic development was negative. Suriname lost its position as a major bauxite exporting country. This was due to the changing world market, the exhaustion of the Surinamese reserves, and guerrilla warfare since 1986. Also Dutch financial assistance did not produce the results that were anticipated. Critics asserted that the massive aid distorted the
economy by artificially raising the level of consumption without concomitantly strengthening the productive bases of the economy. When the Dutch, following the December murders, decided to suspend development aid, the Surinamese economy was in disarray and without external support. When, in 1988, the Dutch cautiously resumed development aid, it was already obvious that these funds alone could not resuscitate the economy in Suriname.

Finally, according to many observers, these last years have seen an upsurge of ethnic rivalry, based more on economic than on political criteria. The positive spirit of nation-building following independence has subsided; today, to many of its citizens, Suriname seems a nation divided.

All in all, the record of post-independence Suriname is not encouraging. This fact is not an ‘official’ point of discussion between the remaining partners of the Kingdom. Most Dutch politicians simply deny that the Suriname experience is of significance for the debate on the decolonisation of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. Yet, Antillean and Aruban politicians increasingly incorporate ‘Suriname’ into their sets of arguments against independence in the foreseeable future.

The wheel of history and other elusive arguments

Do the Netherlands want to extricate themselves from their ‘colonial’ relationship because of political pressure by the rank and file in the metropole or is lack of interest for the welfare of the citizens overseas the cause? Or is it just the opposite, i.e. out of a concern for the overseas territories? Other reasons may include using the threat of independence as a lever to influence Antillean and Aruban politics. Finally, there may exist a general uneasiness about the idea of having ‘dependencies’ in the late-twentieth century.

The first two motives, lack of concern for the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba or political pressure by the rank and file, seem unlikely explanations of Dutch policy. Political pressure is virtually absent as the overseas territories are not a political issue in the Netherlands. One Curacaooan politician even complains about this ‘detrimental lack of interest’. Probably the only way it could attract attention is when the Netherlands Antilles or Aruba make (negative) headlines, as happened in May 1969, or when demagogy will get the upperhand, expressed either in xenophobia or if the costs of keeping the islands afloat are explicitly set off against cutbacks in the Dutch welfare system. Even among policy makers whose actions are guided predominantly by Dutch interests, a total absence of concern
for citizens in the West is insufficient ground to push the Antilles into independence. Some apparently genuinely believe that independence would be helpful to the development of the territories. The CDA spokesman in parliament calls it psychologically important that countries become independent as it ‘underlines their own responsibility and forces them to solve their own problems’.

The last argument receives support in Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles as well. When asked why his country should become independent the Aruban pro-independence cabinet minister H. S. Croes answered, ‘that question has been answered by more than 140 countries. You have to fend for yourself and accept your own responsibility’. Antillean premier Maria Liberia expresses it even more crisply. ‘It’s your pride, it’s your dignity’. Yet, in the Antilles this is used as an argument for the long term only.

Independence can also be used as a stimulus. According to the Statuut no Kingdom partner can unilaterally withdraw nor force others to leave the Kingdom. Thus the Dutch cannot force the Netherlands Antilles into independence. Yet there exists the option of making any continuation of the Statuut less than rewarding. Indeed, some Dutch politicians threaten to change the current (financial) conditions as ‘punishment’ if the overseas territories do not balance their budgets or reorganise and decentralise the disproportionally large civil service. Of course, the Dutch Minister of Antillean and Aruban Affairs cannot reveal whether he employs this tactic as an incentive to spur the islands to change their financial and administrative ways.

Independence also serves as a device to suppress possible inclinations in other islands towards attaining a separate status. When, for example, in 1988 St Maarten expressed its desire to become, like Aruba, a separate country within the Kingdom, the Dutch answer was clear: the choice is between participating in the Antilles-of-five or outright independence.

Finally, some policy makers in the Netherlands want independence for the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba because of their qualms about a continuing colonial relationship when we are approaching the magic year 2000. Words such as ‘unnatural’, ‘anachronism’, and ‘futureless’, are synonyms to express these misgivings. Supposedly, the ‘wheel of history’ dictates that independence is the next logical step for the Caribbean partners. Dutch MP Nuis (D66), however, implies that it is not so much the ‘wheel of history’ as the wheel of politics which directs the future of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba: ‘it is hard to retrace one’s steps if there exists no immediate reason to do so’.
The present situation: independence, fragmentation, and economic crisis

At present two factors virtually preclude a debate on independence in the Netherlands Antilles. First, there exists the problem of fragmentation or administrative viability and second, the current state of the economy or, in more general terms, economic viability. The Antilleans understandably hold that these problems need to be solved before changes in the relationship with the Netherlands can be addressed.

With Aruba things are different. According to the 1983 adjustments to the Statuut, this island has to become independent in 1996. This issue we will address first, before turning our attention to the Antilles-of-five.

The Aruban point of view

The situation in Aruba is a paradox. The great majority of the Arubans do not want to lose their Dutch nationality and thus do not wish to become independent in 1996. In 1985, no less than 87 per cent of the population wanted to maintain or strengthen the present ties with the Netherlands. Yet, at the 1989 elections, the pro-independence MEP became the largest party. The coalition headed by the MEP is seriously preparing for independence in 1996.

Thus the tables have been turned again. The preceding Eman administration invested a lot of effort in removing '1996' from the agenda. In the words of the former premier 'The date of independence is to be determined by Aruba itself. We challenge that 1996 automatically implies independence'. Arguments like 'we wanted a status aparte, but not independence' were used to convince the Dutch. H. S. Croes, then in opposition, stated: 'Nonsense, we wanted independence, we did not mean separashon. I think we very well knew what we had done. The administration [Eman] attempt to postpone 1996 is childish'. Now in the government, the MEP seems to want to make good on its promises.

Obviously the independistas will still find some obstacles in their way, not least the one regular general election and the plebiscite planned prior to the year 1994. Anticipating that the population then is still against independence the outcome is uncertain. One wonders how this will affect the economic recovery during the Eman administration, which was impressive. Again, opinions differ.

Anyhow, many Arubans do not consider the Statuut a burden
anymore, while the Dutch flag is seen as essential to attract foreign investment. These, in turn, are the corner stones of the economic recovery programme. Actually, it is by no means clear if independence is a good or a bad lure to investors. As officials of the Dutch Department of Antillean and Aruban Affairs admit, political stability seems a necessary prerequisite for attracting investment. Certainly, individuals who oppose independence call 1996 the sword of Damocles for Aruba, as the new constitutional status might ruin the present image of stability and thus deter possible investors. Those favouring independence call this a self-fulfilling, or better yet self-destructing, prophecy. So it is that otherwise strange bed fellows, like the Aruban social-democrat H. S. Croes and the conservative Dutch MP Wiebenga, concur in regarding settlement of the constitutional future as giving Aruba a decided advantage in the hunt for the yen and the dollar.

The position of the Netherlands Antilles

The five islands of the Netherlands Antilles have to contend with questions concerning their economic and administrative viability. The economic crisis of the 1980s has severely undermined the economic pillars of the main island Curaçao: the oil industry, tourism, offshore financing, and the shipbuilding industry. This recession has forced respective governments to axe the budget, cut back the civil service, and ask the Dutch government for temporary financial support. Even though recovery is far from certain, economic prospects seem to have improved slightly. Again, it depends on one’s perspective as to how optimistic one is. Those advocating independence are generally more positive about economic chances than those preferring to maintain the constitutional status quo. At present, the economic downturn and its implications weigh so heavily upon a small island like Curaçao that a discussion on independence seems irrelevant.

Furthermore, there exists the problem of internal administration. When one broaches the subject of the constitutional future of the Antilles with Antillean politicians, they will talk about relations between the five islands and not about the ties with the Netherlands. The constitutional structure between the islands is rather ill-defined: the Netherlands Antilles are not a federation, not a decentralised unitary state, and certainly not a confederation. Three levels of government exist: the Kingdom (the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles, and Aruba), the Land (Antilles-of-five), and the individual islands. The Kingdom administers foreign affairs and defence.
Theoretically, the Land governs judicial, postal, and monetary matters, whereas the islands are responsible for education, economic development, etc. However, the tasks of the Land and the islands are not clearly outlined, which may lead to confusion and bureaucratic inefficiency.

Strong centrifugal forces threaten to disrupt the, to an extent artificial, unity of the Antilles. Aruba has left this amalgamation of islands and now Curaçao has become the sole island that has to keep the others afloat. Meanwhile, St Maarten has replaced Aruba as the main opponent of Curaçao, arguing that the structure of the Antilles hampers its social, financial, and economic development. A *status aparte* for St Maarten is gaining popularity among the population, while the island’s strong man, Claude Wathey, even advocates full independence. Curaçao, in particular, wants to decentralise the current structure of the Antilles, yet despite many so-called ‘summit consultations’ the matter is still ‘under consideration’. Curaçaoan politicians of different persuasions all oppose independence; increasingly they are also pondering over the desirability of a *status aparte* for Curaçao. Taking into account that the number of legal and constitutional experts in the islands is limited, it is understandable that restructuring internal relations takes precedence over discussing independence.

In short, Antillean politicians have to grapple with difficult issues, which consume all their energy and overshadow other problems. Independence is simply not the issue. Moreover, there exists no strong independence movement pressing them to change relations with the Netherlands. To the contrary, recent polls reveal that in all islands 96 to 100 per cent of the population opts to maintain a tie with the Netherlands. In Curaçao 41 per cent wants to maintain the status quo, while 21 per cent expresses the desire to become a province of the Netherlands. Thus independence is a non-issue or encounters stiff Antillean resistance – as Dutch policy makers find out time and again.

**Dutch options**

What is next? The dilemma is clear. In pragmatic terms, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba constitute a liability rather than an asset to the Netherlands. The days of the *islas inútiles*, to quote sixteenth-century Spaniards, seem to be back. Do the Dutch want to continue to provide a safety net, and if so how fine-meshed will it be?

It all seems to turn around image and responsibilities, money,
defence, and migration to the Netherlands. Although the Antilleans and Arubans these days emphasise the historical, emotional, and personal ties between the West and the Netherlands, it is questionable whether these carry or ever have carried that much importance. After all, Dutch ties to the Antilles and Aruba are rather tenuous. A factor which will, however, almost certainly play a role is the experience in Suriname.

The Dutch political spectrum displays many opinions. Since the 1970s the points of view of the major Dutch political parties have changed dramatically. From 1977 onward, the largest party, the Christian-Democratic CDA, and the third largest one, the liberal-conservative VVD, have almost continually formed the government, with the social-democratic PvdA being the largest opposition party. The VVD and PvdA have experienced major swings in their opinions on the Antilles; as a matter of fact, the two parties have virtually traded positions.

A majority in the PvdA now advocates that the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba decide for themselves if, when, and at what pace they want to change the Statuut. In the VVD opinions are more divided. The representatives in parliament favour independence in the short run for the Antilles and call the 1996 independence of Aruba a non-negotiable fact. The VVD senators are less rigid and want to 'leave the Antilles in peace'.

The CDA spokesman in the Second Chamber of the Estates General champions independence followed by a so-called commonwealth sui generis. However, opinions in the CDA range from maintaining the constitutional status quo for the time being to the Dutch right to unilaterally renounce the Statuut. The Dutch will almost certainly not exercise this last option. This is not only a matter of decency; constitutionally it is impossible. Moreover, the Antilleans and Arubans would quickly denounce the Dutch at the United Nations as a colonial power if independence were to be forced upon them – thus decolonisation is considered a most colonial act!

Despite the fact that no unanimity exists in Dutch politics, insiders emphasise that the so-called Antilles committee in the Dutch parliament is much inclined towards achieving a consensus. First, the position of the senators is not unimportant as the Antilles committees of both Houses are the only permanent commissions which regularly co-operate on, and jointly travel through, the Dutch Caribbean. Second, this 'joint committee' regards itself as a delegation of the Netherlands in its discussions with Antillean and Aruban parliamentarians. Consequently, instead of internal bickering, a communis opinio is regarded as highly desirable. It seems unlikely that such a
**Geopolitics**

Obviously, in such a geostrategically important area as the Caribbean, other countries besides the Netherlands have an interest in the future of the Antilles and Aruba. Simply by being there the Dutch are involved in foreign policy making in the Caribbean. Yet the Dutch keep a low profile. They seem reluctant to get embroiled in the geopolities of the region. Regarding issues such as the Central American crisis and Cuba the Netherlands follow EC policy. However, concerning the Netherlands Antilles, Aruba, and Suriname, the Dutch are forced to play a more prominent role. This implies direct consultations with Venezuela, Brazil, and the United States.

Suriname in the 1980s has been a concern to all four countries. Particularly the involvement of Cubans and Libyans with the Surinamese junta caused alarm. All four applied pressure on the Surinamese military to change their ways. Whether this was done in a concerted action is unclear. The recent redemocratisation may have appeased the foreign powers, yet it is obvious that the Dutch are still expected to play a prominent role in ‘keeping Suriname on the right track’.

The Dutch presence in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba is self-evident. Yet, as we have seen, the Netherlands are reluctant to live up to their responsibilities indefinitely. A conflict of interests may arise here. The United States and Venezuela welcome the Dutch presence and would perceive a Dutch retreat as detrimental to the stability of the region, and thus to their own interest. In particular, the United States fears chaos if the Dutch leave. At least judging from a scholarly article with the revealing title ‘Trouble in paradise’ this is so. The authors from the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies advise the Dutch to ‘assume a greater responsibility toward maintaining social and political stability’.

Venezuela, only 30 kilometres from Aruba, has a close connection with the Leewards. Economic ties between this country and Curacao in particular are strong, especially as it has now leased the Curacaoan refinery. Antilleans and Arubans are not sure how to view Venezuela: is it a friend, a brother in development, or an enemy threatening their sovereignty? Opinions are mixed. There is no doubt, however, that only a minority is in favour of closer cooperation, hence more dependence, upon Venezuela.
Venezuela's interest in the Caribbean is growing, but Caracas seems primarily interested in stability in the region. Traditionally, Latin American countries have advocated a complete withdrawal of all colonial powers from the Americas; the Malvinas/Falklands are a recent case in point. Along the same lines, Venezuela has during the past century claimed that the Dutch Leewards are part of its own territory. To the Antilleans and Arubans this was nothing less than a threat of annexation. In the past decade, however, an improvement in the relations between Venezuela, the Netherlands, Aruba, and the Netherlands Antilles is discernible. The first explicitly stated that it does respect the sovereignty of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao. Yet, in the same breath the Venezuelan government has emphasised that it will not tolerate a power vacuum. Thus it has impressed upon the Dutch not to renege on their responsibilities in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. Similar messages have been communicated to politicians from the Leewards. Most telling in this respect is the advice given by President Carlos Pérez of Venezuela when he visited Curaçao in June 1988 during his election campaign. He warned his Antillean and Aruban colleagues against 'insular thinking' and separatism. He suggested that Aruba join the other Antillean islands in a confederal union.

The Netherlands seem convinced of the goodwill of the Venezuelans. Clearly this fits well into Dutch decolonisation plans. In the 1980s the Dutch government has initiated regular high-level consultations between the countries involved. The Antilleans and Arubans, however, view this rapprochement with apprehension.

**Conclusion**

The decolonisation of the Dutch Caribbean is an unfinished process. It is almost an example of upside-down decolonisation with the metropolis, not the former colonies, pressing for independence. The first phase in the process of decolonisation was the *Statuut* of 1954. The *Statuut* made the Netherlands, Suriname, and the Netherlands Antilles autonomous and equal partners in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Increasingly, the Dutch have come to view the *Statuut* as a transitional arrangement to prepare the territories for independence.

Suriname was the first to take this final step. The Republic of Suriname was established in 1975 with the smallest possible parliamentary majority and probably even less popular support. The Dutch government consistently supported the independence movement and prepared for a 'model decolonisation', including a vast development-
aid programme. Post-independence developments in Suriname have been discouraging. More than a decade-and-a-half after independence the Netherlands are still by far the most important foreign partner for the young republic, even though the Dutch are only too eager to assume a lower profile.

The relationship with the Netherlands Antilles is even more paradoxical for the Dutch. The latter party strives for independence for the Antilles but finds no significant support on the islands. A logical Dutch policy would be to gradually reduce its remaining involvement. Yet, the opposite is taking place. Because of economic problems Dutch financial assistance, and thus control, is increasing. At the same time, island centrifugalism threatens to tear the Netherlands Antilles apart. St Maarten, in particular, is now playing a disruptive role. Independence for this island alone no longer seems inconceivable. This would pose all parties involved with yet a new series of dilemmas. Dutch policy aims to countervail these tendencies; this also entails a reluctant, but unmistakable, growth of involvement.

Aruba may well prove to be the pivotal point. All recent opinion polls indicate than an overwhelming majority of the population is against independence now that status aparte has been attained. Yet the same population voted a pro-independence government to power. Obviously the Dutch support the strategy of the current Aruban administration. This would entail that Aruba will become independent in 1996.

No formal connection exists between the independence of Aruba and a similar status in the Netherlands Antilles. If, however, Aruba achieves independence it might propel the Netherlands Antilles in the same constitutional direction. After all, Aruba’s new status would in all likelihood mean the creation of a commonwealth. It is highly questionable whether the Netherlands would accept the simultaneous existence of both a commonwealth and the Statuut. Once a commonwealth is a reality it will prove to be another reason for the Dutch to renounce the Statuut. The ‘wheel of history’, elusive argument as it may be, may then well crush Antillean hopes for an indefinite Statuut.

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Notes

Since the completion of this chapter in the spring of 1989, several significant political changes have taken place in Aruba, the Netherlands Antilles, and the Netherlands. In Aruba the newly-elected government headed by MEP Prime Minister Nelson Oduber officially declared independence in 1996 to be a top priority. However, this independence should include a Dutch passport, free migration, and continuation of the extensive Dutch assistance in the fields of defence, foreign relations and the judiciary system. Moreover, Aruba should keep its preferential access to the EC. Clearly, this would constitute nominal independence only and hardly affect the status quo.

Meanwhile, all major political parties in Curaçao have declared their preference for a status aparte for their island, possibly with Bonaire. The Windwards Antilles seem to advocate a status aparte as well, though in St Maarten, Wathey still alludes to independence occasionally.

The most important change of policy occurred in the Netherlands. Unexpectedly the centre-right (CDA-VVD) cabinet fell. The newly-elected centre-left (CDA-PvdA) coalition has announced a significant change of policy. Following his first official trip to the islands, the new CDA Minister of Antillean and Aruban Affairs, Ernst Hirsch Ballin, has stated that the constitutional future of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba is open to negotiations again. In effect, he proposes a further fragmentation of the Antilles into three entities, being Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire, and the Windwards. Furthermore, the Netherlands will no longer insist on independence. Thus even Aruba might not become independent in 1996. The most likely construction will be a commonwealth, consisting of four autonomous partners: the Netherlands, Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire, and the three Windwards.

Summing up, the Antilles get what they wanted: no independence and further insularism. The Dutch have given in. The outcome of this short history of ‘decolonisation’ is not unexpected; the speed of the developments, however, certainly is. One only wonders what the Dutch government will demand in return.


3 For a detailed introduction to the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba see Ingrid Koulen and Gert Oostindie with Peter Verton and Rosemarijn Hoeft, The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba: A research guide, Dordrecht/Providence: Foris, 1987; and René A. Römer, Curaçao.
s.l., Association of Caribbean Universities and Research Institutes (UNICA), 1981.


5 Bieshuvel’s party, the ARP (Anti-Revolutionary Party), published ‘Naar nieuwe verhoudingen’ (Towards new relations) arguing for repealing rather than maintaining the Statuut. See ARP, Naar nieuwe verhoudingen: De staatkundige toekomst van Suriname en de Nederlandse Antillen, The Hague: Dr Abraham Kuyperstichting, 1971. In 1980 the ARP together with two other Christian-Democratic parties, the KVP (Catholic Peoples Party) and the CHU (Christian Historical Union) formed the CDA (Christian Democratic Appeal). The social-democratic PvdA (Labour Party) had advocated the repeal of the Statuut a year earlier than the ARP. In its electoral programme of 1972 the PvdA stated that Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles had to become independent before 1976.


8 Curaçao politician Juancho Evertz expressed this opinion arithmetically: 6–1=0.


10 The Institute for Social Studies in the Hague prepared the first detailed study on the viability of a separate Aruba. The researchers concluded that the call for complete Aruban independence was used only to direct attention towards Aruba’s misgivings. Rather than independence, the islands wanted to break away from control by Curaçao. See G. Benthem-Van den Bergh et al., Aruba en onafhankelijkheid: Achtergronden, modaliteiten en mogelijkheden: Een rapport in eerste aanleg, The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1978.

11 This Commission was called the Koninkrijkswerkgroep (Kingdom Study Group) which published a report in 1980, Rapport van de Koninkrijkswerkgroep: Naar nieuwe vormen van samenwerking (Towards new forms of cooperation), Tha Hague: Staatsdrukkerij.

12 The name of this Committee was Gemengde Commissie Toekomst Antillen (Mixed Commission on the Future of the Antilles) which published its report in 1982. See Raaport van de Gemengde Commissie Toekomst Antillen, The Hague: Staatsuitgeverij.

14 Koninkrijkswerkgroep, *Naar nieuwe vormen van samenwerking*, p. 16.
16 Interestingly enough, conservative Wiebenga (VVD) fears that a ‘1969 revisited’ would put the Netherlands in the international pillory, while one of the 1969 young left-wingers (Niew-Liinkser) Pronk, who admits that Willemstad 1969 had traumatised him then, now claims that the *Status* does not have a neo-colonial character or image.
17 This kind of reasoning does not take into account that Suriname and the Antilles are not comparable entities. Suriname historically always had stronger ties with the Netherlands, while the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba have a more Caribbean and Latin American outlook. Many politicians expect that, in contrast to Suriname, the Netherlands will not be the only escape hatch for Antilleans and Arubans. Moreover, among Antilleans and Arubans there exists a readiness to return to their island provided they have good employment prospects. See W. Koot, ‘In welke mate en hoe is de terugkeer van Antilleaanen te beïnvloeden?’ in *Nos Futuro*, pp. 281–90, at p. 289.
19 Since financial support for the Caribbean partners is five per cent of the Dutch development aid budget, which is fixed at one per cent of the total budget, money saved on the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba cannot be used to lower the deficit in the Netherlands. Reallocation to poorer countries probably would be justified by claiming that the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba do not belong to the Third World if one considers their Gross National Product per person. For a comparison between selected countries in Latin America and the Caribbean see Koul en et al., *The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba*, p. 10.
23 For the evolution of the point of view in the PvdA see Partijcommissie Nederlandse Antillen, *Visie van de PvdA op de toekomst van het koninkrijk*, Amsterdam: Evert Vermeer Stichting, 1989. The relations between the PvdA and its Antillean ‘sister’ party MAN (Movimiento Antiyano Nobo) are such that exchanges of ideas take place frequently and both parties influence each other. Another, smaller left-wing party, the PPR (Radical Party) has also changed its position and accepts that the constitutional status quo will be maintained. See PPR Eerste Kamer-fractie, *Een koninkrijk voor de West: Poging tot consensus*, Ermelo/Landsmeer: n.p. 1987.
24 See, for instance, W. C. L. van der Grinten, ‘De toekomst van de


26 Verton, ‘Wat vindt U van de toekomstige band met Nederland’, pp. 201–4; and Koot et al., *Which political structure is desired by the population of the Netherlands Antilles?*, p. 7.