

The Poor: Who Cares?

Dutch parliamentary debates about taking care of the poor in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries



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Introduction

During the nineteenth century, European societies changed due to industrialization and urbanization. European governments' attitudes changed as well. The laissez-faire attitude of the so-called 'night watchman state', which saw government intervention in society as counterproductive, gave way to an increasingly interventionist approach, particularly with regards to social issues, towards the end of the nineteenth century.¹ Before this period, however, central governments in many countries had already been involved in the oldest form of social policy: the relief of the poor.²

The nineteenth-century Netherlands and England-Wales stood out as countries with relatively generous poor relief provisions.³ However, while in England-Wales the national government had already been involved in regulating the support of the poor for centuries, in the Netherlands it was all but clear that the national government should have anything to do with poor relief. As early as 1870, Arwed Emminghaus, a German nineteenth-century writer on social policies, pointed at the rather unique modest role of the Dutch state in the relief of the poor.⁴

In the nineteenth-century Netherlands about half the townspeople were considered to be poor. They were exempted from paying taxes and lived under the constant threat of becoming destitute. Approximately fifty per cent of these people were partly dependent on poor relief for their survival.⁵ Support was provided by poor relief organizations that had

¹ F.X. Kaufmann, *European Foundations of the Welfare State* (New York, Oxford, 2012), p. 340.

² A. de Swaan, *In Care of the State. Health Care, Education and Welfare in Europe and the USA in the Modern Era* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 50.

³ P. H. Lindert, *Growing Public. Social Spending and Economic Growth Since the Eighteenth Century* (2 vols, New York, 2007), I, figure 3.1, p. 46.

⁴ A. Emminghaus, 'Introductory Chapter' in A. Emminghaus ed., *Poor relief in different parts of Europe, a selection of essays translated from 'Das Armenwesen und die Armengesetzgebung in europäischen Staaten'*, revised and translated by E.B. Eastwick (London, 1873), p. 3.

⁵ L.F. van Loo, *Arm in Nederland Arm in Nederland. 1815-1990* (Amsterdam, Meppel, 1992), p. 31.

mostly been set up by religious institutions in the time of the Dutch Republic.⁶ At the end of the eighteenth century, the idea that the national government and state institutions should increase their role in the poor relief came up. This idea led to a continuous debate in the following century about the question: who should take care of the poor?⁷

This thesis will contribute to knowledge about how the Dutch parliament's view on state responsibility for taking care of the poor changed during the second half of the nineteenth century. The state, in this context, is understood as the national and local governments plus the public institutions. The thesis will compare the debates about poor relief that took place in the Second Chamber, the Dutch lower house, in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Poor Laws that were passed in parliament after these debates, in 1854 and 1912, were based on a similar 'subsidiarity' principle, with ecclesiastical and private organizations playing the primary, and public organizations a subsidiary, role in the relief of the poor. These laws could give the impression that the national parliament, though it had become more interventionist in other areas, had not really changed its view on state responsibility for taking care of the poor during the second half of the nineteenth century. This thesis will show that this impression is not correct. Though the actual laws did not differ that much, the debates in parliament certainly did. The central question that will be addressed by this thesis is: how did the Dutch national parliament's view on taking care of the poor change during the second half of the nineteenth century?

Historiography

The implementation of social policies has received much scholarly attention over the last decades. However, (scholarly) debate about social policies is not only a recent phenomenon. Gosta Esping-Andersen has stated that questions about the implementation of social policies

⁶ F. Gouda, *Poverty and Political Culture. The Rhetoric of Social Welfare in the Netherlands and France, 1815-1854* (Amsterdam, 1995), p. 50.

⁷ M. Wintle, *An Economic and Social History of the Netherlands, 1800-1920* (Cambridge, 2010), pp.276-77.

were ‘already formulated by the nineteenth-century political economists 100 years before any welfare state can rightly be said to have come into existence.’⁸ Peter Lindert has argued in *Growing Public* (2004) that the debate about whether and how redistribution through government should take place is already thousands of years old. However, he states: ‘only in the past 200 years has government social spending grown large.’⁹

Although scholars have pointed to the longer timeline of the debate about social policies, the passing of nineteenth-century social policies has received much less attention than the twentieth-century emergence of the welfare state. An exception might be the English case, since quite a lot of research has been done about the English Poor Law system.¹⁰ The Dutch nineteenth-century situation has attracted less scholarly attention. Based on the existing literature, it is not clear how the national parliament’s view on taking care of the poor changed over time. Only Petrus Melief, in his work from 1955,¹¹ has focused specifically on the role of, and the debate in, the Dutch national parliament. His study covers the first half of the nineteenth century. Other works that pay attention to the Dutch parliament’s view on social policies focus on the twentieth century and pay less attention to the nineteenth-century developments.¹²

One of the reasons for the lack of scholarly interest in the parliamentary debates is that the role of the Dutch national legislature in poor relief was very small. The nineteenth-century Netherlands was very much locally organized. Taking care of the poor was seen as local business where the main role belonged to Christian and private charities and an additional role

⁸ G. Esping-Andersen, *The three worlds of welfare capitalism* (Oxford, 1996), p. 9.

⁹ Lindert, *Growing Public*, p. XV.

¹⁰ The amount of research led G.R. Boyer in his book *An Economic History of the English Poor Law 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1993) to differentiate between three different schools in the study of the poor laws in the 1750-1850 period: the traditional, neo-traditional and revisionist school.

¹¹ P.B.A. Melief, *De Strijd om de Armeazorg in Nederland 1795-1854* (Groningen, Jakarta, 1955).

¹² E.g. L. van der Valk, *Van pauperzorg tot bestaanszekerheid. Armeazorg in Nederland 1912-1965* (Delft, 1986); D. Oude Nijhuis, *Labor Divided in the postwar European welfare state* (New York, 2013); R. Cox, *The Development of the Dutch Welfare State. From Workers’ Insurance to Universal Entitlement* (Pittsburgh, 1993).

was played by local governments.¹³ That is why quite some works about the Dutch poor relief take a local perspective. One of the best known studies of this kind is the work of Marco van Leeuwen, who examined the situation in Amsterdam during the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁴

The national parliament's stance towards poor relief has been given some attention in broader historical overviews of the nineteenth-century Netherlands.¹⁵ Importantly, these works mention the influence of the emerging pillarization, i.e. the organization of society and politics in different religious or ideological groups, the pillars.¹⁶ They, however, do not examine how the parliamentary debates changed over time. The description of the emergence of social policies given by these accounts can be summarized as follows: politicians were confronted with social problems and had to respond to these problems by implementing social policies, especially when workers became better organized and pressure on politicians increased.

Some scholars have primarily focused on how poor people themselves dealt with their situation in the nineteenth-century Netherlands. They explain what kind of survival strategies people had and what kind of social welfare provisions were available or created. Joost van Genabeek's study fits in this category. He explains how workers set up their own private social insurances in order to protect themselves against certain risks. Also these studies do not cover the political debate about poor relief.¹⁷

¹³ M.H.D. van Leeuwen, 'Armenzorg 1800-1912: erfenis van de republiek' in J. van Gerwen and M.H.D. van Leeuwen eds., *Studies over Zekerheidsarrangementen. Risico's, risicobestrijding en verzekeringen in Nederland vanaf de Middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam, 1998), pp. 276-316 at p. 277.

¹⁴ M.H.D. van Leeuwen, *Bijstand in Amsterdam, ca. 1800-1850. Armenzorg als beheersings- en overlevingsstrategie* (Zwolle, 1992).

¹⁵ E.g. J. Luiten van Zanden, A. van Riel, *Nederland 1780-1914. Staat, Instituties en Economische Ontwikkeling* (Leuven, 2000); R. Aerts et al., *Land van kleine gebaren. Een politieke geschiedenis van Nederland 1780-1990* (Nijmegen, Amsterdam, 2010); Wintle, *An Economic and Social History*.

¹⁶ Cox, *The Development*, p. 60.

¹⁷ E.g. Van Loo, *Arm in Nederland*; J. van Genabeek, *Met Vereende Kracht Risico's Verzacht. De plaats van onderlinge hulp binnen de negentiende-eeuwse particuliere regelingen van sociale zekerheid* (Amsterdam, 1999).

Studies with an international, and often comparative, approach have come up with general explanations for the rise in social policies.¹⁸ Lindert has argued that growing political voice was the main reason for the rise in social transfers before 1930. Abram de Swaan concludes in his book *In Care of the State* (1988) that:

The moment and the momentum of social-security legislation was determined by the balance of forces between the petty bourgeoisie and the growing industrial classes of workers and employees, with the political regime in a pivotal position. The scope and nature of transfer-capital arrangements was determined mainly by the composition of the political coalition that brought it about.¹⁹

A different perspective is given in *States, Social Knowledge, and the Origins of Modern Social Policies* (1996) edited by Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol. This book explains that social knowledge played an important role in the implementation of social policies. Naturally, these international studies do not look at the specific debates that took place in the nineteenth-century Netherlands.

Methodology

There are many different ways in which scholars have looked at the emergence and increase of social policies.²⁰ This thesis will focus on what parliamentarians said in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth Poor Law debates, since this perspective has, as the previous part about the historiography has shown, been underexposed. By focusing on the place where the decisions were made and on the opinions of the main players, it follows the example of Robert Cox, who argues in *The Development of The Dutch Welfare State* (1993) that social policies do not automatically arise from changes in socioeconomic conditions but that they ‘result from the ways policy makers perceive the problems that arise from socioeconomic

¹⁸ A work that focussed specifically on poor relief is D. van Damme, *Armenzorg En De Staat. Comparatief-historische studie van de origines van de moderne verzorgingsstaat in West-Europa (voornamelijk achttiende tot begin negentiende eeuw)* (Gent, 1990).

¹⁹ De Swaan, *In Care of the State*, p. 222.

²⁰ Chapter One in Van Damme’s *Armenzorg En De Staat* (1990) gives an extensive overview of the different directions in the writing on social policies.

change and from the way they conceive policy responses.²¹ Cox explains, by looking at the decision-making processes, how retirement pensions, public assistance programmes and arrangements for the disabled emerged and developed in the Netherlands during the twentieth century. In the same way, this thesis will look at what the parliament's views were on state responsibility for taking care of the poor and how different arguments, different ideologies and convictions played a role in the debates. Thus, I follow Cox's methodology in which the decision-making processes rather than structural transformations in society are central.

The thesis has an individualizing comparative approach. Comparisons will be used to bring to the fore differences and similarities.²² The Dutch parliamentary debates about poor relief in the 1850s and the early twentieth century will be compared to make clear which arguments and ideologies were central at a certain time and what the main differences between the debates were. Furthermore, a brief comparison with other Western countries will show that the Dutch situation was quite unique.

Sources

Parliament records will be the main source for this thesis. Most of the research will be based on the minutes of parliamentary debates in which the Poor Laws of 1854 and 1912 were being discussed. Since stenography was in use in the Second Chamber starting from 1854, the minutes will almost literally show what was being said in the different meetings.²³ The parliamentary debates might, however, as different scholars have pointed out, not directly indicate the reasons of politicians to implement social policies. Parliament served also other than law-giving purposes. Not all that was being said was only, or primarily, meant for the debate itself but it could also have been meant for supporters or other people outside the

²¹ Cox, *The Development*, p. 21.

²² S. Berger, 'Comparative History' in S. Berger, H. Feldner, K. Passmore eds., *Writing History: Theory and Practice* (London, 2010), pp. 161-79 at p. 164.

²³ B.J. Bonenkamp, *Zwijgend medewerker en aandachtig luisteraar. 150 jaar Stenografische Dienst der Staten-Generaal* (Den Haag, 1999), p. 107.

parliament. Henk te Velde has explained that nineteenth-century European parliamentary debates were often very open to influences from outside the parliament. Discussions were sometimes held for the public and debate and consensus were often closer to one another than seemed to be the case at first sight.²⁴ To gain more insight in the ideologies of the different central political figures this thesis will use, next to the parliamentary reports, biographies about these persons. Moreover, the thesis will have a brief look at what different newspapers said about the parliamentary debates in order to see how different opinions were presented in the newspapers.

Current debate about social policies

Despite some reforms and talk about welfare state retrenchment over recent decades, public social spending in 2014 was worth 22% of GDP in the average OECD-country and 25% in the Netherlands.²⁵ However, also the present liberal-social national government in the Netherlands aims to shift some responsibilities from the state to the society. In the 2013 *troonrede*, the annual speech delivered by the Dutch monarch to set out the government's plans, King Willem-Alexander mentioned that the classic welfare state was in the process of becoming a participation society. In the future, citizens should depend less on welfare provisions from the state and take up more responsibility for their own lives and neighbourhoods.²⁶ Furthermore, Dutch local governments have become more important in the execution of social policies over the last few years. In the Law on Social Support (*Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning*), which was implemented in 2015, municipalities have

²⁴ H. te Velde, *Sprekende Politiek. Redenaars en hun Publiek in de Parlementaire Gouden Eeuw* (Amsterdam, 2015), p. 267.

²⁵ 'Social Expenditure Update - Social spending is falling in some countries, but in many others it remains at historically high levels', [<http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/OECD2014-Social-Expenditure-Update-Nov2014-8pages.pdf>] (accessed on 22 October 2015).

²⁶ 'Troonrede 2013', [<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/toespraken/2013/09/17/troonrede-2013>] (accessed on 9 June 2016).

become responsible for a wide range of social policies that had before fallen under the national authority.²⁷

The Dutch welfare state has, just as the nineteenth-century poor relief, been described as an exceptional case. The Dutch relatively extensive safety net has been constructed under Christian democratic rather than social democratic governments. This exceptional historical path towards an extensive welfare state makes it difficult for scholars to place the Dutch welfare state in a category with other welfare states.²⁸ Scholars disagree, for example, in which of Esping-Andersen's categories, social democratic, liberal or corporatist-statist, the Dutch welfare state belongs.²⁹

Many scholars have mentioned the importance of continuity between the nineteenth-century developments and the subsequent growth of the twentieth-century welfare state. Michael Wintle has stressed the importance of the nineteenth century in particular for the Dutch welfare state. In this century, he states, 'the state took on more and more responsibility for providing services to its people, forming the basis of what was to become the great edifice of the Dutch welfare state, replete with all its corporatist and pillarized elements.'³⁰ Frances Gouda has emphasised the specific importance of the poor relief for the future welfare state: 'within this splintered structure of religious and municipal poor relief, however, resided the nucleus of the advanced welfare state of the future...'³¹

²⁷ 'Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning', [<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/zorg-en-ondersteuning-thuis/inhoud/wmo-2015>] (accessed on 9 June 2016).

²⁸ K. van Kersbergen, U. Becker, 'The Netherlands: A Passive Social Democratic Welfare State in a Christian Democratic Ruled Society', *Journal of Social Policy*, vol 17, iss 4 (1988), pp. 477-99 at pp. 477-78.

²⁹ W. Arts, J. Gelissen, 'Three worlds of welfare capitalism or more? A state-of-the-art report', *Journal of European Social Policy*, vol 12, iss 2 (2002), pp. 137-158 at p. 151; R.E. Goodin, A. Smitsman, 'Placing welfare states: The Netherlands as a crucial test case', *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, vol 2, iss 1 (2000), pp. 39-64 at p. 41.

³⁰ Wintle, *An Economic and Social History*, p. 344.

³¹ Gouda, *Poverty and Political Culture*, p. 259.

Outline

The historiography about the poor and social policies in the nineteenth-century Netherlands has shown that this thesis, by specifically focusing on the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth-century debates in the Dutch parliament, will produce new knowledge on how the parliamentary view on state responsibility for taking care of the poor changed during the second half of the nineteenth century. By comparing the debates, the thesis gives an example of how nineteenth-century developments can be linked to the emergence of social policies in the twentieth century. Furthermore, the topic of this thesis can be of interest for those who are involved in the current debate about welfare state reform and retrenchment.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 will explain how debate about state responsibility for taking care of the poor already started at the end of the eighteenth century and how the Dutch nineteenth-century elite viewed taking care of the poor. Furthermore, this chapter will look at who the poor were and in what manner they were supported. Subsequently, chapter 2 will show how the parliamentary debate about the Poor Law in the 1850s developed. Chapter 3 will cover the Poor Law reform of 1870 and describe the changes in the political situation that took place during the second half of the nineteenth century. Chapter 4 will take up the early twentieth-century debate, while the last chapter, chapter 5, will specifically compare both debates to bring to the fore how the national parliament's view on taking care of the poor had changed during the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the second part of chapter 5 will look briefly at the situation in other Western countries during the second half of the nineteenth century. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the findings of this thesis, discuss the broader impact and offer ideas for further research.

1. The Dutch and the poor in the nineteenth century

In Holland the ecclesiastical care of the poor which was still flourishing in the fifteenth century and was afterwards put an end to, was re-established in an altered form in the seventeenth century, and has lasted to our own times.³²

The citation above comes from Arwed Emminghaus. He described in 1870 the Dutch poor relief situation as exceptional, since it deviated from the path that most European countries had followed; a path in which poor relief had become the state's rather than the churches' responsibility.³³ This chapter will first describe how debate about the state's role in poor relief started at the end of the eighteenth century. Subsequently, it will have a look at the different ideas about poverty that were prevalent within the Dutch elite. Finally, the chapter will briefly describe who the poor were in the Dutch nineteenth-century society and by what kind of organizations they were supported.

Start of a debate

In the Dutch Republic of the early modern period, charity was seen as a moral calling. Thousands of poor relief agencies had been established, mostly by religious organizations, to support the unfortunate of society.³⁴ The Reformed Church, due to its strong connections with the state, played the pivotal role in this system.³⁵ The locally organized Dutch poor relief was diverse, flexible, not too expensive, and the Republic's elite was satisfied with the way it operated. This satisfaction, however, decreased during the last years of the existence of the Republic of the Seven United Provinces.³⁶

At the end of the eighteenth century criticism began to rise against the growing costs of poor relief. The idea gained ground that the poor relief should be reorganized and

³² Emminghaus, 'Introductory Chapter', p. 3.

³³ Emminghaus, 'Introductory Chapter', p. 3.

³⁴ Gouda, *Poverty and Political Culture*, p. 50.

³⁵ Melief, *De Strijd om de Armeenzorg*, p. 1.

³⁶ Van Leeuwen, 'Armeenzorg 1800-1912', p. 277.

centralized by the state in order to make it an efficient national public service. The plan to increase state influence was connected with the ideas of the French Revolution and, despite the fact that a strong national state did not exist at that time, the national government of the Batavian Republic (1795-1806), a government supported by the French revolutionary regime, wrote a Poor Law with the aim of giving the national state the pivotal role in the poor relief.³⁷ For the government of the Batavian Republic it was clear that the poor had to be supported and that the central government had to play a role.³⁸ It was unclear, however, what the role of the state in relation to the existing religious and private poor relief institutions should be. Many thinkers, religious readers, people involved in poor relief agencies and politicians started to discuss the state's responsibility for taking care of the poor. Finally, the patriotic governments proved to be unable to implement their new Poor Law since the resistance against it was too strong. Churches and many members of the boards of poor relief organizations were strongly opposed to a general organized public poor relief system since they saw taking care of the poor as a religious and not as a civil duty.³⁹

Following the French period, King William I, who became king of the newly formed Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815, also attempted to improve the manner in which the poor were supported.⁴⁰ According to the constitution of 1815 the state was the overseer of the poor relief. An Act of 1818 decided that the relief of paupers was the responsibility of the municipality where they had lived for the previous four years. Debate about whether taking care of the poor was primarily state business or should be left to the churches and other organizations continued during the reign of William I.⁴¹ The king did not succeed in his aim of reducing poverty, partly due to the Belgian Revolution and the subsequent secession of the

³⁷ Van Leeuwen, 'Armenzorg 1800-1912', pp. 277-78.

³⁸ Melief, *De Strijd om de Armenzorg*, p. 23.

³⁹ Van Leeuwen, 'Armenzorg 1800-1912', p. 279.

⁴⁰ Melief, *De Strijd om de Armenzorg*, p. 91.

⁴¹ Wintle, *An Economic and Social History*, pp. 275-76.

latter kingdom, which had a negative effect on the king's welfare policies.⁴² William II, who became king in 1840, wanted to deal with the problems that were caused by the uncertainty of where exactly the responsibility for taking care of the poor rested. He and his advisers, however, were still in the process of writing a new bill when the 1848 constitutional change completely altered the role of the king and shifted power from the monarch to the parliament and the government ministers.⁴³

Thinking about the poor

Dutch public officials and intellectuals saw the growth in urban poverty during the first half of the nineteenth century as proof of the country's decreasing economic and political power in comparison to the larger European states.⁴⁴ Gouda has argued that the Dutch looked back on the glorious times of the Republic in order to find a way to deal with the problem of poverty. In the Netherlands, 'the preoccupation with poverty was not necessarily a typically modern fixation; rather, poor relief practices in the nineteenth century were moulded and shaped by the intricate, if deeply rooted, social architecture which the Republic had bestowed upon the modern era.'⁴⁵ Dutch intellectuals of the first half of the nineteenth century described poverty as a problem for the society as a whole. The problem, according to these intellectuals, could only be solved by finding collective solutions. Some Dutch liberal economists, however, argued that intervening in the situation would only lead to more poverty. Charity would extend the lives of poor people, which would lead to an increase in the labour supply and thus keep wages down and make people even poorer. Malthusian ideas were widely accepted by the Dutch elite in the first half of the nineteenth century. Poor people were blamed for

⁴² Melief, *De Strijd om de Armeenzorg*, p. 91.

⁴³ Melief, *De Strijd om de Armeenzorg*, pp. 169-70, pp. 185-86.

⁴⁴ Gouda, *Poverty and Political Culture*, p. 136.

⁴⁵ Gouda, *Poverty and Political Culture*, p. 41.

marrying without having the proper resources and for having too many children.⁴⁶ One of the solutions that was brought forward consisted of teaching the poor to become hardworking labourers.⁴⁷

Helping the poor should preferably be done in kind, with food and clothing, because handing out cash carried the risk that the money would be spend in an undesirable way. The economy had to be restructured to provide enough work for everybody. Able-bodied people without employment should only receive support if they offered work in return.⁴⁸ Interestingly, the Dutch seemed not to have worried so much about possible political upheaval caused by poor people. The poor were not seen as much as a threat to the political regime as was, for example, the case in France.⁴⁹

The poor

The Dutch pre-industrial society was stratified. In the towns the lowest stratum counted for sixty to seventy percent of the inhabitants. At the bottom were the paupers, workers, service personnel and small tradesmen. People were not supposed to move from one stratum to another, since this would destabilize the framework of society.⁵⁰ Nineteenth-century Dutch literature about the slums clearly shows the stratification. A story was considered to have a happy ending if the character who came from a higher stratum, but had fallen to a lower one, eventually managed to work his or her way back up the social ladder. That people who had always lived in the lower stratum stayed behind in very uncomfortable living conditions was understood as being the natural order of things.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Gouda, *Poverty and Political Culture*, pp. 131-33, p. 229.

⁴⁷ Melief, *De Strijd om de Armeenzorg*, p. 122.

⁴⁸ Gouda, *Poverty and Political Culture*, pp. 229-31.

⁴⁹ Gouda, *Poverty and Political Culture*, p. 243.

⁵⁰ Van Loo, *Arm in Nederland*, p. 28.

⁵¹ R. van de Schoor, 'Wellustige Indianen en achterbuurtmysterie. De 'ander' onderin de negentiende-eeuwse standenmaatschappij' in N. Bemong, M. Kempering et al eds., *Naties in een spanningsveld. Tegenstrijdige bewegingen in de identiteitsvorming in negentiende-eeuws Vlaanderen en Nederland* (Hilversum, 2010), pp. 135-151 at p. 150.

The people in the lowest stratum lived under the greatest risk of becoming destitute. Van Loo has estimated that about a quarter of the Dutch nineteenth-century urban population received support from poor relief agencies. These households were really poor and could not survive without the support that in general consisted of food, clothing and, in wintertime, peat.⁵² Van Loo distinguishes three main causes for falling into poverty. First, he mentions the alternation between good and bad times: the influence of lower wage and rising prizes, severe winters and epidemics. The second category of causes for falling into poverty concerns individual vulnerability: a person's stage in life, the amount of children in a family and the health of the breadwinner of a household. The third category consists of a person's starting position: the availability of good food and the level of received education.⁵³

The poor relief organizations

There existed three types of poor relief organizations in the Netherlands: the civil or public poor relief, the private organizations and the ecclesiastical agencies. The last one was by far the most important. The ecclesiastical organizations, in general, took care of their fellow believers, and the civil poor relief organizations helped the people who were not supported by the churches. However, in places where no civil poor relief organization existed, the Reformed or Catholic organizations often fulfilled the role of public relief agencies as well. Poor relief was very diverse. The most important task was the handing out of necessities to the needy at their homes, but poor relief included also hospitals, schools, banks, and institutions for orphans, widows and the old, the sick and the disabled.⁵⁴

⁵² Van Loo, *Arm in Nederland*, p. 31, p. 37.

⁵³ Van Loo, *Arm in Nederland*, pp. 32-46.

⁵⁴ Van Leeuwen, 'Armenzorg 1800-1912', pp. 282-83.

Het cijfer van hen, die in de weldaden van de overige instellingen, voor welke de vereischte inlichtingen zijn verkregen, in 1851 hebben gedeeld, bedroeg:	
bij de 2951 besturen voor huiszittende armen	398,491
" " 45 genootschappen tot ondersteuning van schamele armen	7,580
" " 39 genootschappen tot ondersteuning van behoeftige kraamvrouwen	3,334
in " 468 godshuizen	19,801
" " 61 gast- of ziekenhuizen	15,727
bij " 163 armescholen, uitsluitend bestemd voor behoeftige kinderen	57,396
" " 2219 scholen waarin, gemeenschappelijk met andere, kinderen van behoeftigen worden onderwezen	80,560
" " 37 bijzondere weescholen, door genootschappen of particulieren bekostigd	4,286
" " 94 zondagscholen, door genootschappen of particulieren bekostigd	8,414
" " 117 kleinekinder- of bewaarscholen	17,100
" " 37 werkscholen	8,747
" " 2 gestichten voor doofstommen	233
" " 2 gestichten voor blinden	91
" " 49 werkplaatsen van liefdadigheid	8,628
" " koloniale inrigtingen der Maatschappij van Weldadigheid	9,900
Te zamen	635,288
Dit getal staat tot de bevolking als 20367/100 tot 1000.	

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The table above comes from a parliamentary report about the support given by poor relief organizations in 1851. For this report 7213 charity organizations had provided information. These organizations supported in total 635.288 people, which meant that more than 20% of the population had received some kind of relief. Since not every organization had sent in information for the report, the total number of people that received support would even have been higher.

Van Leeuwen has argued that the poor relief in Amsterdam functioned as a survival instrument for the poor and a control instrument for the elites. In Amsterdam the elites had much influence on the social policies. They had managed to organize the financing of the relief in such a way that they contributed a relatively small share. The poor did not receive much support, but the relief that they received certainly increased their chances of survival. Poor relief influenced the labour market by keeping seasonal workers in the city. Van

⁵⁵ Verslag over de verrigtingen aangaande het Armbestuur over 1851, Kamerstuk Tweede Kamer 1853-1854 kamerstuknummer XLIII ondernummer 2 Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854, p. 415.

Leeuwen concludes that poor relief had a stabilizing impact on the society in Amsterdam during the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has set out the background against which the mid-nineteenth-century parliamentary debate about a new Poor Law, the topic of the next chapter, would take place. It has shown that debate about state responsibility for taking care of the poor had already been taking place since the end of the eighteenth century. One needs only to look at the number of people who dependent on support, the amount of organizations that were involved in poor relief and at the debates that had already been conducted during the first half of the nineteenth century to see the great importance of the mid-nineteenth-century debate for the whole society.

⁵⁶ Van Leeuwen, *Bijstand in Amsterdam*, p. 314.

2. Mid-nineteenth-century debate

This morning we have heard that nobody can claim the right to live from the state... I claim instead that a civilized state is indeed obliged to prevent as much as possible the starving of its members due to lack (of basic necessities).⁵⁷

Chapter 2 will describe the parliamentary Poor Law debate of the early 1850s. It will show that the liberal Thorbecke, from whom the quote above derived, had proposed a very different Poor Law from the one that was finally adopted in 1854. The chapter will start by describing the political situation in the national parliament of the 1850s.

Political situation

During the first half of the nineteenth century the Dutch king could rule by Royal Decree, which meant that the parliament often functioned as an advisory board without having real power. After the new constitution of 1848 the Second Chamber became the place where most political power rested. Ministerial responsibility was introduced and ministers were to be responsible to parliament rather than to the king, whose role had become formally constitutional. According to the 1848 constitution, the members of the Second Chamber had to be directly elected by the enfranchised part of the population. The right to vote was granted to the male part of the population who paid a minimum amount of direct taxes. For the year 1850 the new rules meant that 2.5 per cent of the total population could vote. Under the new constitution the Second Chamber was strengthened vis à vis the local governments via various centralizing measures.⁵⁸ Wintle explains this as follows:

⁵⁷ Thorbecke in parliament on 12 May 1854, *Handelingen Tweede Kamer 12 mei 1854, Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854*, pp. 812-813: 'Wij hebben dezen morgen gehoord, dat niemand een regt van leven heeft tegen de staat... Ik beweer integendeel, dat een beschaafde Staat wel degelijk verplicht is, te zorgen zooveel mogelijk, dat zijne leden niet van gebrek omkomen.'

⁵⁸ Wintle, *An Economic and Social History*, pp. 253-55.

Thus 1848 was not only a democratizing measure, but a centralizing as well, and indeed was rapidly followed by two laws on local government, the Provincial Act (*Provinciale Wet*) of 1850, and the Municipality Act (*Gemeentewet*) of 1851, which, while granting some important local competences, rigidly cemented political power in the hands of the new, directly elected national government.⁵⁹

By the middle of the nineteenth century, politicians had accepted that the Dutch state had become a small constitutional monarchy without much international influence. Hence, the national parliament focussed mainly on internal affairs during the second half of the nineteenth century. Until 1870 the most important political divide existed between conservatives and liberals who interpreted the constitution of 1848 in different ways.⁶⁰ The liberals, who were in favour of progressive reforms and were supportive of the 1848 ‘revolution’, were led by Johan Rudolph Thorbecke. The liberals wanted to leave the economy as free as possible and strove to implement a legal framework that would increase individual freedom. They were also in favour of the separation between church and state.⁶¹ Members of the other important group, consisting of orthodox Protestant Christian members of parliament, came to be known as the anti-revolutionaries. This group emphasised the importance of non-governmental institutions for society. The leader of the anti-revolutionary group was Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer.⁶² One of the aims of Groen van Prinsterer was to counteract a further secularization of state and society. Religion, according to Groen van Prinsterer, was as important for the state as it was for the individual.⁶³

In the parliamentary debate between these two parties, one of the discussed topics was about which party was the most nationalistic one. The anti-revolutionaries accused the liberals, who claimed to be the real national party, of not being nationalistic at all. After all, as

⁵⁹ Wintle, *An Economic and Social History*, p. 255.

⁶⁰ H. te Velde, ‘Van grondwet tot grondwet. Oefenen met het parlement, partij en schaalvergroting 1848-1917’ in R. Aerts, et al., *Land van kleine gebaren. Een politieke geschiedenis van Nederland 1780-1990* (Nijmegen, Amsterdam, 2010), pp. 97-175 at p. 99.

⁶¹ Te Velde, ‘Van grondwet tot grondwet’, pp. 104-5

⁶² Van der Valk, *Van pauperzorg*, p. 9.

⁶³ H.W.J. Mulder, *Groen van Prinsterer. Staatsman en Profeet* (Franeker, 1973), p. 52, p. 73.

Groen van Prinsterer argued, the liberals wanted to break down the nation to individuals and build it back up again. In other words, he blamed the liberals for a lack of appreciation and respect for the existing non-state institutions in society.⁶⁴ This discussion is an example of how the liberals and the anti-revolutionaries valued the individual and institutions differently. The liberals put more emphasis on the importance of the individual and were less reluctant than the anti-revolutionaries to interfere in non-governmental institutions. The different view on society of both groups would play a major role in the Poor Law debate that took place during the 1850s. Central to this debate was the question: to what extent could/should governments intervene in society?

Thorbecke's Poor Law

Thorbecke became minister of Internal Affairs and the leader of a liberal government in 1849. At this time the Second Chamber was eagerly anticipating the passing of various new laws that would reform the way in which the country was governed and reshape parts of the economy and the educational system. Also a new law that would rearrange the poor relief was impatiently awaited.⁶⁵ In the constitution of 1848 it had been recognized that taking care of the poor was of continuing concern for the government and that it should be organized by law.⁶⁶

Thorbecke's government came up with a Poor Law Bill in 1851. This bill contained strongly centralizing measures and would increase the role of the state in poor relief. Thorbecke foresaw a future in which poor relief would eventually become the complete responsibility of the state.⁶⁷ Thorbecke held the state responsible for guaranteeing Dutch

⁶⁴ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 10 december 1850, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1850-1851*, p. 183.

⁶⁵ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 09 december 1850, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1850-1851*, p. 156.

⁶⁶ Van der Valk, *Van pauperzorg*, p. 9.

⁶⁷ Gouda, *Poverty and Political Culture*, p. 191.

citizens civil freedom, which meant that the state had to make sure that all citizens had the possibility to develop themselves. Therefore, the poor who did not have the means to survive should be helped by the state.⁶⁸ Thorbecke's Poor Law Bill never passed parliament because his government fell before the bill had been discussed.⁶⁹ However, in the debate about the Municipality Bill of 1851, a bill introduced by the same government, came clearly to the fore that Thorbecke's Poor Law proposal would have met with fierce opposition. In the debate about the Municipality Bill discussion had taken place about whether municipalities had the right to inspect the accounts of religious and private charity organizations. The Municipality Bill included this right and Thorbecke was, also in his Poor Law Bill, in favour of this governmental oversight. Groen van Prinsterer and others though, were strongly opposed to the interference of the government in religious and private organizations and an amendment that proposed the removal of the oversight clause from the Municipality Law was adopted.⁷⁰

In April 1853 broad-based protests in society took place against the renewed introduction of the Episcopal hierarchy in the Netherlands. Many Protestants in the Netherlands were afraid for interference from Rome in Dutch society and opposed the government's tolerant stance in 'de Aprilbeweging'. Thorbecke and his government resigned when the king appeared to be, according to the government, too willing to listen to the protesters. The administration that was formed after the resignation of Thorbecke's government introduced a new Poor Law Bill in December 1853.⁷¹

⁶⁸ C.H.E. de Wit, 'Thorbecke, Staatsman en historicus' in C.H.E. de Wit ed., *Thorbecke en de wording van de Nederlandse natie* (Nijmegen, 1980), pp. 7-176 at pp. 104-5.

⁶⁹ Wintle, *An Economic and Social History*, p. 276.

⁷⁰ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 19 mei 1851, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1850-1851*, pp. 807-808(1).

⁷¹ Van der Valk, *Van pauperzorg*, p. 10.

Poor Law debate of 1854

In reaction to the new law proposal, many poor relief organizations and local governments sent the government their thoughts on the new Poor Law Bill. Both proponents and opponents of the proposed law got involved in the debate. Among the organizations expressing their opinion about the bill were many church councils, municipal councils and other organizations involved in poor relief, such as independently operating orphanages. The main objections against the proposed law concerned the interference from the (central) government in religious institutions and the increase in central oversight, and thus the loss of independence for municipalities and independent relief institutions.⁷² Also, the clause that local authorities were only allowed to help people who received no support at all from other organizations met with resistance from some municipalities. They argued that, if municipalities had to follow this rule, problems would arise with poor people who received some, but not enough, support from non-governmental institutions. The municipalities were afraid that private relief organizations would not have the resources to take care of all the poor people in their community without receiving government subsidies.⁷³

The Poor Law Bill got a lot of attention from the press. *De Tijd*, a Catholic newspaper, mentioned on 28 January 1854 that the different newspapers that had written about the bill agreed that it was inconsistent. On the one hand, the bill adhered to the freedom and independence of existing charity organizations, while, on the other hand, it interfered in this freedom by obliging the organizations to report about their work to the government.⁷⁴

⁷² E.g. the church councils of the Hervormde Kerk of Harderwijk and Driebergen had concerns about the new law, Handelingen Tweede Kamer 18 maart 1854, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854*, p. 617; Also the orphanage of Harderwijk had its doubts, Handelingen Tweede Kamer 22 maart 1854, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854*, p. 655; Just as the municipality councils of Goes and Heino, Handelingen Tweede Kamer 3 mei 1854, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854*, p. 730; An example of a church council in favour of the proposed law is the Hervormde Kerk of Noordlaren, Handelingen Tweede Kamer 23 maart 1854, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854*, p. 675.

⁷³ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 3 mei 1854, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854*, p. 731.

⁷⁴ *De Tijd*, 28 January 1854, p. 1.

On 10 May 1854 debate about the Poor Law Bill in the Second Chamber took off. Many members would give their views on the bill or aspects of the bill during the following two weeks. Both supporters and opponents of the bill started their contributions by emphasising the importance of the proposed law both for the people who received support and for society as a whole.⁷⁵ The minister of Internal Affairs, Gerlach van Reenen, set out what the law entailed. In his outline he explained that taking care of the poor was a moral and religious duty, but that in the current society state interference had become indispensable. The minister argued that public poor relief organizations were needed to take care of people who were not supported by the private or religious organizations. Furthermore, he emphasised that these public institutions had often already existed for hundreds of years, and that their continuing existence was in line with the constitution of 1848. Minister Van Reenen pointed out that the proposed law did not interfere with the freedom of religious and private institutions. The public facilities would only help people who were not supported by other organizations. To know, however, who was and who was not supported by the religious and private charities, it was necessary that these organizations informed the local governments about who they were supporting.

The minister argued that the members of parliament who wanted to leave poor relief completely to the non-governmental institutions were wishful-thinkers, since it was unrealistic to expect that other organizations would automatically fill the gap if public institutions would cease to exist. On the other hand, the minister also opposed the members of parliament who wanted both religious and private organizations and the public organizations to fall under the same law. He believed that this would interfere with the right of religious and private

⁷⁵ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 10 mei 1854, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854*, pp. 777-95.

institutions to act independently. The minister finished by stating that it would always be possible to adjust the law to future needs.⁷⁶

The groups around Thorbecke and Groen van Prinsterer were both unsupportive towards the Poor Law Bill.⁷⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, who was personally involved in many charity organizations,⁷⁸ attacked the bill for not proposing a path towards a decreasing, and an ultimately vanishing, role for the government in the provision of support for the poor. He argued for ‘the abolition of the *charité légale*’ and emphasised that ‘nobody could claim the right to live from the state.’ Poor relief organized by the state, according to Groen, would lead to the end of Christian charity.⁷⁹

Thorbecke came up with very different reasons for being dissatisfied with the Poor Law Bill. According to him, the government made a big mistake by putting the responsibility for taking care of the poor primarily in the hands of the non-governmental poor relief institutions. In response to the remarks of Groen van Prinsterer, Thorbecke claimed that the state did indeed have a responsibility to prevent its citizens from starving. He argued that independently operating, and possibly competing, churches might provide support in a counterproductive way, which would only increase the amount of poverty. Thorbecke thought that it would be better if the state organized governmental oversight to make better coordination between different poor relief organizations possible. This way, according to Thorbecke, poor people could be helped in a more efficient way.⁸⁰

The press followed the parliamentary debate closely and reported daily about what was being said in the parliament. The newspapers were not only passive reporters, they also influenced the parliamentary debate. At some point, for example, Thorbecke accused Groen

⁷⁶ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 11 mei 1854, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854*, pp. 808(5)-808(6).

⁷⁷ Van der Valk, *Van pauperzorg*, p. 10.

⁷⁸ Mulder, *Groen van Prinsterer*, pp. 51-52.

⁷⁹ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 12 mei 1854, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854*, pp. 809-11: ‘... niet regeling maar uitroeiing van de *charité légale*’ (p. 809); ‘Niemand heeft tegenover de staat het recht om te leven’ (p. 810).

⁸⁰ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 12 mei 1854, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854*, pp. 812-13.

van Prinsterer of answering questions that were raised in the newspapers instead of in the parliamentary debate. Groen van Prinsterer responded by pointing at the importance of the press for the working of a constitutional government.⁸¹ This confirms what Henk te Velde has stated, namely that nineteenth-century European parliamentary debates were often very open to influences from outside the parliament.⁸² Different newspapers were supportive towards different parliamentary groups. For example, when the majority in the Second Chamber agreed that the English Poor Law of 1834, which had increased state involvement, had led to an increase in poverty, newspaper *De Grondwet* came up with numbers to show that the amount of English people asking for support had actually decreased during the previous years.⁸³ Another example is *De Tijd*, which criticised the minister for not making clear where the government got the right from to ask for annual reports from independent functioning churches.⁸⁴

After much debate and proposed amendments, the Poor Law Bill passed the Second Chamber on 23 May 1854 with 37 votes in favour and 28 votes against.⁸⁵ The bill of Minister Van Reenen was, despite the many disagreements and the intensive debate, almost unchanged. According to the new law, the religious and private poor relief organizations would primarily be responsible for helping the poor. Public institutions were allowed to help people who were not supported by other organizations. The religious and private agencies were obliged to provide the government with information about whom they were supporting.⁸⁶

The reactions in the newspapers towards the passing of the bill were diverse. Some confined their reporting to giving only a description of what had been said in the parliament,

⁸¹ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 16 mei 1854, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854*, pp. 853-56.

⁸² Te Velde, *Sprekende Politiek*, p. 267.

⁸³ *De Grondwet*, 18 May 1854, p. 1.

⁸⁴ *De Tijd*, 19 May 1854, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 23 mei 1854, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854*, p. 938.

⁸⁶ Van der Valk, *Van pauperzorg*, p. 10.

others expressed more of their own views. The *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* emphasised that the majority in the Second Chamber in favour of the proposed law had only been a small majority.⁸⁷ *De Grondwet* attacked the anti-revolutionaries by looking back at the statement of Groen van Prinsterer that citizens cannot claim the right to live from the state.⁸⁸ After the Poor Law of 1854 was implemented, taking care of the poor remained ‘...continually the subject of very wide ranging public debate, both in parliament, and especially in countless pamphlets in which seemingly every thinking man (very few women) expressed their considered views.’⁸⁹

Conclusion

For all the participants in the debate there had been no doubt that the destitute poor should receive support. The debate had not focused on the question of whether relief should be given or not, but rather on the question what the desirable role of the government was in the provision of poor relief. Should local governments organize support? Did the state have the right to ask for information from independent charity organizations? The majority in parliament had followed Minister Van Reenen in his view that supporting the poor was in essence not a duty for the state but a moral and religious duty and thus should preferably be left to society. For the moment, however, state interference had become indispensable and had to be taken into account in the law. The liberals around Thorbecke and the anti-revolutionaries around Groen van Prinsterer, who both had argued for a more extreme choice in the law, though in opposite directions, had voiced their opinions clearly. Neither of these groups, however, had convinced the parliament to change the bill in any substantial way.

Debate about supporting the poor did not stop when the bill had passed the Second Chamber. Also, the state continued to be involved in job creation. In 1854 around 13.500

⁸⁷ *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, 24 May 1854, p. 1.

⁸⁸ *De Grondwet*, 24 May 1854, p. 2.

⁸⁹ Wintle, *An Economic and Social History*, p. 277.

people worked in jobs created by the government.⁹⁰ In the parliamentary debate, members of parliament had expressed their hope that the state's role in the support of the poor would decline over time. The following years, however, would only show growth in the public poor relief. Changing economic and political circumstances during the following decades would influence the continuing debate about the state's responsibility for the poor. The next chapter will look at how the political situation changed in the Netherlands during the second half of the nineteenth century.

⁹⁰ Wintle, *An Economic and Social History*, p. 276.

3. Changing Netherlands

There must be for human affairs an order which is the best. This order is by no means always the existing one; else why should we all desire change in the latter! But it is the order which ought to exist for the greatest happiness of the human race. God knows it, and desires its adoption. It is for man to discover and establish it.⁹¹

Emile de Laveleye, in his book *Primitive Property* (1878), expresses clearly the feeling that, since societies were changing during the second half of the nineteenth century, institutions had to change as well. One important issue that was widely discussed in Western societies in this period was the social question, to which the next chapter will pay attention. Another question concerned the political situation, for example, the debate on voting rights. This chapter will describe how the political situation changed in the Netherlands during the second half of the nineteenth century. However, it will start by looking at the reform of the Poor Law in 1870.

1870 Poor Law reform

De Laveleye posed in his book the question of how a modern, industrialized country, in which a lot of people were dependent on their labour for making a living, could make sure that everybody had the means to survive. He explained the different forms of common property and the collective use of land that had existed in the past and how this had changed in modern times. De Laveleye explained that also in the Netherlands common lands had become scarce in the nineteenth century.⁹² An increasing number of people had no access to land and were dependent only on the wages that they received for their labour in order to pay for their food, housing and other necessities. Due to the growth in industrialization and migration, an increasing number of poor people demanded support in cities to which they had migrated in

⁹¹ E. de Laveleye, *Primitive Property* (London, 1878), p. 353.

⁹² De Laveleye, *Primitive Property*, p. 283.

their search for work. According to the 1854 Poor Law, a poor person's municipality of origin had to reimburse the municipality that gave public support. People started to see this reimbursement as one of the reasons for the rise in public poor relief in the period following the Poor Law of 1854. It was thought that the public poor relief organizations of the cities to which people had migrated handed out too much support, due to the fact that they did not have to pay for it themselves. In 1870 the national government decided to reform the Poor Law in this aspect. According to the newly reformed Poor Law it was no longer the municipality where a poor person was born that had to pay for his or her support but rather the municipality where the person lived.⁹³

Pillarization and the emergence of political parties

Until the 1870s a relatively homogeneous elite ruled the nation on a political, social, cultural and religious level. When in the 1880s new groups became politically organized, various forms of Dutch national identities emerged.⁹⁴ A Dutch national conscience had already existed in elite circles in the eighteenth century. Now, national feelings spread from the elite to the majority of the people. In different groups, however, the national identity took on a different shape. The difference in ideology came clearly to the fore in the conflict about education, the so-called school struggle, between liberals and confessionals during the second half of the nineteenth century. Attempts under King Willem I and following governments to enforce a centralized, more uniform, educational system, contributed to the rise of political feelings in previously politically non-active groups. In 1878 half a million Protestants and Catholics signed a petition against a new Education Law that would make it more expensive to send children to a non-public, often denominational, school. The resistance against the government's educational policies brought the confessional groups together on a national

⁹³ Van der Valk, *Van pauperzorg*, pp. 10-11.

⁹⁴ Te Velde, 'Van grondwet tot grondwet', pp. 143-45.

level. The founding of cheap national newspapers further enabled the mobilization of the new groups. Abraham Kuyper, for example, founded *De Standaard* to spread his idea of the Dutch Calvinistic nation. Both Catholics and Calvinists formed their own national identities, which were clearly distinct from the liberal one.⁹⁵

The emancipation of the Calvinists, Catholics, and also the socialists, took place under a new type of leadership. These new leaders looked for support from the people, rather than for respect from the elite. They used propaganda and new national organizations to get the people behind their ideas.⁹⁶ The emergence of different national identities and the organization of the different groups on a national level has come to be known as the pillarization of society. The nation began to separate out into different nationally organized groups, the pillars, with each their own variant of the national identity and their own organizations. The emergence of the different national identities and the pillarization took place as part of the emancipation struggle of the different groups. Wintle summarized this as follows:

With the exception of the liberals, who assumed a defensive stance, several other groups, who were developing their own national identity, were involved in some form of emancipation struggle. Their attempts towards nation building had much to do with the search for a place within the framework of the nation; they looked for legitimacy, and a just and recognized place as an active, important and unique part of the Dutch nation, in passed, present and future.⁹⁷

The pillarization became also visible in the national parliament. Between the 1840s and World War One, Dutch politics moved from being largely confined to the elite into something that interested all men and women. Possessors of voting rights, as a percentage of the male

⁹⁵ M. Wintle, 'Natievorming, onderwijs en godsdienst in Nederland, 1850-1900' in H. te Velde, H. Verhage eds. *De Eenheid & De Delen. Zuilvorming, onderwijs en natievorming in Nederland 1850-1900* (Amsterdam, 1996), pp. 13-28 at pp. 17-25.

⁹⁶ Wintle, *An Economic and Social History*, pp. 315-16.

⁹⁷ Wintle, 'Natievorming, onderwijs', p. 25: 'Met uitzondering van de liberalen, die een verdedigende houding aannamen, waren de verscheidene andere groepen, die hun eigen nationale identiteit aan het ontwikkelen waren, bezig met de een of andere vorm van emancipatiestrijd. Hun pogingen tot natievorming hadden veel te maken met het zoeken van een plaats voor zichzelf binnen het kader van de natie; zij waren op zoek naar legitimatie, naar een rechtvaardige en erkende plaats voor zichzelf als een actief, belangrijk en uniek deel van de Nederlandse natie, in verleden, heden en toekomst.'

adult population, went up from 11% in 1853, to 12.3% in 1880, 26.8% in 1890, 49% in 1900 and in 1917 all adult men had the right to vote. In 1919 female suffrage followed suit.⁹⁸ The different pillars in the Dutch society organized themselves in national political parties. In 1878 the Anti-Revolutionary Party (Anti-revolutionaire Partij, ARP) was founded by Abraham Kuyper as the first national political party in the Netherlands. The ARP followed the thinking of Kuyper who recognized different spheres of authority. Although state intervention in society was needed to deal with anti-social tendencies, in general, the state had to act in its own sphere of authority, leaving other institutions, such as families, churches and workers' organizations, free to act in their sphere of authority.⁹⁹

Although part of the Catholic elite prevented a real Catholic party from emerging, Catholic politicians participated in several confessional governments with the ARP, for the first time in 1888. The Social Democratic League (Sociaal-Democratische Bond, SDB), in 1882, and the Social Democratic Workers' Party (Sociaal-Democratisch Arbeiderspartij, SDAP), in 1894, were established as the national political parties for the socialists. The liberals followed the example of the other groups, which resulted in the founding of the Liberal Union (Vrije Liberalen, VL) in 1885. And from 1901 onwards, more leftwing liberals started to cooperate in the Free-Thinking Democratic League (Vrijzinnig Democratische Bond, VDB).¹⁰⁰

Following the entry of party politics and the extension of the voting rights in the 1880s, liberal and confessional governments started to alternate with each other. The social question gained more and more attention. However, though all parties were in favour of passing new social legislation, disagreement about the nature of these policies, made it

⁹⁸ Wintle, *An Economic and Social History*, p. 253.

⁹⁹ J. E. McGoldrick, *Abraham Kuyper. God's Renaissance Man* (Darlington, 2000), p. 80.

¹⁰⁰ Wintle, *An Economic and Social History*, pp. 313-17.

difficult to find majorities for proposed legislation.¹⁰¹ The confessional government under Heemskerk (1908-1913) managed to pass several social policies.¹⁰² One of the bills that was passed by the Heemskerk government was the 1912 Poor Law. The debate that took place in the parliament about the 1912 Poor Law is the topic of the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has explained how the Dutch government reformed the Poor Law in 1870 in an attempt to reverse the growth in public poor relief. It has also covered the changing political landscape during the second half of the nineteenth century, with the start of party politics and the emergence of the pillarized society. New groups of society had become directly represented in the national parliament by members of mass political parties. This new political order had to deal with older and newer issues. One of the older issues concerned the question about responsibility for taking care of the poor.

¹⁰¹ J. Luiten van Zanden, A. van Riel, *The Strictures of Inheritance. The Dutch economy in the nineteenth century* (Princeton, 2004), p. 247, p. 261.

¹⁰² Te Velde, 'Van grondwet tot grondwet', pp. 157-59.

4. Turn-of-the-century debate

If no breath of Christian charity and social justice come to calm all these hatreds, Europe amid the struggles of class with class and race with race, is threatened with universal chaos.¹⁰³

As long as one stands antithetically opposed to one another, everybody will mostly pull his own cord. While one side tried to decrease the role of the Church and to oppress the Church, the other side, the side of the Church, often intended to, if possible, completely exclude the government from poor relief.¹⁰⁴

This chapter describes how debate in parliament about the Dutch poor relief started once again towards the end of the nineteenth century. In 1901 the social liberal Hendrik Goeman Borgesius produced a Poor Law proposal but it was not discussed in parliament due to lost elections. In 1912 another Poor Law Bill, one that very much reflected anti-revolutionary values, was debated and passed by the parliament. This chapter gives an overview of the debate.

The social question

At the end of the nineteenth century changing ideas about the role of the state and the acknowledgement that people could become poor through no fault of their own, led to increasing support for state intervention in society. When the Netherlands became a more industrialized country, pressure on the state to intervene arose, particularly with regards to the workers. Also the idea, originating from England and Germany, that paupers could be elevated from their state of poverty gained ground.¹⁰⁵ Different journals about poor relief and social policies were founded and research was undertaken to make a better understanding of

¹⁰³ De Laveleye, *Primitive Property*, p. xxvi.

¹⁰⁴ A. Kuyper in the Poor Law debate, *Handelingen Tweede Kamer 27 februari, Handelingen der Staten Generaal 1911-1912 II*, p. 1676: ‘zoolang men antithetisch tegenover elkander staat, trekt ieder aan zijn eigen streng het sterkste. Evenzeer als men aan de eene zijde lange jaren de Kerk had willen inperken, binden en verdrukken, had men aan de andere zijde, aan de zijde van de Kerk, het er vaak op toegelegd, om de Overheid in zake armenzorg, kon het zijn, geheel uit te sluiten.’

¹⁰⁵ Van der Valk, *Van pauperzorg*, p. 16.

the problem of poverty possible and to improve the statistical records of the poor relief.¹⁰⁶ Around 1900 the Dutch central government implemented several new social policies, mainly to improve workers' rights.¹⁰⁷

The turn-of-the-century government also wanted to introduce a new Poor Law. The Poor Law proposal that it brought forward was a product of Goeman Borgesius, the minister of Internal Affairs. Goeman Borgesius had already been an active propagator of social reforms for years. He was one of the writers of the influential *Nutsrapport* of 1895. This report described the different shortcomings of the poor relief system and claimed that a new Poor Law, one that would allow a larger role for the state, was needed.¹⁰⁸ The Poor Law Bill of Goeman Borgesius, however, would not be discussed in parliament due to the elections of 1901 in which the governing liberal parties lost their majority. The confessional government that followed withdrew the bill on the ground that it was necessary to first come up with other social policies and labour laws before the right time for a new Poor Law had come.¹⁰⁹

In 1912 a new Poor Law Bill was discussed in parliament. This bill was largely based on the same principles as the law of 1854 had been, with poor relief primarily being seen as a task for charity organizations rather than as a responsibility of the state.¹¹⁰ According to the bill, a destitute person should first look for help from immediate family. If they were unable to provide support, it was up to private or religious organizations to take action. Only when these organizations did not offer (sufficient) help either, public poor relief organizations should step in. The responsibility of supporting the poor remained with the local organizations and municipalities. The national state did not contribute financially to the poor relief system. The new law brought, however, some changes compared to the situation of the 1854 Poor

¹⁰⁶ Van Leeuwen, 'Armenzorg 1800-1912', p. 290.

¹⁰⁷ Te Velde, 'Van grondwet tot grondwet', p. 158.

¹⁰⁸ B. Wartena, *H. Goeman Borgesius (1847-1917). Vader van de verzorgingsstaat. Een halve eeuw liberale en sociale politiek in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 2003), pp. 102-4.

¹⁰⁹ Van der Valk, *Van pauperzorg*, p. 20.

¹¹⁰ Wintle, *An Economic and Social History*, p. 276.

Law. It was now allowed for public poor relief organizations to support people who received some but not sufficient relief from other organizations. People who needed assistance were no longer obliged to first sell all their valuable possessions before being eligible for support. Furthermore, people who were expected to be able to rise out of poverty were allowed to be given more than the absolute minimum to make it possible for them to take the step towards independence.¹¹¹

1912 Poor Law debate

The bill of Minister Theodorus Heemskerk was debated in the national parliament from 27 to 29 February 1912. For this debate, churches, charity organizations and municipalities had sent in petitions in which they expressed their opinions about the new Poor Law. There existed consensus about the necessity of a new law that had to deal with the experienced problems of the poor relief system. The parliament agreed that the proposed bill had important advantages compared to the Poor Law of 1854. However, there was disagreement about the extent to which the new law was just an adaptation towards an already existing reality and to what extent it really set out new lines for poor relief policy. The same disagreement could be found in the newspapers. The liberal newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* wrote that the bill consisted of a mere technical improvement and would neither solve social problems nor decrease the amount of poverty.¹¹² Socialist newspaper *Het Vrije Volk* was of the opinion that, unless certain amendments were to be adopted, the law would not form the right basis for poor relief in the twentieth century.¹¹³ *De Tijd*, the national, Catholic newspaper, argued that the law had managed to find a compromise between left and right. The non-participation of the Catholic members of parliament in the general debate was, according to the newspaper, a clear sign of Catholic support for the bill.

¹¹¹ Van der Valk, *Van pauperzorg*, pp. 21-26.

¹¹² *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 25 January 1912, p. 1.

¹¹³ *Het Vrije Volk*, 27 January 1912, p. 1.

The main participants in the debate were Minister Theodorus Heemskerk and Abraham Kuyper, both from the ARP, the liberals Mynard Tydeman and Pieter Rink, and the social democrat Willem Vliegen.¹¹⁴ The first speaker in the debate was Mynard Tydeman. He started off by expressing his delight with the bill, which, according to him, brought a lot of improvements compared to its predecessor. He explained that he was glad to see that the proposed law adjusted to the already common practice of people being supported by more than one poor relief organization, something that had been forbidden by the Poor Law of 1854. However, Tydeman was dissatisfied with the way the minister had portrayed the public poor relief as being subsidiary to the private and religious charities. From the wording of the bill it became clear that the minister was of the opinion that public poor relief was based on less lofty motives than private and religious poor relief. Tydeman argued that public poor relief organizations did relief work based on equally valuable motives as the private and religious organizations. Furthermore, he attacked the minister for being opposed to a financial contribution from the national state for the support of the poor. Tydeman claimed that the national government should take action if a poor municipality faced difficulties in supporting the poor that lived in its area.¹¹⁵

The second speaker was ARP-founder Abraham Kuyper. He began his speech by thanking the minister and the Preparation Committee for the effort they had put in writing the bill. He stressed the importance of the proposed law for solving the existing antithesis between supporters of state responsibility for the relief of the poor on the one hand, and the supporters of leaving the relief to religious and private organizations on the other. Following his opening statement, Kuyper continued by giving an historical overview of different Dutch poor relief regulations. According to him, history had proven that laws which were not in line with the spirit and nature of the nation had always failed. He evidenced this by giving the

¹¹⁴ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 27 februari 1912, *Handelingen der Staten Generaal 1911-1912 II*.

¹¹⁵ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 27 februari 1912, *Handelingen der Staten Generaal 1911-1912 II*, pp. 1672-74.

example of the Poor Law that had been adopted under the government of the Batavian Republic in 1800, and by explaining that the unsuccessful bills of Thorbecke (1851) and Goeman Borgesius (1901) had both been out of touch with the nation. Kuyper stressed that the now proposed law managed to guarantee the freedom of the private and ecclesiastical poor relief organizations, while at the same time acknowledging the role of the civil governments. Kuyper admitted that Protestants had in the past been too negative towards state involvement in the support of the poor. After all, in many primarily Protestant countries, like Germany, England and the Scandinavian countries, the state had long been given a central role in poor relief, which showed that it was not completely opposed to Protestant thinking to have state involvement in helping the poor. According to Kuyper, the motives of Christian and private organizations differed from the public poor relief organizations. Where the church gave support out of Christian love, the government's incentive consisted in the fact that it was its duty to provide for those in need. Kuyper was critical towards the churches in the Netherlands who had failed to support their poor members sufficiently during the previous decades. Due to this failure of the churches, it was only logical that the public poor relief had kept on growing in importance. However, Kuyper underlined that it had been Christian rather than humanistic thought that stood on the basis of public assistance to the poor.¹¹⁶

Third speaker in the debate was Theodorus Heemskerk, the minister responsible for introducing the bill. He explained that in the new law poor relief was still primarily seen as a task for religious and private organizations. In places where these organizations gave sufficient support, the public poor relief organizations had to take a step back. However, whether this would happen in reality depended on actual developments in society. Heemskerk argued that the government had to make sure that it was possible for churches to fulfil their duty in taking care of the poor. Furthermore, when someone felt the urge to help someone

¹¹⁶ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 27 februari 1912, *Handelingen der Staten Generaal 1911-1912 II*, pp. 1674-78.

else, the state should make room and not be in the way of this private initiative. Paramount for Heemskerk was not the question of which type of organization was best suited for relieving the poor. All the different organizations had to do their work to the best of their abilities and they should learn from each other. Public support should only be given according to the subsidiarity principle, only when a person was not helped sufficiently by anyone else should the government step in. The minister stressed that he was against financial support from the national state for the relief of the poor. Municipalities should be responsible for taking care of their own poor, whether through local charity organizations or via taxes and the local government. Every place had to be responsible for its own expenses, which, according to Heemskerk, could only be considered to be fair.¹¹⁷

In reaction to this speech, Tydeman emphasised once more that he thought that the public poor relief organizations were just as important as the religious and private variants and that he foresaw a future in which the role of public poor relief would only keep on growing. He also argued that the state should help municipalities who struggled to pay for the support of the poor. Tydeman wanted the state to act as a backup for the municipalities, since poorer municipalities were not able to carry the risk of poverty on their own.¹¹⁸

What followed in the debate was the proposal of different amendments. Quite a few of them came from, and were defended by, socialist Willem Vliegen. In one of his amendments he argued for a change in the bill that would allow organizations to refuse support for people only on economic and not on other grounds.¹¹⁹ Other proposals came from the liberal opposition and often advocated the increase of the role of the state. These amendments,

¹¹⁷ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 27 februari 1912, *Handelingen der Staten Generaal 1911-1912 II*, pp. 1679-80.

¹¹⁸ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 27 februari 1912, *Handelingen der Staten Generaal 1911-1912 II*, p. 1681.

¹¹⁹ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 28 februari 1912, *Handelingen der Staten Generaal 1911-1912 II*, pp. 1696-97

however, were not successful.¹²⁰ On 14 March 1912, after other, successful, amendments had been included in the draft, the bill passed the Second Chamber.¹²¹

Conclusion

The debate had taken place during three days. The Preparation Committee, with members of different parties had played an important advisory role during the debate. All the different speakers in the debate had been in favour of a new Poor Law. However, while liberals and socialists were in favour of a more prominent role for the public poor relief organizations and for financial support from the state, the confessional parties remained faithful to the principle of confining public poor relief organizations to a subsidiary role. Also the confessional members, like Abraham Kuyper, however, agreed on the necessity of having public poor relief organizations working alongside the religious and private ones. Kuyper did not rule out a growing role for the public poor relief in the future, although this was certainly not his preferred choice. The next chapter will consider how the just described debate differed from the one that had taken place more than half a century before.

¹²⁰ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 28 februari 1912, *Handelingen der Staten Generaal 1911-1912 II*, Handelingen Tweede Kamer 29 februari 1912, *Handelingen der Staten Generaal 1911-1912 II*.

¹²¹ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 14 maart 1912, *Handelingen der Staten Generaal 1911-1912 II*, p. 1920.

5. Comparisons

‘In any case, the Netherlands remains a Janus-headed welfare regime, combining both social democratic and conservative attributes.’¹²²

Many works about social policies, such as Esping-Andersen’s study on different welfare regimes, show that comparisons between different periods, regions and countries can bring similarities and differences to the fore that contribute to the knowledge on which factors have played a role in the emergence and growth of social policies. The first part of this chapter compares the parliamentary debates about the Poor Law in the Netherlands in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The second part of the chapter looks at the poor relief situation in other Western countries in the nineteenth century.

Comparison Dutch debates

Scholars agree that the Poor Law of 1912 did, in essence, not differ much from the one of 1854. Wintle states that ‘the role of the churches was maintained in the next major Poor Law, of 1912, the product of a confessional government, which still viewed poor relief as charity provision by the churches in the first place...’¹²³ The result of Goeman Borgesius’ attempt to make a more radical change in the Poor Law has been described by Van Leeuwen as: ‘also these reforms of the poor relief came to nothing. Again an attempt to extend the authority of the state, and to confine the power of the ecclesiastical and private poor relief, had been repulsed.’¹²⁴ Thus, the Poor Laws of 1854 and 1912 did not differ that much. The previous chapters, however, have shown that the same cannot be said about the Poor Law debates in the national parliament. The two debates differ much more than one would expect from

¹²² G. Esping-Andersen, *Social foundations of postindustrial economies* (Oxford, 2003), p. 88.

¹²³ Wintle, *An Economic and Social History*, p. 276.

¹²⁴ Van Leeuwen, ‘Armenzorg 1800-1912’, p. 294: ‘Ook deze hervormingen van de armenzorg stokten. Weer was een poging tot uitbreiding van het gezag van de staat in deze, en een beperking van de macht van de kerkelijke en particuliere armenzorg, afgeslagen.’

looking at the resulting laws. Unfortunately, the differences between the debates have not received much attention from scholars so far, which is a missed opportunity since they show how the Dutch national parliament's thinking about taking care of the poor and the role of the state did change during the second half of the nineteenth century. Three striking differences come to the fore when we compare both debates.

The first important difference is the thinking about public poor relief. The parliamentary opinion in this regards had changed by almost 180 degrees in half a century. In the debate in the 1850s, the public poor relief had been pictured by a majority of the parliament, including Minister Van Reenen, as a necessary temporary arrangement. In the early twentieth-century debate, the role of public poor relief, though seen by most members of the parliament as subsidiary to the other organizations, was accepted by everyone as being an indispensable part of the total poor relief system. The churches, who had sent the parliament their arguments against people receiving additional support from the public poor relief,¹²⁵ could not count on the same support in parliament as they had in the mid-nineteenth-century debate. In the debate of the early twentieth century, in striking contrast to the earlier debate, nobody spoke out against the idea that additional public support should be given to poor people who did not receive sufficient support from the private or ecclesiastical organizations.

The second important difference concerns the involvement of the state in poor relief in general. In the 1850s, a majority of the parliament did not regard poor relief as a task for the state, because taking care of the poor was seen as a religious and moral task and not as a governmental one. Preferably the government should not even have to concern itself with poor relief legislation. In the debate in the early twentieth century, by contrast, there was no question about whether the state should act as regulator in the support of the poor and had the right to receive information from the different poor relief organizations. A good illustration in

¹²⁵ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 27 februari 1912, *Handelingen der Staten Generaal 1911-1912 II*, p. 1672.

this regards is to compare the different foreign examples that the leaders of the Calvinistic groups gave in both debates. In the debate of 1854, Groen van Prinsterer had brought up the example of the Scotsman Thomas Chalmers, who had successfully attacked poverty in Edinburgh by increasing ecclesiastical and private support while decreasing the public poor relief. Groen van Prinsterer had argued that the example of Chalmers showed that state involvement only made things worse.¹²⁶ Kuyper, one of the leaders of the Orthodox Protestant party in the early twentieth century, came up with a very different international example. He brought forward that in other largely Protestant Western European countries the state had taken up an important role in the poor relief system. Kuyper believed that the example of these Protestant countries made clear that Calvinists in the Netherlands had been too negative towards state involvement in the relief of the poor and that state involvement actually was legitimate.¹²⁷

The third important difference is to be found in the growing importance of national responsibility for taking care of the poor. Already the reform of the Poor Law in 1870 had changed the law in such a way that municipalities now had also to take care, on their own expense, of people who came from other places. In doing so, the government shifted the responsibility for taking care of the poor from rural, often poorer, municipalities from which people migrated, to the richer municipalities where the migrants had moved to. Now, responsibility for taking care of the poor went further than the responsibility for one's native, local population. In the debate of the 1850s the idea that the state had the right to regulate the poor relief at all had been highly disputed. In the early twentieth century this idea was completely accepted and it was even suggested that the national state should also contribute financially to different forms of poor relief, or at least act as a guarantor for municipalities that struggled in meeting their Poor Law obligations. Although this idea was not very

¹²⁶ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 13 mei 1854, *Bijblad van de Nederlandse Staats-courant, 1853-1854*, p. 829.

¹²⁷ Handelingen Tweede Kamer 27 februari 1912, *Handelingen der Staten Generaal 1911-1912 II*, p. 1676.

enthusiastically received and was not included in the law, the fact that such a suggestion occurred, was something that would have been unthinkable in the previous debate. Evidently, taking care of the poor had become more of a national concern than it had been half a century before.

International comparison

Western European countries already had, before the state became much more involved in implementing social policies towards the end of the nineteenth century, a wide network of charity organizations. In England and Wales there were already national regulations since the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601. Here, locally organized public poor relief authorities emerged all over the country.¹²⁸ Interestingly enough, the role of the English public poor relief decreased during the second half of the nineteenth century due to changes in legislation and execution. The percentage of the population supported by public poor relief went down from 12 per cent in 1849 to 5 per cent in 1900. Towards the end of the nineteenth century large groups of destitute people survived via self-help, mutual aid and voluntary charity rather than via support from the public poor relief.¹²⁹

In mid-nineteenth-century Germany both liberals and conservatives had second thoughts about the regulation of poor relief by law. However, when proposed legislation took sufficient note of their views, they agreed with the new social policies of the unified empire.¹³⁰ Also, the fact that local and central German governments had already played a role in poor relief for centuries made a bigger role for the state easier to accept. The German state legitimated itself as the regulator of society and saw public poor relief as part of this task.¹³¹

In the Scandinavian countries the national state had a big say in the nineteenth-century poor

¹²⁸ Van Damme, *Armenzorg*, pp. 300-1.

¹²⁹ A. Kidd, *State, Society, and the Poor* (Houndmills, 1999), pp. 11-12.

¹³⁰ L. Frohman, *Poor Relief and Welfare in Germany from the Reformation to World War I* (New York, 2008), p. 79.

¹³¹ Van Damme, *Armenzorg*, p. 301.

relief system. In Denmark, for example, local authorities did not have the right to change the taxation for poor relief since this fall under authority of the national government.¹³²

The revolutionary regime in France had tried to centralize and rationalize poor relief arrangements. During the thermidorian and Napoleonic periods, however, the Church regained its central position in poor relief and the central government decreased its involvement.¹³³ In France, like in the Netherlands, private, ecclesiastical and public poor relief were mixed together on a local level.¹³⁴ In Belgium the liberals were in power by the mid-nineteenth century. They had confined the role of the Catholic Church in the support of the poor by a law of 1859.¹³⁵ Though poor relief was also in Belgium organized on a local level, the state and provinces contributed financially to the support of the poor.¹³⁶ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Belgian Catholics and socialists organized themselves and became politically active. The leaders of these groups had to work together, and ‘by developing a sense of pluralistic toleration and cooperation, these leaders helped to lay the basis for the social welfare state.’¹³⁷

In the United States the poor received less support than was the case in Western European countries. Both the amount of tax and private money spent on poor relief was lower in the United States. Opposition against state involvement in the support of the poor was strong. The ecclesiastical and private organizations were believed to give relief in a more efficient way than the state and it was thought that an increase in public poor relief would result in a similar decrease in private poor relief.¹³⁸

The social question started to play a role in all developing countries towards the end of the nineteenth century. However, countries and states reacted differently to this question. Pat

¹³² Lindert, *Growing Public*, p. 78.

¹³³ Van Damme, *Armenzorg*, pp. 250-51.

¹³⁴ Lindert, *Growing Public*, pp. 40-44.

¹³⁵ E.H. Kossmann, *The Low Countries. 1780-1940* (Oxford, 1978), p. 238.

¹³⁶ B.S. Rowntree, *Land and Labour lessons from Belgium* (London, 1911), p. 497.

¹³⁷ C. Strikwerda, *House Divided. Catholics, Socialists and Flemish Nationalists in Nineteenth-Century Belgium* (Lanham, 1997), p. 401.

¹³⁸ Lindert, *Growing Public*, pp. 58-60.

Thane has stated that: ‘among the developing capitalist economies of the half-century before 1914 there was no clear correspondence between stages of economic development and of public interest and action concerning social problems.’¹³⁹ She proves this point by describing how agricultural countries, such as Denmark, New Zealand and Australia, were at the forefront of implementing social policies, while in an industrializing country like Japan social provision was seen as a responsibility for family and employers rather than for the local or national governments.¹⁴⁰

Both Lindert and Thane see democratization and the emergence of workers’ organizations as the main forces behind the growth in social policies towards the end of the nineteenth century. Lindert explains, following the theory of George Boyer, how English political elites had used the Poor Laws to make other people pay for the availability of cheap labour. When the urban elite gained more influence in the national parliament in 1832, stricter conditions for receiving poor relief were implemented. However, when towards the end of the nineteenth century voting rights were extended to poorer households, an increase in poor relief and the passing of other social policies took place. Lindert argues that growing political voice remained the main force behind the growth in social policies in Western countries until 1930.¹⁴¹

Conclusion

The three differences between the two Dutch debates have brought clearly to the fore that the parliament’s view on poor relief had changed during the second half of the nineteenth century. The continuing existence of public poor relief had been accepted, the national parliament had become the logical place to debate poor relief and there had even been talk about a financial

¹³⁹ P. Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State* (New York, 1996), p. 99.

¹⁴⁰ Thane, *Foundations*, pp. 95-98.

¹⁴¹ Lindert, *Growing Public*, pp. 80-85.

contribution from the national level. Although the Poor Laws of 1854 and 1912 had not differed that much, certainly the national parliament's view on poor relief had moved during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The international comparison supports Emminghaus' statement that the Dutch situation in the relief of the poor during the second half of the nineteenth century was quite unique. In no other Western European country seemed a growing role of the national parliament in poor relief to have been as controversial as it was in the Netherlands. The strong conservative voice against state involvement in the United States does remind of the Dutch debate. That the Netherlands was traditionally a country that was very much locally organized and that the religious and private poor relief were relatively large are explanations for the Dutch situation. The typical Dutch pillarization of society also influenced the poor relief debate. The conclusion will come back to this point.

Conclusion

The former chapters have given some answers to the central question of this thesis: how did the Dutch national parliament's view on taking care of the poor change during the second half of the nineteenth century? Chapter 1 has demonstrated how debate about a growing role of the state in poor relief started towards the end of the eighteenth century. The subsequent chapters have shown that the Dutch, rather unique, poor relief debate in the national parliament had changed during the second half of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in contrast with half a century before, the continuing existence of public poor relief had been accepted, the national parliament had become the natural place for debating the legislature of poor relief and even the idea of financial contribution towards poor relief from the central state had been brought forward.

Although the actual content of Dutch national poor relief legislation might not have pointed to a change in the parliament's perception of the state's responsibility for the welfare of its citizens, the Poor Law debates make nevertheless clear that the thinking about social policies and the role of the state certainly had evolved. Wintle has argued that the pillarization process allowed new groups to get a say in the national framework. When these groups had become well-represented in the national parliament, they became more willing to accept growing influence, though on a pillarized basis, of the state in society. That is why confessional political parties, at the beginning of the twentieth century, could accept a growing role of the state in poor relief.¹⁴² This theory confirms the importance that Lindert and Thane attribute to the democratization process for the growth in social policies.

When the emancipation process was over, the pillars in the Dutch society started to crumble. This can be illustrated by the fact that the most important laws for the Dutch welfare

¹⁴² Wintle, 'Natievorming, onderwijs', p. 25.

state were implemented under confessional governments. This time the confessional parties, though inspired by Groen van Prinsterer's ideals,¹⁴³ did not only accept but even favoured a growing role of the state in taking care of the poor. The successor of the Poor Law of 1912, the General Assistance Act of 1963, was no longer based on the subsidiarity principle. Now the state had become the primary institution for taking care of the poor.¹⁴⁴

The notion of scholars like Wintle and Gouda, that nineteenth-century developments were a springboard for the emergence of the welfare state in the twentieth century, has been confirmed by this thesis. This is, of course, not to say that the emergence of the welfare state was in anyway inevitable, but the parliament's changing opinion about its responsibility for the welfare of (part of) the Dutch citizens made it certainly more likely that the state would increase its responsibility for the welfare of its citizens during the twentieth century.

This thesis has focussed on how the view of the Dutch parliament changed in regards to the relief of the poor. Future research could focus on how views in society changed during the same period. Did public opinion show similar changes? How did parliamentary and public opinion influence each other? Furthermore, a more detailed international comparison could come up with new knowledge on how the peculiarity of pillarization influenced the debate about social policies in the Netherlands.

De Swaan has described the emergence of the Dutch welfare state as 'a long sizzle and a big bang'.¹⁴⁵ This thesis has shown that the sizzle could already be heard in the nineteenth-century parliamentary debate about poor relief. Discussion about social policies, redistribution and state responsibility has continued ever since. Debate about the poor and poor relief, partly due to a changing perception of what 'being poor' means, also continues to the present day.

The Poor: Who Cares?

¹⁴³ T.E. Krijger, 'Een veldheer met vele legers. De partijpolitieke erfenis van Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer', *Trajecta* (July 2015), pp. 85-120 at p. 85.

¹⁴⁴ De Swaan, *In Care*, p. 215.

¹⁴⁵ De Swaan, *In Care*, p. 210.

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Picture on front page:

- Painting: Eetzaal van het Joods oudeliedengesticht in Amsterdam [http://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/nl/details.php?cps=30&canon_id=221] (accessed on 25 April 2016).