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The Legacy of Pillarization

Trade Union Confederations and Political Parties in the Netherlands

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines the relationship between trade union confederations and political parties in the Netherlands. The Netherlands stands out from many countries by having a historical tradition of Christian-democratic trade unionism due to the legacy of pillarization, when Dutch social and political life was segmented into tight religious and ideological networks. As a result, the analysis of party-trade union links considers both social-democratic and socialist as well as Christian-democratic parties. Compared to previous historical periods the current relationships between Dutch political parties and trade union confederations are relatively weak. There are few institutionalized links between the two, and cooperation mainly takes place when the two share common interests. The chapter discusses the reasons why we see only weak links between parties and trade unions, and proposes that corporatism weakens the need for strong ties between them.

Keywords: The Netherlands, political parties, trade unions, Christian Democrats, pillarization, corporatism

The Netherlands may look like a Scandinavian country, with political institutions that provide a fertile breeding ground for strong trade union-political party relationships. It has a large welfare state and a strong corporatist tradition. However, the relationship between the trade unions and the party political left has been rather different. Most importantly, there are strong divisions within the

Dutch trade union movement reflecting the fact that Dutch society has traditionally been pillarized—divided into four subcultures with their own integrated network of societal organizations, including trade unions and parties. During this period, major parties and ideologically aligned trade unions had strong personal, organizational, and ideological ties. Trade unionism was not, therefore, exclusive to the left. In addition, Christian Democratic parties had ties with trade unions—ties which we examine in this chapter. Indeed, current Dutch trade union confederations have (part of their) roots in Christian Democratic trade unionism. In the mid-1960s these pillarized ties weakened at the mass and elite level, but the legacy of pillarization is nevertheless reflected in the fragmentation of today's party and trade union systems in the Netherlands in which trade unions interact with parties of many different political colours.

The divisions within both trade unions and political parties lead to two questions in our analysis. With which kind of trade union confederations does the Dutch social-democratic Labour Party have relationships? And do Dutch trade union confederations chose to link themselves to one party or to several?

(p.187) A Pillarized Past

We examine three parties and three trade union confederations. Our analysis focuses on the three government-recognized, trade union confederations: the Dutch Federation Trade Union Movement (*Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging*, FNV), with over a million members, is by far the largest trade union confederation; the Christian National Trade Union Confederation (*Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond*, CNV) has a Christian-social profile and 300,000 members; and the small, white-collar Confederation for Middle and Higher Personnel (*Vakcentrale voor Middelbaar en Hoger Personeel*, MHP) with over 100,000 members, which in April 2014 reconfigured itself as the Trade Union Confederation for Professionals (*Vakcentrale voor Professionals*, VCP). On the party side, we focus on the large, centre-left Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA), which has been the main social-democratic party since 1946; the mid-sized Christian Democratic Appeal (*Christen-Democratisch Appèl*, CDA), which was formed as a merger of three Christian Democratic parties, all of which had trade union wings; and the old-left, mid-sized Socialist Party (*Socialistische Partij*, SP), which has rapidly grown since the mid-1990s.

Pillarization had its heyday between 1918 and 1967. During this period the directorates of the different pillarized organizations were interlocked. As an example, the leader of the Dutch Catholic Trade Union Confederation (*Nederlands Katholiek Vakverbond*, NKV) was a member of parliament for the Catholic People's Party (*Katholieke Volkspartij*, KVP). The Catholics represented the largest and best-organized pillar: in 1964, 80 per cent of NKV members voted KVP (Lijphart 1968a, 43). However, the links between pillarized organizations began to weaken in the 1960s. In the Catholic pillar, the NKV severed its bonds with the KVP and oriented itself more towards the PvdA (Bank

1985, 315). In less than fifteen years, the Catholic family grew apart: the KVP formed the non-denominational CDA together with two Protestant parties, and the NKV merged with the secular Dutch Trade Union Confederation (*Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen*, NVV) to form the FNV.

Other pillars were weaker: the social-democrats shared some institutions (e.g. schools) with the liberals, but the relationship between the secular trade union NVV and the Labour Party was as strong as the relationship between the Catholic federation and party, the NKV and the KVP. The tacit agreement was that one NVV board member could serve as an MP and another on the national executive (Hueting et al. 1983, 157). Overlap between the two was visible at the mass-level: in 1964, 80 per cent of the NVV members voted for the PvdA and, in 1968, 44 per cent of PvdA members were members of the NVV (Lijphart 1968a, 43; Mulder 2012, 141). The links at the elite level began to weaken in the early 1970s when the agreement about mutual representation in decision-making bodies was cancelled by the PvdA. To replace these formal **(p.188)** ties, the PvdA founded a working group of trade unionists consisting of all unions and party activists (Koole 1986, 190). However, this group was never able to fulfil its role and was dissolved in the late 1980s.

The Protestant parties and trade unions kept more of a distance from each other. The two Protestant parties, the Christian Historical Union (*Christelijk-Historische Unie*, CHU) and the Anti-Revolutionary Party (*Anti-Revolutionaire Partij*, ARP) cooperated with the CNV: it had representatives in both parliamentary parties until the early 1970s (Hazenbosch 2009, 410). After the formation of the CDA, the CNV established links with this party (Hazenbosch 2009, 521). At the voter level, 35 per cent of CNV members voted for CHU and 33 per cent voted for ARP in 1964 (Lijphart 1968a, 43). However, the conservative economic course of the Christian Democrats estranged the two (Hazenbosch 2009, 516). A formal committee of the CDA and the CNV meant for regular consultation was formed in 1981, but it was short-lived (Hazenbosch 2009, 517). Since the 1980s, CNV members have no longer voted exclusively for Christian Democratic parties (Hazenbosch 2009, 524).

Eventually, the pillarized structure started to weaken due to organizations merging across subcultural lines. The largest Dutch trade union confederation FNV was founded in 1982 as a merger of the social-democratic trade union confederation NVV and the Catholic NKV, although one Catholic trade union for higher personnel did not agree with the formation of the FNV and broke away to form the core of the white-collar MHP, the third-largest Dutch trade union confederation (van der Velden 2005, 151)—one with a right-wing economic orientation and no formal ties to parties. The FNV, meanwhile, was politically and religiously neutral (van der Velden 2005, 152). Its members were not exclusively oriented to one party: in 1986, half of FNV members voted PvdA and one-fifth CDA (van Praag 1987). According to FNV chair Wim Kok (1984, 258),

the relationship between the leader of the Labour Party and the chair of the FNV was informal and irregular. Still the relationship between the two was different from other relationships: in 1986, for instance, Kok, then a trade unionist, became PvdA leader without having any previous political function. He is not the only one: five of the six FNV chairs had positions in the Labour Party before or after they left the trade union.¹ This did not, however, prevent unions and party coming into conflict when the PvdA was in government during troubled economic times, notably over sick leave in 1982, disability benefit in 1991, and the pension age in 2009 (Otjes 2016).

Depillarization also meant the development of new political parties, such as the Socialist Party. It was formed in 1971 as a Maoist split from the Communist Party, but has distanced itself from its Maoist roots and adopted a socialist course. It entered parliament in 1994, and its electoral support, especially among FNV members, grew considerably between 2000 and 2010. The SP often criticized the FNV for neglecting the interests of its members in tripartite negotiations (*Tribune* 2002). It also began to support the activist **(p.189)** wing of the FNV. It has a special platform, *Solidair*, for SP-members who are active within the FNV and for trade unionists who share the party's vision of an activist trade union (*Tribune* 1997). Here, SP MPs and FNV activists meet to discuss agreements the FNV has made with employers or the government. In these meetings, the SP disseminates its arguments within the FNV. In this way, the SP became a potent force within it: by 2007, the SP polled better among FNV members than the PvdA (Interview NSS 2007). The SP's support of the trade union activist wing was likewise successful. The FNV now has two wings: a consensual wing oriented towards the Labour Party, willing to make compromises with employers and government, and an activist wing oriented towards the SP, unwilling to make compromises. The activist wing has become more vocal and is an important part of the trade union confederation's base. However, the consensual wing is strongest in the federation's leadership (Otjes 2016).

Pillarization left its legacy in a fragmented system of trade unions and parties. This kind of fragmentation may be less conducive to party-trade union relations because unions have to deal with many parties and vice versa. In general, there is a limited potential for exchange relationships between Dutch trade unions and political parties. Trade unions cannot offer Dutch parties a reliable constituency. Even if Dutch citizens tend to have very positive views of trade unions compared to political parties (van der Velden 2005, 1), the Netherlands has moderate levels of trade union density in comparative terms: by 2013 less than one fifth of the Dutch workers were unionized. Moreover, even in the 1960s the Netherlands scored among the lowest levels of class voting in comparative perspective: despite the fact that the Netherlands did have a sizeable working class, it was divided between religious groups. Depillarization did not increase the levels of class voting: although the religious working class increasingly voted for the

PvdA, the social-democrats lost their control over the secular working class (Nieuwbeerta 1996, 356). At the same time, the size of the working class dwindled to a fifth of the population. Finally, trade unions do not now offer parties finance, since the Dutch parties primarily rely on state subventions and membership fees (Andeweg and Irwin 2008, 78).² The main asset trade union confederations can offer parties is therefore public support: their relative popularity can be used by political parties to boost legitimacy. However, the exchange of general support between the government and the trade unions is typically much more important than trade union support of an individual party's proposal.

Corporatism has been a key feature of Dutch politics since the Second World War. The most important corporatist body is the Social-Economic Council (*Sociaal-Economische Raad*, SER), which advises the government on social-economic policy. A third of its members are appointed by the three recognized trade union confederations. Some argue (see Chapter 1 in this volume) that corporatism fosters strong relationships between left-wing **(p.190)** parties and trade unions, but the Dutch case may show that things are more complex. The institutionalized dialogue between the government and trade union confederations undermines the need for a privileged relationship between specific trade union confederations and specific parties. Instead, trade union confederations have a direct connection to the government, independent of its composition (Poppe 1980; Kok 1984). As left-wing parties have only been in government in the Netherlands for less than half of the last fifty years, left-wing parties do not offer trade unions an instant pathway to power. Corporatist structures, however, do so. Dutch trade unions have to deal with right-wing coalitions more often than not. In this way, associating too closely with the Labour Party means associating closely with an opposition party, which potentially weakens the ability of trade unions to make deals with the government.

Dutch governments are formed by a system of partially altering coalition governments: each coalition is formed by two out of three core parties: the Labour Party, the Liberal Party, and the major Christian Democratic party (until 1977 it was the KVP and afterwards the CDA). This makes coalition negotiations unpredictable: as every combination of two of these three parties is possible, it is unclear after elections which government will take office. Arguably, the pattern of coalition governance affects interest group-party collaboration: insecurity regarding future coalition formation means that interest groups cannot afford to lobby ideologically close parties exclusively, but need to lobby all three major parties (Otjes and Rasmussen 2015).

Relationships Today: Mapping of Links

Our empirical evidence on the nature of the relationship between the social-democratic Labour Party, the Christian Democratic CDA, the Socialist Party, and the three recognized trade union federations (the large FNV, Christian-social CNV, and white-collar MHP) is derived from the party-union relationship survey, i.e. structured interviews conducted with leading members of these organizations in late 2013.³

One thing emerged immediately: trade unions did not have overlapping organizational structures with parties. Moreover, collective membership has never existed. Guaranteed access to decision-making bodies used to exist within the context of pillarization but disappeared in the early 1970s.⁴

The Absence of Durable Links

Table 10.1. Reciprocal, durable inter-organizational links between party central organization/legislative group and union confederation, last five years (c.2008-13)¹

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Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Tacit agree ments about one- sided/ mutu al repre senta tion in natio nal decisi on- maki ng bodie s	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Perm anent joint comm ittee(s)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Temp orary joint comm ittee(s)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	c.d.	No	Yes	Yes

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Form al agree ments about regul ar meeti ngs betwe en party and organ izatio n	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Tacit agree ments about regul ar meeti ngs betwe en party and organ izatio n	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Joint confe rence s	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Joint camp aigns	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
<i>Party- confe derati on dyad — LPG</i>	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Tacit agree ments about one- sided/ mutu al repre senta tion in natio nal decisi on- maki ng bodie s	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

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Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Perm anent joint comm ittee(s)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Temp orary joint comm ittee(s)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	c.d.	No

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Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Form al agree ments about regul ar meeti ngs betwe en party and organ izatio n	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

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Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Tacit agree ments about regul ar meeti ngs betwe en party and organ izatio n	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	No	No	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	No	No

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Joint confe rence s	c.d.	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Joint camp aigns	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

⁽¹⁾ 'P/U' indicates responses from party/trade union questionnaires, 'CJ' signifies the authors' 'coded judgment' based on alternative sources in cases of diverging or missing P/U answers. 'c.d.' means contradictory data (diverging P/U answers), 'n.d.' means no data (informant didn't know/missing/unclear), and 'n.a.' means not applicable in this case.

As Table 10.1 shows, durable links are also quite rare. The PvdA has the strongest durable ties with the largest confederation, the FNV. Two out of **(p. 191) (p.192) (p.193)** three informants reported a tacit agreement regarding an informal discussion group between the chair of the FNV, its parliamentary lobbyists and its policy advisors, the PvdA chair, PvdA MPs, and their policy advisors. It was set up in 2012 and meets two to four times a year. The goal of this group is to provide an opportunity for the FNV to give input to the Labour Party, and it was formed as a reaction to the growing influence of the Socialist Party on the FNV.

The range of the FNV's political network goes beyond the PvdA, since its chair meets with the chairs of all parliamentary parties in a yearly round in September. Both FNV and PvdA representatives refer to the existence of joint campaigns by the PvdA and the FNV, such as a joint campaign by the Labour Party, the small left-wing party GreenLeft, and the FNV about childcare facilities around 2005. When the PvdA was in opposition, the social-democrats (but also the SP and GreenLeft) regularly supported FNV demonstrations. One interviewee pointed, as an example, to the campaign 'Poverty Does Not Work', which the FNV organized against the budget cuts of the first Rutte cabinet. The representative of the Labour Party's parliamentary party also mentioned joint conferences, but we found no specific examples of such conferences within the last ten years. The PvdA has weaker durable ties with the Christian-social CNV. The trade union representative mentioned the existence of a tacit agreement with the parliamentary party group to meet regularly. In contrast, there are no durable links between the Labour Party and the white-collar MHP.

The Socialist Party is linked exclusively to the FNV. The representative of the SP board (but not the FNV representative him or herself) mentioned a tacit agreement between the party and the FNV to meet regularly; there is at least one regular meeting in the September round. As mentioned earlier, the SP regularly organizes meetings where trade union activists and MPs discuss current affairs. However, unlike the regular talks between the PvdA and the FNV, these meetings focus on the trade union base, not its leadership, and the emphasis is on what the SP feels the FNV should do. Both sides mentioned joint campaigns: the SP is often active at FNV demonstrations and strikes, where it supports the unionists with soup, sandwiches, and leaflets. The SP has no durable links with the CNV or the MHP.

As the main Christian Democratic party, the CDA has historic ties with all three recognized trade unions or their predecessors. This is reflected in limited durable ties between the Christian Democrats and the FNV and CNV respectively. At least one side reports a tacit agreement regarding regular meetings between the Christian Democratic legislative party group and the leadership of the FNV and the CNV respectively. The leaders of the FNV and the Christian Democrats meet at least during the September round. The

respondents from the CDA and MHP also mentioned the existence of temporary joint committees between the CDA and the CNV and the MHP respectively. However, the **(p.194)** existence of such joint committees was neither supported by the CNV nor by additional written sources.⁵

The Ubiquity of Occasional Links

Table 10.2. One-way, occasional links at the organizational level between party central organization/legislative group and union confederation, last five years (c.2008-13)¹

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invita tion to party to partic ipate in the organ izatio n's natio nal congr ess	Yes	Yes	No	No	c.d.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

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Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invita tion to organ izatio n to partic ipate in the party' s natio nal congr ess/ confe rence	Yes	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	c.d.	Yes	Yes	Yes

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Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invita tions to organ izatio n to partic ipate in the party' s ordin ary meeti ngs, semin ars, and confe rence s	Yes	Yes	No	No	c.d.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	Yes	Yes

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Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invita tions to party to partic ipate in ordin ary organ izatio n meeti ngs, semin ars, and confe rence s	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	Yes	Yes

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invita tions to organ izatio n to speci al consu ltativ e arran geme nts initiat ed by the party	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invita tions to party to speci al consu ltativ e arran geme nts initiat ed by the organ izatio n	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	No	No

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
<i>Party- confe derati on dyad — LPG</i>	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invita tion to party to partic ipate in the organ izatio n's natio nal congr ess	Yes	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invita tion to organ izatio n to partic ipate in the party' s natio nal congr ess/ confe rence	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invita tions to organ izatio n to partic ipate in the party' s ordin ary meeti ngs, semin ars, and confe rence s	Yes	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invita tions to party to partic ipate in ordin ary organ izatio n meeti ngs, semin ars, and confe rence s	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invita tions to organ izatio n to speci al consu ltativ e arran geme nts initiat ed by the party	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No

The Legacy of Pillarization

Party- confe derati on dyad — CPO	PvdA-FNV		PvdA-CNV		PvdA-MHP		SP-FNV		SP-CNV		SP-MHP		CDA-FNV		CDA-CNV		CDA-MHP	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invita tions to party to speci al consu ltativ e arran geme nts initiat ed by the organ izatio n	Yes	Yes	c.d.	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No

(¹) 'P/U' indicates responses from party/trade union questionnaires, 'CJ' signifies the authors' 'coded judgment' based on alternative sources in cases of diverging or missing P/U answers. 'c.d.' means contradictory data (diverging P/U answers), 'n.d.' means no data (informant didn't know/missing/unclear), and 'n.a.' means not applicable in this case.

Occasional links are far more prevalent than durable links and they encompass a broader range of actors, as can be seen in Table 10.2.

All possible forms of occasional links between the Labour Party and the FNV were mentioned by at least one of the three respondents. As a principle, the FNV invites all national political parties to its conference. All three trade union confederations are also invited to the party conference of the PvdA. The occasional links between the Labour Party and the CNV are also relatively tight, although they are almost completely focused on the legislative party group. The only activities between trade unions and parties not mentioned by either side are special consultative arrangements of the parliamentary party.

The two trade unions approach the PvdA differently. Whereas the FNV is more focused on the Labour Party as a whole, the Christian-social CNV focuses on the political decision-makers in The Hague—perhaps a remnant of the special relationship between the PvdA and the FNV. Finally, links between the Labour Party and the white-collar MHP are limited to party and trade federation conferences and ordinary meetings initiated by the party.

As with the PvdA, all forms of occasional links between the Socialist Party and the FNV were mentioned by at least by one side. In contrast, there are no occasional links at all between the SP and the CNV and MHP. The SP is a party single-mindedly focused on the FNV; the CNV and the MHP appear to take no interest in the SP. Given the ideological difference between them, this is not surprising.

The Christian Democrats appear to have the most ubiquitous, occasional links with trade unions: almost every kind of link was mentioned by at least one side for every trade union. The only exception is that the CDA has not been invited to any special consultative meeting initiated by the MHP. The Christian Democratic central party organization is more active than the legislative party group, as it is invited to and invites trade unions to special consultative meetings, to which the legislative party group is not invited.

Individual-level Links: Individual Contacts and Personnel Overlaps and Transfers

Personal links between trade union confederations and parties can contribute to the smooth running of a corporatist democratic system. Here, we will look **(p. 195) (p.196) (p.197)** at the nature of the communication between trade unionists and political parties, and whether MPs have roots in the trade union movement.

The PvdA and the SP on the one hand and the FNV on the other communicate through informal channels primarily, such as face-to-face conversations. There appears to be less communication between the CNV and the MHP, on the one hand, and the Labour Party, on the other hand. The CNV and the SP communicate through formal letters and informal face-to-face meetings. The CDA's communication with all three trade union confederations takes place via formal letters, and informal written and oral communication.

Informal communication works best if MPs and trade unionists have a shared background.

Figure 10.1 shows the share of PvdA, SP, and CDA members of

parliament that hold or have held positions as officials and staff in the confederations of trade unions at the national level (including both the lower and the upper house).⁶ In 2013, SP, the Labour Party, and the Liberal Party, as well as the GreenLeft, had one representative of the FNV in their lower house group. Similarly, the CDA and the GreenLeft had one representative of the CNV in its lower house group. One of the PvdA MPs has worked for a MHP affiliated union. In the upper house, there are four representatives of trade union confederations: two representatives of the FNV (for the PvdA and the SP) and two of the CNV (for the PvdA and the CDA).

We have also examined the extent to which there are union-affiliated MPs in the Social-Economic Council, which is the pinnacle of the Dutch corporatist system. Eleven members of this official advisory body of the government are appointed by trade union confederations. In 2013, six of the eleven had public ties to parties. Three of the eight FNV councillors were members of the Labour Party, whereas one was a member of the social-liberal D66. One of the two CNV representatives and the sole MHP-member were Christian Democrats.

Figure 10.1. Share of PvdA, SP, and CDA MPs in 2013/14 that hold or have held positions as officials or staff in the confederations of unions at the national level.¹

(¹) Composition of both houses on 1 January 2014. N of MPs is 38 for PvdA, 15 for SP, and 13 for CDA in the Tweede Kamer, 14 for PvdA, 8 for SP, and 11 for CDA in the Eerste Kamer.

Overall Degree of Closeness and Range

We have discussed a number of different ways to assess the closeness of the trade union confederations and parties. We looked at durable and occasional links between parties and unions. Figures 10.2a and 10.2b present the total organizational scores of each possible pair of party and union confederation. Here we see that PvdA-FNV and the SP-FNV obtain the highest scores in both party spheres, approaching a medium level of strength. The scores for CDA and CNV are also worth noting, although somewhat lower, while in the other cases we see that links are generally weaker or non-existent.

If we also take account of the other data available, our results indicate that we can distinguish between four levels of intensity. First there are dyads between parties and trade unions, with a limited number of durable links **(p.198) (p.199)** but with a high number of occasional and personal links: the relationships between the FNV and PvdA and Socialist Party respectively.

Even if the relationship of the FNV with the former is somewhat stronger than the relationship with the latter, there are a number of signs that the relationship between the FNV and the Labour Party and the SP respectively are different from the other relationships analysed here. Our study may downplay the character of the 'special relationship' between the two somewhat, since the only indicator that taps the special relationship is the tacit agreement to meet regularly. The FNV reports meeting regularly with all parties, but the question is what is

discussed during these meetings? As one FNV-chair put it: the PvdA is one of a number of parties with which the FNV is in dialogue, 'but it is one with which we try to think a bit more about strategy' (Godfroid 1995). In contrast, the SP

Figure 10.2. Total link scores of central party organization-trade union relationships and legislative party-trade union relationships (0-20/0-12).¹

⁽¹⁾ The theoretical maximum link score is 20 for the CPO-dyads and 12 for LPG-dyads since some link items are unlikely to apply to the legislative party group and were thus not included in this part of the survey. However, when comparing dyads involving CPOs with those involving LPGs, one should still keep in mind that the latter's maximum involves fewer links than the former's top scores.

primarily has an intensive working relationship with the activist wing of the FNV, but not its consensual wing. The SP has pursued a strategy of mobilizing activists within the FNV. By organizing the activist wing of the base level of the trade union, the SP has become a major player *within* the trade union.

The second group of relations involves occasional links of a less intensive nature than the first category. Such links exist between the CDA and the Christian-social CNV and the white collar MHP respectively, as well as between the Labour Party and the CNV. Third, we have a group of dyads characterized by distant relationships. Examples include the links between the FNV and the Christian Democrats, and between the MHP and the PvdA. As a neutral trade union confederation, the FNV formally treats the Christian Democrats in an equal manner to other parties, but there is little love lost between them. The same is true of the relationship between the MHP and the Labour Party. Finally, and at the other end of the scale, we find examples of no collaboration. The relationships between the SP and the MHP and the CNV respectively are examples of dyads which involve no collaboration at all.

We also asked the trade union confederations and party representatives to assess the strength of these relationships themselves (shown in Figure 10.3).

Most of the relationships do not exceed the level of an 'ad hoc relationship', notwithstanding a few durable links. This is how the PvdA and the largest trade union confederation FNV both describe their relationship, and how the PvdA, CDA, and SP representatives describe their relationship with the Christian-social CNV. Parties and the trade union confederations tend to work together when they have a shared interest. The respondent from the SP describes the relationship between the party and the union as 'fairly' close, whereas the FNV representative describes it as 'ad hoc'. It is perhaps most appropriate to say that the SP has a fairly close relationship with the activist wing of the

Figure 10.3. Rating of overall degree of closeness/distance (average score) between the party and union confederation, last five years (c.2008-13).¹

(¹) Ratings in-between two categories reflect that the party and union responses to the survey question differed. None of the ratings differed with more than one category. The PvdA-CNV, SP-CNV, and CDA-CNV ratings reflect the party's rating only since CNV answered the survey question with 'Not applicable.'

federation. The relationships between the white-collar MHP and the SP and PvdA respectively are weaker than their relationship with the Christian Democrats. The left-wing parties feel distant from this white-collar **(p.200)** trade union confederation and the MHP itself thinks that its relationship to these parties is ad hoc. Finally, the relationship between the CDA and the FNV is more distant than the FNV's relationship with the SP and the Labour Party. Both the CDA and the PvdA have a broad range of links to each of the three trade union confederations, although these are weaker as the ideological distance between the union confederations and the parties increases. The SP is focused single-mindedly on the FNV.

In order to discuss the range of these relationships from the unions' point of view, it is necessary to also consider the other parties in the Dutch multiparty system. Officially the FNV is neutral, which means that it invites all political parties to its congresses and meetings. When it comes to more durable links, such as common campaigns, the party is more focused on the Labour Party and SP, as well as the smaller left-wing party GreenLeft. The CNV also mentions GreenLeft as a cooperative partner. Finally, the MHP reports that it has some links with the social-liberal D66 and the Liberal Party.

The overall image is one in which the FNV has a broad network of links to different parties but a special relationship with the PvdA and a somewhat more complex one with the SP. In contrast, the CNV focuses on the Christian Democrats and the Labour Party. The MHP has weaker links with parties but focuses on the political right rather than the political left.

Compared to the period of pillarization, party-union relationships have changed in terms of intensity and range. During pillarization, there were close, exclusive relationships in each pillar where directorates of trade unions and political parties interlocked and their support bases overlapped. Such links have now disappeared. The merger of Catholic and socialist trade union **(p.201)** confederations into the FNV meant the end of pillarized relationships. As a politically neutral trade union confederation, the FNV talks to and invites all parties. However, there are remnants of a special relationship between some trade unions and the PvdA, but it has weakened over time. All three respondents report a growing distance from the FNV. One reason is that tensions between the Labour Party and FNV have grown on specific political issues. All respondents mention problems related to the rise of the pension age (discussed in greater detail later in the chapter). Recently, a communication structure between the leadership of the PvdA and the FNV has been set up to ease the relationship between the two. At the same time, we see 'a new kid on the bloc': the Socialist Party. The party itself reports increasing closeness to all confederations, although only the FNV respondent reciprocates this view. The SP has been active within the FNV since the mid-1990s and has gained ground in the mid-2000s in particular. The orientation of the FNV to both the SP and the

Labour Party reflects a tension within its base. It has a growing 'radical' wing oriented towards the SP (which is stronger in the confederation's base), and a 'consensual' wing with strong ties to the PvdA (which is stronger in the confederation's leadership).

The relationship between the CNV and the new CDA was never as close as its relationship to the Protestant parties had been. Currently, the CNV appears to have as close a link to the Labour Party as it has to the Christian Democrats. As the MHP was formed after pillarization, it has always operated independently.

Cutting Links, Corporatism, and Coalition Government

The intimate relationships between particular political parties and trade unions that used to exist under pillarization have disappeared. Why did this happen? Depillarization, but also continuing patterns of corporatism and coalition government, are possible explanations. First, depillarization itself meant that parties and trade union confederations cut their ties and reorganized along new lines: the FNV was meant to unite all workers, religious or secular. Therefore it was set up to be politically neutral. After the CDA was formed in the late 1970s it pursued more conservative economic policies, estranging the Christian-social CNV. Close relationships between parties and trade unions were no longer appropriate in an era in which citizens no longer identified themselves as Catholic, Protestant, social-democratic, or liberal. At the same time, trade unions had relatively little to offer parties in terms of a traditional, direct exchange relationship. Pillarization had resulted in low levels of class voting in the Netherlands, which continue today. **(p.202)** Moreover, the size of the working class has been shrinking and the level of union membership is low.

Second, the context in which the parties and trade union confederations acted undermined the need for cooperation with specific parties. Corporatism means that trade unions have the attention of the government irrespective of who is in power. This goes against the standard hypothesis that corporatism would foster close relationships between parties and trade unions. If the trade union confederations act in too partisan a manner they lose the ability to work with right-wing governments. Instead, trade unions must have good relations with all political parties that are likely to get into government in the fragmented Dutch party system. With frequent changes in government composition and the fragmented party system, there is no guarantee that the PvdA will be in government. This also means that the direct exchange of votes for policy influence is unlikely to play a major role in the relationship between trade union confederations and parties. In corporatist structures, this exchange of policy influence for support occurs between political parties of any colour, trade union confederations, and employers.

What may account for differences in the closeness between different pairs of parties and unions today? More specifically: why are the relationships between

certain pairs of unions and parties (such as the FNV and the PvdA, or the MHP and the CDA) closer than between others (such as the CNV and the SP)? First, the extent to which unions and parties hold similar policy positions plays a role. Trade union confederations and parties have their own agendas. However, the left-wing agenda of the FNV comes closer to the agenda of the SP and the Labour Party. In contrast, the MHP and CNV are much more open to welfare state reform. Whereas the centrist CNV still shares some positions with the PvdA it is much further away from the SP than from the Christian Democrats. The white-collar MHP (and its successor) is close to the political right.

Second, resources play a role in the closeness of the relationship that develops. Although trade unions are unlikely to deliver votes directly, the trade union confederations can give public support to governments or they can organize public protests against government policy. Trade union confederations can be a useful ally for both government *and* opposition parties. The exchange between the government and trade unions occurs outside of partisan politics in corporatist structures: government parties trade influence on policy for public support. Trade union support for welfare state reforms is particularly important for the Labour Party. Its left-wing credentials have been under threat, which has led to the rise of the SP. Trade union confederations focus on collaborating with larger parties that are in government or had a history of government participation. Moreover, one of the reasons that the relationships between the SP and the trade union confederations improved is the increased size of the SP.

(p.203) Finally, agency plays a role in understanding differences in closeness between unions and parties. It would be a mistake to consider trade union confederations as unitary organizations that are able to set a completely collective course. Skilful parties can make use of the fact that Dutch trade union confederations are organized democratically and participate in union politics. The SP has used this opportunity to support the radical *wing* of the FNV. In this way it has been able to ensure that the FNV is much closer to the SP than it is likely to have been without its involvement.

Relevance: Comparing the Pension Age and Labour Market Reforms
Even though the relationships between Dutch political parties and trade unions are not institutionalized, they are of political significance. The existing party–union links contribute to the smooth running of a corporatist democratic system and also to the ability of governments to implement changes with broad support. One can see this in how the governments and trade unions cooperated during two major reforms after the financial crisis in the Netherlands: the rise of the pension age (2009–11) and the reform of the labour market (2013). There are important differences in the closeness of the links between trade unions and politicians in the two cases, with important implications for the speed of decision making and policy outcomes.

The first case is the proposal of a centre-left cabinet of Christian Democrats and social-democrats to raise the retirement age in 2009. The largest trade union confederation, the FNV, opposed this reform. The FNV-chair announced that she would make a deal with anyone (including 'the devil and his mother') in order to save the pension age. At the same time, informal contacts between the FNV and Labour Party were under pressure, as there were no FNV representatives in the PvdA's legislative party group (Otjes 2016). Due to the FNV's resistance, decisions on the reform measures were postponed. New elections were held and the FNV had to accept the reform when it was proposed again by a centre-right government. The agreement passed through parliament with the support of the Labour Party. The SP had been opposed to the reform and chastised the FNV for having acted against the interests of its supporters. The two largest unions in the FNV voted against the pension agreement, plunging the organization into an internal crisis. The case was one in which the weakened relationship between the PvdA and the FNV hurt both: they had to accept the pension age reform on the terms put forward by the centre-right.

The second case is the reform of the dismissal law and unemployment benefits presented by the Liberal/Labour government in 2013. Plans for this **(p.204)** reform dated back to the late 2000s, but had faced opposition. After the pension crisis, the FNV appointed a former Labour Party MP as its chair and the PvdA put a former trade unionist high on its list of candidates, with the two organizations intensifying their contacts. This allowed the new government to put forward its proposal for major reform of labour market policies with support from the FNV. The return of corporatist politics helped the government ensure broad approval for its policies, while allowing the trade unions to exert more influence on decision making.

The difference between the two cases underlines the value of contacts between politicians and trade unionists for both sides: politicians can adopt reforms more quickly and with greater support; trade union confederations get more influence on policy. Both reforms took place within the same, formal corporatist structure, but resulted in very different outcomes as a result of the decision by the Labour Party to improve its relationship with the FNV. Contacts between the two improved both the smoothness and the speed of decision making.

Conclusion: Post-pillarized Relationships

In the Netherlands today, political parties and trade union confederations operate independently of each other and mainly decide to cooperate when they have a common interest. The relationships between Dutch parties and trade union confederations are comparatively and historically weak: the strong ties that existed between Dutch political parties and trade unions during pillarization have disappeared and are weaker than they are in some other countries (see Chapter 15 in this volume).

Among the few formal durable links that exist between parties and trade unions, the strongest ones consist of support for each other's campaigns. Such links exist especially between the largest trade union confederation, the FNV, and the social-democratic PvdA and Socialist Party respectively. Occasional links are in place between the Labour Party and the Christian-social CNV, whereas the Christian Democrats have instead had weak ties to the white-collar MHP and the Christian-social CNV. Overall, the different trade union confederations chose to have weaker relationships with many political parties rather than an intensive relationship with one party only.

There are a number of explanations for the decline and lack of highly institutionalized links between parties and trade union confederations. First, the process of depillarization loosened the bonds between parties and unions so that specific trade union members no longer exclusively vote for one party. Second, corporatism means that trade unions do not need to have exclusive links with specific parties, as they have a direct link to the government no **(p.205)** matter who is in power. When it comes to explaining variation in links between parties and trade unions at the individual level, it matters whether the actors involved have shared policy preferences. As an example, we found that the SP has better ties with the left-wing FNV than with the centrist CNV and MHP, while the Christian Democrats also have ties to these centrist organizations.

Despite the relatively weak links between trade unions and parties in the Netherlands, there is evidence that such links can play an important role in smoothing decision-making in practice. This was illustrated in a comparison between the reforms of the pension age (2009–11) and the labour market (2013–14). In the former, the lack of collaboration between the FNV and the PvdA resulted in controversial and difficult decision-making. In the latter, intensified contacts between the two led to a smoother decision-making process and resulted in broader support for the chosen policy. In this way, the special relationship between the Labour Party and the largest trade union confederation in the Netherlands can still be useful, not least as a means of greasing the wheels of the country's democratic corporatist system.

Notes:

(1.) Johan Stekelenburg (FNV chair 1988–97) was a PvdA-senator; Lodewijk de Waal (FNV chair 1997–2005) was a symbolic candidate on the PvdA list in 2010; Agnes Jongerius (FNV chair 2005–12) is currently a PvdA MEP; Ton Heerts (FNV chair 2012–current) was a PvdA MP before becoming FNV chair.

(2.) The only example of a financial link between a party and a trade union we could find concerned the NKV and the KVP in the 1950s (Bank 1985, 310).

(3.) The GreenLeft is included in the study at large, but not in this country chapter due to space constraints. Our key informants in the other cases were:(1)

the chief of staff of the PvdA parliamentary party;(2) the chief of staff of the CDA parliamentary party;(3) the secretary-general of the SP executive;(4) the chair of the CDA;(5) a member of the executive of the PvdA;(6) the parliamentary lobbyist of the FNV;(7) one of the two co-chairs of the MHP; and(8) an advisor to the board of the CNV.

(4.) A table is not presented as there were no 'yes values' (coded judgments).

(5.) Moreover, because our MHP respondent sat on the CDA board *à titre personnel*, the nature of the committees may have been blurred.

(6.) Data were obtained from the Parliamentary Documentation Centre (2014).

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