

The Mutiny on Board De Zeven Provinciën: Reactions and Repercussions in the Netherlands*

J.C.H. BLOM

On Saturday, 4th February, 1933, at approximately ten at night, mutiny broke out on board the Dutch warship *De Zeven Provinciën*, as she rode at anchor in the roadstead of Oleh-leh near Kutaradja, at the north-west tip of Sumatra in the then Netherlands East Indies. A group of about ten native sailors seized the firearms and ammunition, surprised such officers as were on board (about half the officers were at a social gathering in the officers' club in Kutaradja), and took over the ship. Almost all the other native crew members aboard, about 180 men, unanimously joined in the mutiny, while the reactions of the European other ranks, about fifty of whom were on board, varied. Some immediately and enthusiastically joined the mutineers, others hesitated at first and subsequently tried to exercise a restraining influence, while some let themselves be forced to join or succeeded in holding themselves aloof.

After some hours of confusion the ship left Oleh-leh and set course for Surabaya, the central naval base in the Netherlands East Indies. The mutineers intended to hand the ship over to the authorities just before reaching Surabaya and to allow the commanding officer, who had been ashore at the outbreak of the mutiny, to come aboard. The naval chiefs, however, did not allow this to happen. They assembled an armed force of aeroplanes and warships in the Sunda Straits, between Java and Sumatra, which there lay in wait for the mutinous ship, by that time following the coast of Sumatra. On 10th February, at approximately nine in the morning, there was an engagement. A bomb, which officially had been intended as a warning, was dropped from an aeroplane and hit the mark. Twenty-three people died. The mutiny came to an immediate end.

In attempting to explain the mutiny, we must distinguish between general factors concerning conditions in the navy and factors related specifically to this particular incident. In this respect we wish to remark from the outset that the suggestion that a communist or Indonesian nationalist cell organized the

* The author summarizes part of his recent study *De muiten op De Zeven Provinciën. Reacties en gevolgen in Nederland* (Bussum, 1975; also thesis University of Leiden, Fac. of letters, 1975).

mutiny is highly improbable. This idea was already in circulation at the time of the mutiny and has been repeated in some recent publications.¹ There is, however, no reliable information whatsoever to indicate this and the entire course of events during the mutiny would seem to disprove such a contention.² Another, altogether different matter played a major role, the prelude to which began in mid-December 1932 when, in connection with the economic crisis, the government in the Netherlands East Indies decided to reduce the salaries of civil servants by seven per cent. In order to enforce this decision in the navy, consultations had to take place with the government in The Hague. Other problems arose and as a result the pay cut, which was originally to have taken effect on 1st January, 1933, was temporarily delayed. This decision more or less coincided with protest actions organized by navy personnel and although later on it turned out that there was no connection between the two,³ at the time large groups of navy personnel assumed that there was. Moreover, there was a growing conviction that the cut in pay was to be put off for some considerable time.

Thus when the decision was taken to implement the pay cut, in a somewhat modified form, as of 1st February, 1933, this aroused great indignation, as well as renewed action on the part of the personnel, in which the employees' unions, who for that matter were forbidden at the time to hold meetings, lost control. In Surabaya, where practically the entire fleet was assembled when the decision was announced, there were cases of insubordination at the end of January and beginning of February, and several arrests followed.

The mutiny on board the ironclad *De Zeven Provinciën*, even though Surabaya was a long way off, was clearly a reaction to the pay cut on the one hand, and to the connected arrests on the other. There had been some irregularities on board this ship before and the fact that the mutiny was successful can be attributed, among other things, to the presence of a few people with obvious leadership qualities and to the negligence of the superior officers, who ought to have known of the impending troubles but took no special precautions.⁴

In general to understand the mutiny it is important to pay attention to what might be called the 'climate' prevailing in the Dutch navy at the time. The economic, social and political situation in the thirties was certainly not favourable. Moreover, for the army and the navy it was unfavourable by virtue of the fact that until around 1936 'defence' was far from popular and was politically and financially neglected by the government and parliament. This

1. The clearest example of this is L. de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, I, *Voorspel* (The Hague, 1969) 175-6.

2. Blom, *Muiterij*, 36-79.

3. *De ongeregelheden bij de Koninklijke Marine in den aanvang van 1933* (The Hague, 1934) 23.

4. Blom, *Muiterij*, 78.

was detrimental to the atmosphere in the navy and although it is true that there was no obvious injustice, morale was low. Moreover, even though the great social distance which existed between officers on the one hand and petty officers and crew on the other was in fact taken for granted, it nevertheless led to a mutual lack of understanding and at times to tensions which in reality were unnecessary. Among the ratings unions with social democratic tendencies functioned in a way similar to that of a trade union in a factory or other enterprise, even though the former were not officially members of a trade union federation. They were the only ones in fact to serve the interests of the personnel, and acted as the mouthpiece of all malcontents. This was somewhat against regulations but, to the annoyance of many officers, the unions were usually able to do as they pleased without hindrance, thereby widening the already existing gap between officers and their subordinates.

The naval situation was alike in the Netherlands and in the Netherlands East Indies the sole difference being that in the colony it was complicated by the problem of the native personnel, whose position amounted to a kind of *apartheid*. Native navy personnel were always inferior in rank, had separate quarters, received special food, and were organized in their own separate unions, etc. Differences of language and culture reinforced their isolation. So it is quite understandable that conspiracies could take shape almost unnoticed by outsiders in precisely this circle. Given the general situation, as outlined above, in combination with any number of particular circumstances and events, these conspiracies ultimately ended in mutiny.

The mutiny on board De Zeven Provinciën had its repercussions in the Netherlands. The Dutch government was of course primarily concerned with putting an end to the troubles in the East Indies — relations with the government in Batavia were very close — and also with preventing any similar developments in the Netherlands. To this end surveillance was intensified and special precautionary measures taken, in particular at the naval base at Den Helder. The Minister for Defence, L.N. Deckers, stated in the Second Chamber on 7th February, 1933, even while the mutiny was still going on, that

drastic measures will be taken against the pernicious influences which have repined the minds of men to a violation by public servants of that same authority which they have voluntarily assumed the duty of serving.⁵

Such (drastic) measures were intended to strengthen government authority. Members of parliament and representatives of the liberal and denominational press, in the years preceding the mutiny, had repeatedly raised the problem

5. *Verslag der Handelingen van de Staten-Generaal 1932-1933*, II (The Hague) 1603.

of the maintenance of authority, while bourgeois and service circles had frequently called for that authority to be strengthened. Moreover, a number of measures to that very effect had already been drawn up or were in preparation. The mutiny intensified the need for such action and accelerated the process. In the thirties the government and the majority in parliament believed that government authority was being threatened by groups desirous of changing existing political and social relations, a danger which they feared came especially from groups on the left, such as the communists, revolutionary socialists, and to some extent also the social democrats. The above measures, which ultimately were rigorously applied also against right-wing groups, such as the fascists and nationalists, were originally aimed principally at the 'left'.

The measures in question can be divided roughly into two groups — those particularly affecting the fleet, and those of more general scope and in most cases only indirectly connected with the mutiny. The measures falling within the first category were designed on the one hand to purge the navy of undesirable elements and, on the other, to improve the existing conditions. The latter aim was only partially realized. A somewhat 'better' situation did not come into being until the second half of the thirties, when people in the Netherlands began to adopt a more positive attitude towards the armed forces. The 'purge' in the navy led to the dismissal of a large number of persons who, in connection with the mutiny and the preceding cases of insubordination had behaved incorrectly in the eyes of the government, eyes which had now suddenly become very sharp. The dismissals affected not only all the mutineers and many of those who had unlawfully neglected their duty, but almost all the committee members of the employees' unions as well. Besides trying to weaken the position of the navy unions,⁶ the navy authorities were also especially bent on excluding social democratic influences. Communist and revolutionary socialist influences played hardly any role and hence were not subject to special control.

Even while the mutiny was still in progress, an injunction was issued forbidding servicemen to read newspapers favorable to social democratic ideas. Clearer still in its opposition to social democratic influences was a measure taken on 24th February, 1933, whereby the minister for defence prohibited servicemen from joining or supporting associations founded on social democratic principles. This provision was formally based on the servicemen's code, which contained an article prohibiting the support of associations which acted contrary to discipline in the armed forces.⁷ According to the minister, this

6. J.L. Swarte, *Spreekpunt 1971. 25 jaar V.B.Z. en wat daaraan vooraf ging* (s. l., s.a) 92-9; Blom, *Muiterij*, 103-26.

7. Army order 1933 no. 59, in: *Militair-rechtelijk Tijdschrift*, XXVIII (The Hague, 1933) 528.

was the case with the socialists, who in those years still propagated anti-militarism.

The measures taken against the employees' unions were likewise directed in the first instance against unions with socialist leanings, on which in the course of February and March the minister had already imposed numerous conditions. The unions in question consisted of three associations combined into a federation, with its own weekly journal, a club house, and a great deal of activity. They were under the direction of professional administrators, mostly old navy men, no longer subject to naval authority. However, the unions were forced to dismiss these professionals and explicitly to subordinate their activities to military discipline, and from then on in fact losing thereby their originally fairly strong position.

A regulation issued on 18th April, 1933, and pertaining to associations concerned with the forces⁸ placed the activities of the employees' associations under strict control, confining them to extremely rigid boundaries. This affected in the first place the unions of social democratic coloring, which in the eyes of the authorities were unreliable. They were disbanded, with the exception of one, which lingered on. In addition, however, the regulation also checked the freedom of movement of denominational associations, normally very emphatic in their loyalty to authority. In particular the Roman Catholic union conformed only after a long spell of passive resistance. From that time on the denominational unions, too, led a very precarious existence.

The so-called *Ambtenarenverbod* (Civil Servant's Prohibition), an amendment to the *Algemeen Rijks Ambtenaren Reglement*⁹ (General Code for Government Civil Servants), is a good example of a measure taken to strengthen authority in a general sense. It also demonstrates fairly clearly the influence, albeit indirect, which the mutiny had on questions of policy. The prohibition came into force as early as 22nd May, 1933. Between that date and February 27 the text had gone with unusual speed through all the required advisory procedures and had passed all the proper official bodies. This measure entitled the government to dismiss those government servants who were members of particular organizations. Prior to this it had already been possible to dismiss government servants for behavior potentially dangerous to public order or State security. However, this provision had given rise to difficulties of interpretation. Hence it was now laid down that membership of associations regarded as undesirable for public servants (in practice always political parties and related organizations) could be viewed as potentially dangerous behaviour. The government was

8. Army order 1933 no. 138, *ibidem*, XXIX (1933) 93-8.

9. Royal Decree 22nd May 1933, no. 9, *Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden* (The Hague, 1933) 294.

empowered to compile lists of those associations which could be regarded as dangerous to the State, the first list of this kind being published on 24th July, 1933.¹⁰ Roughly speaking, it included all extreme left and extreme right parties. Moreover, by virtue of earlier measures it was prescribed that civil servants working in the defence department (both professional servicemen and departmental officials) were forbidden to join the Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiders Partij (SDAP - Social Democratic Labour Party) and the NVV, the social democratic trade union. This particular prohibition remained in force until 1938.

The question is, of course, whether provisions of this type contributed much to increasing the reliability of government servants. For in this particular instance few such servants were actually dismissed, though many did resign their membership of the associations in question. These provisions did ensure, however, that open expressions of unrest and dissatisfaction among public servants no longer occurred.

The mutiny on board *De Zeven Provinciën* and the measures which were taken as a result inevitably gave rise to heated political debates in the Netherlands, in particular in parliament and in the press. Reactions to events reflected current political and social relations.

The parties of the thirties can be roughly classified into four groups. In the first place, there were the large 'bourgeois' parties, which represented about two thirds of the electorate and which had together been calling the tune for some considerable time. They displayed all kinds of nuances and mutual contrasts, but were essentially positive in their attitude towards the existing social and political situation. These 'bourgeois' parties included the liberal *Vrijheidsbond* (Union for Freedom) and the *Vrijzinnig-Democratische Bond* (Liberal Democratic Union), the *Rooms-katholieke Staatspartij* (RKSP - Roman Catholic State Party) and the Protestant parties, viz. the *Christelijk-Historische Unie* (CHU - Christian Historical Union) and the *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* (ARP - Anti-Revolutionary Party).

Secondly, there was the SDAP, which was going through a period of transition. At its inception the party had had a revolutionary tinge and was strongly opposed to society such as it was. But, and especially after the first World War, the social democrats had begun to see more and more positive elements in the existing situation, which had meanwhile also undergone all kinds of improvements. They had increasingly come to expect greater benefit from further reforms by gradual means rather than through revolution. They

10. Decision of the Council of Ministers 24th July, 1933, no. 327 Kab., *Bijvoegsel tot het Staatsblad* (1933) Gorinchem no. 175.

had assumed an ever greater shared responsibility in political and social developments, even though they were not as yet taking part in the government. During the thirties they held as a rule between twenty-two and twenty-four seats in the Second Chamber.

The two remaining groups consisted of extremists, who totally rejected the existing situation, either from a 'left' ideological viewpoint, usually called socialist, or else on the basis of a 'right' authoritarian, *mutatis mutandis*, fascist conviction. On the left a number of ideological trends were clearly organized into parties, together representing perhaps five per cent of the population. The situation on the right in the early thirties was less clear. There were a number of outspokenly fascist parties and all kinds of semi-organized groups and circles of people who were somewhat vaguely opposed to existing conditions. They often looked back on the past with a certain nostalgia rather than having in mind a radical image of the future. Politically, this latter group stood somewhere between 'bourgeois' and extreme right, and in the early thirties they were sometimes difficult to distinguish from the outspokenly fascist groups which were then beginning to appear.

Of the various reactions to the mutiny, those of the social democrats are the most interesting and the most characteristic. For the SDAP, the question of how to react to the mutiny was of fundamental importance, while for its political opponents it was above all how far the socialists could be regarded as politically reliable which was at issue. Some social democrats, in the early days after the mutiny evinced an emotionally charged enthusiasm for the mutiny's opposition to the prevailing system and tried without reserve to exploit the possibilities for propaganda which the situation offered. So Ch.G. Cramer, member of the Second Chamber, inadvertently let slip the remark that the incident 'gave him devilish much pleasure',¹¹ and the social democratic press showed more than clearly in pictures and writing that it regarded the mutiny as a just judgment on a discreditable policy. The fact that a bomb had been used to bring the mutiny to an end aroused great indignation. The terms 'murder' and 'murderers' were heard and artists drew pictures of hands dripping with blood. Many other social democrats, however, clearly rejected the mutiny. They emphatically took the side of authority and had no desire whatsoever to create the impression of being revolutionary. Professor Goudriaan, who left the party shortly after, expressed this viewpoint in the following words: 'Strong government authority is no reactionary slogan; it is a democratic requirement *par excellence*'.¹²

11. *Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, Amsterdam, Archief Cramer no. 10, 93 and report in *Vooruit*, daily newspaper (The Hague, 6th February, 1933).

12. *De Groene Amsterdammer*, weekly (Amsterdam, 18th February, 1933).

A few weeks later, such extreme statements were no longer to be heard coming from the social democrat camp. By that time the social democrats had on the whole adopted a middle-of-the-road point of view, which was formulated very clearly by their leader, J.W. Albarda, in his speeches in the Second Chamber, in journal articles and in a pamphlet entitled 'Another light, another opinion on events aboard De Zeven Provinciën',¹³ which appeared at the beginning of March 1933. This pamphlet contained what can be considered as more or less an expression of the official party standpoint. The argument it presents has two main themes: an unequivocal rejection of the mutiny, in fact of any mutiny and in practice of all revolutionary action, and in addition a sharp criticism of the government. The author appealed to general common sense, but left no doubt that before and during the mutiny things had happened which were absolutely unacceptable to the social democrats; and he made it clear that in his opinion sweeping reforms were an urgent necessity. In particular, he criticized the way in which the mutiny had been brought to an end, the measures taken against unions of the navy personnel and the prohibition of membership of the SDAP and NVV. Albarda indicated emphatically that social democrats as such had had nothing to do with the mutiny and were aiming to defend the principles of the democratic system.

Meanwhile, however, the earlier radical statements had taken effect. Both the 'bourgeois' parties and extreme right circles violently attacked the SDAP, who in their eyes were untrustworthy, not only in this particular instance but in general when the maintenance of government authority was at stake. The very fact that they professed to actually want to maintain law and order — a deceptive and ambiguous position — left the social democrats open to objection in the eyes of their critics. The influential liberal daily, the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, gave the following sketch of the 'Janus'-like character of the SDAP:

That twists and turns and stammers and brags so as nevertheless to have a front on both sides, and while one mouth pays homage to the pretended revolution (oh so carefully and just within the law so there is no risk), the other weakly regrets an attack on the lawful authority.¹⁴

This anti-socialist campaign, which formed part of the electoral contest for the parliamentary elections in April 1933, put the social democrats very much on the defensive, whereas in February they had still believed they could capitalize on events to the advantage of their own party.

Thus, in the first few months following the mutiny, the position of the social democrats on the national political level became even more isolated than it

13. J.W. Albarda, *Een ander licht, een ander oordeel over de gebeurtenissen op De Zeven Provinciën* (Amsterdam, 1933).

14. *Algemeen Handelsblad* (Amsterdam, 9th February, 1933).

already was, although in the long run the effect was rather the opposite. The process of the integration of the social democrats into existing society, which had already begun before 1933, continued also thereafter, and precipitated a number of reports as well as changes in the SDAP program. An important step was the creation of a 'committee of review', after the SDAP had suffered a loss of two seats in the 1933 parliamentary elections. The committee's task was to reflect on the political line the SDAP should follow and to search for the reasons behind the electoral defeat. The mutiny was also something to be kept in mind in this connection, but it is difficult to determine exactly how much importance should be attached to it in comparison with other factors, such as the economic crisis and the rapid growth of fascism. In a certain sense the mutiny and the reactions that followed it stimulated a process of reflection which ultimately broke through the isolation of the social democrats, a breakthrough which was completed in 1939 when the SDAP, too, took part in the government coalition which was then formed.

In 'bourgeois' circles reactions to the mutiny were, certain nuances aside, quite clearly unanimous. What mattered here was in the first place, to suppress the mutiny as quickly as possible. Differences of opinion about the means to be used were of secondary importance. Colijn, ARP party leader, thought for example that the ship should be sent 'to the bottom of the ocean with a torpedo'¹⁵ if necessary, but nevertheless agreed in principle with the opinion of H.P. Marchant, the leader of the progressive liberals (VDB), that 'What is needed are statesmanship, calmness, and political insight. Any display — display of force, display of courage — would be quite mistaken'.¹⁶ And indeed all the 'bourgeois' parties supported the government in its actions against the mutiny and in the measures it took to strengthen authority. Any criticism remained marginal. The 'bourgeois' parties were equally united in their campaign against the social democrats. They all considered incidents such as the mutiny to be potentially lethal for the existing social system and they believed that only resolute and unreserved condemnation was appropriate. The denominational trade union movement also clearly took sides on this issue, and *De Volkskrant*, the paper of the roman catholic trade unions, spoke for example of 'the winding labyrinthian paths along which social democracy roams and wanders'.¹⁷

As such the 'bourgeois' parties were not concerned solely with the concrete case of the mutiny, but with Authority (often indeed written with a capital

15. Interview in the daily newspaper *Het Vaderland* (The Hague, 6th February, 1933).

16. *Verslag Handelingen Staten-Generaal 1932-1933*, II, 1647.

17. *De Volkskrant*, daily newspaper (Utrecht, 14th February, 1933).

'A') in general, which to them appeared to be a necessary condition for an ordered society. The mutiny presented a good opportunity to emphasize this once again. The absolute domination of authority was not desired, but rather a combination of authority and freedom as mutually complementary values. In such times as those one had above all to ensure that authority was not lost, nor overrun by freedom. On these points there was general agreement, even though opinions differed quite widely on details. Colijn believed that the demand to strengthen authority came from 'those who value not only order, but also freedom',¹⁸ but that 'the worst that could happen would be for order and freedom, both, to be lost' and that therefore 'order will have to be maintained at the expense of freedom' in the unlikely event that a choice had to be made between the two.¹⁹ From many sides, however, there also sounded a note of warning to the effect that government authority as such had of course to be maintained but that the means used to maintain it must be examined critically and the idea of a 'strong man' must be rejected. As the roman catholic daily *De Tijd* wrote, the important point was 'the exercise of authority purely on the basis of the legal principles of our democratic constitutional system'.²⁰ And according to the 'bourgeois' parties, the government had indeed kept to these principles in its actions of early 1933.

While the SDAP and the liberal and denominational parties, however big their mutual differences, tried to look at the problems in connection with the mutiny from various angles, both the right and the left extremist parties exposed respectively only one aspect.

According to the extreme right, the incident could be reduced to one cause, viz. the slackening of authority over many years had made the mutiny inevitable. Nor, in a political system where subversive left-wing forces were free to do as they pleased, could one expect anything different in the future. There was no question of the spokesmen of these groups advocating the preservation of a certain degree of freedom, and their campaign against the socialists was considerably more venomous than was that of the 'bourgeois' parties. Repeatedly they suggested that there was a connection between loss of authority and the 'decline of the nation' in general,²¹ as it was put by A.A. Mussert, the leader of the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (NSB - National Socialist Movement), which at the time was still extremely small. In fact they had no real

18. H. Colijn, *Wankelen noch weifelen* (Amsterdam, 1933) 19-20 (speech of 9th March, 1933).

19. B. van Kaam, *Parade der mannenbroeders. Flitsen uit het protestantse leven in Nederland in de jaren 1918-1939* (Wageningen, 1964) 202.

20. *De Tijd*, daily newspaper (Amsterdam, 21st March, 1933).

21. *Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie*, Amsterdam, Archief NSB, dossiers of the leader, 2g.

hope for improvement in what the fascist weekly *De Bezem* called the 'present corrupt parliamentary democratic State'.²²

In extreme left circles, the reaction was the opposite. Here there was rejoicing at the mutiny and the hope that there would be a follow-up. They expressed their feelings of comradeship with the mutineers, compassion with the victims, and great indignation at the actions of the government and social conditions in general. The left tried to a large extent to exploit the events for their own propagandist purposes, and in this respect they were in fact practically unanimous in spite of all their other differences. In a pamphlet published on 5th February the 'revolutionary socialist' H. Sneevliet described what had happened as 'joyous events',²³ while 'respect, deep respect' was due the mutineers, as the communist L. de Visser stated in the Second Chamber.²⁴ Only a few anarchists and anti-militarists doubted the justness of so positive a judgment of the mutiny. Nevertheless, the entire left found the attitude of the government and pro-government parties repulsive and thought the same, perhaps even more strongly, of the social democrats, who had shown themselves once again to be traitors to the working class.

What, ultimately, were the consequences of the mutiny and the discussions it entrained for political relations in the Netherlands? The answer to this question must remain somewhat impressionistic for want of exact information. We have already referred to the position of the SDAP. A further indication is provided by elections to the Second Chamber, held in April 1933. The mutiny inevitably played an important role in the election struggle, and in the elections themselves fairly big shifts took place in view of the Dutch political situation at the time, though the results simultaneously confirmed the stability of the existing political system. Four of the five large 'bourgeois' parties each lost one or two seats (five altogether) out of a total of one hundred, but on the other hand the ARP won two seats under Colijn, who had shown himself to be a very strong advocate of the maintenance of government authority. The SDAP, as we have seen, had to accept a loss of two seats. The extremists gained ground — the communists went from two seats to four and for the first time the Trotskyist Revolutionary Socialists secured one seat. Their leader, Sneevliet, was in jail at the time of the elections because he had written a seditious pamphlet in connection with the mutiny. A new extreme right-wing party, the Verbond voor Nationaal Herstel (Alliance for National Recovery), which had placed a great deal of emphasis on the mutiny in the election campaign, also won one seat in parliament.

22. *De Bezem*, weekly paper, VI, no. 11 (The Hague, 18th February, 1933).

23. *Het proces Sneevliet* (Amsterdam, 1933) 3.

24. *Verslag Handelingen Staten-Generaal*, II, 1624.

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The shifts which followed the elections are connected with the three big issues which were mainly under discussion in those years: the great economic depression and its aftermath, the rise of fascism and national socialism in Europe, and the problem of the maintenance of government authority. The last problem was not new but had become more important in the election campaign because of the recent mutiny. It is impossible to determine to what extent each of these factors — which are moreover interrelated — separately influenced the election results. We can assume, however, that the mutiny somewhat reinforced the tendency towards extremism, although it did not provoke any big shifts and was in the long run unimportant. However, for a short time it attracted a great deal of attention because of its spectacular character, and the discussions to which it gave rise present a good picture of political and social relations in the Netherlands in the early thirties.