

# Distributing condoms on the factory floor: Communists and sexual health in the Netherlands

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**Abstract** Dutch communists were remarkably progressive in their views on (heterosexual) sex, sex education, contraception and family planning. Many were active members of the *Nederlandse Vereniging van Sexuele Hervorming* ('Dutch League for Sexual Reform' or NVSH), and were passionate advocates of sexual health, and promoted the use of contraceptives and the legalisation of abortion. This progressive stance on sexuality and contraception was not led by the Dutch Communist Party (CPN). In fact, from the 1940s until the late 1960s, topics related to birth control, sex education and family planning had been given a wide berth in the CPN and its organisations. The CPN seemingly followed the example set by the Soviet Union, where, after a very brief moment of sexual liberation in the early post-revolution years, conservative views about sexuality, the family and household organisation had prevailed. Considering the Dutch party's refusal to address sex education and family planning, it is quite remarkable that so many of its members were such passionate advocates of sexual health. Based on a series of interviews with twenty-five cradle communists, communist archives, and a wide range of other sources, this article explores communists' stance on sexual health, and discusses their roles in the NVSH and the abortion rights movement during the Cold War. It argues that in regard to sexuality and sex education, the ideas of Dutch communists were much more in line with utopian socialist traditions that predated the Russian revolution as well as anarchist traditions carried through to communists, than with the Soviet ideology.

**Keywords** Communist Party of the Netherlands, sexual health, abortion and contraceptives, oral history

**M**y father was a sales agent at the NVSH and provided young colleagues at the factory where he worked with condoms. These young boys were often too scared and embarrassed to go to the store and buy condoms. He used to say, 'Those boys just want to score'. But he understood their urges and tried to educate them about sex. He would also take his nephews on walks during which he gave them advice about contraceptives and sex. My father felt it was incredibly important that a woman enjoyed sex. He always tried to teach men that sexual satisfaction is relevant for men and women alike and forms the basis of a healthy relationship (Alie b. 1949, Amsterdam).

Aside from communism, my father was also a staunch supporter of the sexual revolution, and he discussed anything related to sexuality openly and freely. Within the party, he was alone in this matter. He never passed on any of the party's conservatism about sex and sexuality. Quite the contrary, he provided me with very thorough and detailed sex education. 'Don't let anyone do anything you don't want', he always used to say to me. I think that's fantastic advice. My father was not only a difficult, tiresome and short-tempered communist; he was also a very patient father, who taught his little girl to read and went on long walks with her through the city of Den Haag on warm summer nights whilst explaining the solar system or discussing sexuality and procreation (Esther b. 1948, Den Haag).

Alie and Esther are two of the twenty-five Dutch cradle communists I interviewed for an oral history project conducted between 2001 and 2019 about rank-and-file communist family life during the Cold War.<sup>1</sup> Amongst the topics discussed during the interviews were sexuality and contraception. As illustrated by these two quotes, Dutch communists were remarkably progressive in their views on (heterosexual) sex, sex

education, contraception and family planning. Like Alie's and Esther's fathers, many were active members of the *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Sexuele Hervorming*, ('Dutch Association for Sexual Reform' or NVSH), the post-war successor of the *Nieuw-Malthusiaanse Bond* (New Malthusian League or NMB) and were passionate advocates of sexual reform. They distributed contraceptives and transmitted information about sexuality and contraception methods to their children and co-workers. Communist women and their daughters enthusiastically embraced the Pill when it was introduced in 1963. And when contraception failed, abortion – illegal until 1984 – was openly discussed in communist families as a viable option.

From its founding in 1909 until the eve of the Second World War, the *Communistische Partij van Nederland* ('Communist Party of the Netherlands' or CPN) supported the legalisation of abortion, sexual education for children, and the right to contraceptives for all, and these issues were discussed regularly and passionately by communist representatives in the Dutch House of Commons and in the communist newspaper *De Tribune* and its successor *Het Volksdagblad*.<sup>2</sup> After the war, these issues faded out of the public sphere and were no longer mentioned by communists in the political arena. Similarly, between 1945 and the early 1960s, topics related to sex education and family planning all but disappeared from the pages of the communist newspaper (which was renamed *De Waarheid*), and the magazines of communist women and youth organisations.<sup>3</sup> The CPN seemingly followed the example set by the Soviet Union, where, after a very brief moment of sexual liberation in the early post-revolution years, conservative views about sexuality, the family and household organisation prevailed. In the private sphere, however, Dutch rank-and-file communists remained staunch supporters of sexual reform, and passed their views on sex and sexual satisfaction, contraception and abortion on to their children. Overall, the shame and taboo surrounding sexuality in the 1940s and 1950s was absent in these communist families.<sup>4</sup>

In the past few decades, scholars have challenged the myth of monolithic communist dictatorship by emphasising national differences within the *international* communist movement, but also by underlining the dissonance between the formal and the informal within *national*

communist movements.<sup>5</sup> This article, which explores Dutch communists' stance on sexual health, and communists' roles in the NMB and the NVSH in the period 1920-1970, adds to this debate. It argues that, whilst the CPN changed its views on sexuality and abortion according to Moscow's whims, rank-and-file members of the Dutch communist movement did not. Instead they upheld utopian socialist and anarchist traditions that were often passed on by their parents and grandparents. Furthermore, their radical ideas regarding sex were also informed by their country's own distinct sexual culture, a culture that prompted the creation of the NMB and the NVSH, and formed the motor behind the success of the sexual reform movement.

### **A (very brief) sexual revolution**

Following the revolution in 1917, the Bolsheviks adopted a legal reform which seemingly catapulted Russia into the vanguard of sexual and gender politics. In the country's new family code of 1918, women were allowed to keep their names in marriage and control their own property, and spouses were forbidden to interfere in each other's private business. Obtaining a divorce became easy, and illegitimacy as a status for children ceased to exist. Abortion was made legal, though it wasn't encouraged, and was provided free of charge by qualified physicians in state hospitals. Before the revolution, anal intercourse among men was prohibited in the imperial legal code. This law was also thrown out and homosexuality was officially legalised in Soviet Russia in 1922. The latter, according to Frances Lee Bernstein, who writes insightfully about the Bolsheviks' attempts to define and control sexual behaviour in the years following the revolution, should be understood in the context of the changing attitudes toward homosexuality which reframed it as a medical rather than a juridical problem.<sup>6</sup> Though same-sex activity was officially legalised, treatment of gay individuals varied in early Soviet Russia. Some considered homosexuality a social illness that needed curing, whilst others saw it as an example of bourgeois degeneracy. Still others felt that homosexuality should be tolerated or even respected in the new socialist society.<sup>7</sup>

Though not everyone was on the same page about what should and

shouldn't be condoned, it was nonetheless felt by observers from the west that the Bolsheviks had swept away the moral double standard. Figures including American journalist and novelist Theodore Dreiser, Russian-American writer and correspondent Maurice Hindus, and Austrian doctor and psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, noted that, as a result, a sexual liberation was taking place in these post-revolution years.<sup>8</sup> However, the unintended impacts of the new family code soon prompted a swing back of the pendulum of sexual revolution. These negative impacts – which by the early 1920s had accumulated into a full-blown crisis – included a surge of single mothers who, after short-lived and casual relationships, were left to fend for themselves with no child support. Due to the fact that female unemployment was rampant in the early 1920s, many of these women had no other choice than to resort to prostitution. As a result of the rise in prostitution and casual sexual relationships, and the absence of reliable birth control measures, the incidence of venereal diseases increased dramatically. To resolve this crisis, there was an explosion of sex education being produced and provided by physicians in Soviet Russia. Bolsheviks considered sexuality and sex education medical problems that should be left to the care of trained medical professionals, according to Bernstein.<sup>9</sup> In the mid-1920s, the first People's Commissar of Public Health, Nikolai Semashko, dramatically declared that the obsession with sexual topics plagued daily life in Soviet Russia, and that 'only medicine could treat these ills and make the construction of the new society possible'.<sup>10</sup> Physicians had already heeded his call to address the country's 'disordered state of sexual relations' through a health advice programme, known as 'sexual enlightenment', which established a model of sexual conduct for those responsible for this new society. This programme's sex educators promoted a range of behaviours, including restraint, abstinence and concern for the collective at the expense of the individual. Bernstein argues that these behaviours bore a striking resemblance to the traditional values preached by the state after Stalin's consolidation of power in the early 1930s, which included pro-natalism and hostility to sexual experimentation and unconventional practices – such as homosexuality, which was re-criminalised in March 1934. By analysing the Soviet health advice programme of the 1920s, Bernstein shows that, in

terms of the values that were championed by the state, the shift from the supposedly sexually-liberated 1920s to the sexually-repressive 1930s was not as drastic as many scholars have argued. In fact, she calls the whole assessment of the 1920s as an age of tolerance and experimentation into question. In contrast with sex reform movements throughout Europe, Soviet sexual enlighteners left no room for pleasure and sexual fulfilment, thinking only in terms of sexual 'health', which they defined as the absence of a series of perceived deviant and dangerous behaviours.<sup>11</sup>

Lenin himself felt that sex received too much attention, which he deemed unhealthy and counterproductive. As early as 1920, during one of their famous interviews, he complained to Klara Zetkin that communists in Germany were spending too much time helping working people with problems surrounding sex and marriage. Lenin was particularly upset regarding a pamphlet written by a communist activist about the sex question which cited the theories of Sigmund Freud. In response to this German pamphlet, Lenin remarked: 'I have no confidence in sex theories expounded in various articles, scientific papers, pamphlets, and the like – briefly, in that specific literature which has sprung up so luxuriantly on the dung heap of bourgeois society. I do not trust those who are constantly and persistently absorbed in problems of sex, like that Indian fakir is in the contemplation of his navel'.<sup>12</sup> About the situation in his own country, Lenin said that sex problems were pushed into the limelight and were rapidly becoming the central feature of youth psychology. He felt that, instead of pursuing sex, youth should be encouraged to adopt a variety of physical and intellectual pursuits.<sup>13</sup>

## **The New Malthusian League**

Lenin's views on sexuality and the benefits of abstinence were widely shared by the conservative segment of Dutch society in the early twentieth century, which was also known for its deeply anti-socialist views, and, shaken up by a rapidly-changing society, was clinging onto an identity defined by late-nineteenth century christian morality. This was the driving force behind the introduction of the so-called *zedelijkheidswetten* ('morality laws') in 1911, which criminalised a number of

disparate activities under the umbrella of morality. Among the list of prohibited practices and organisations were the display and advertising of contraceptives, pornography, brothels, prostitution, homosexual acts by both men and women, and abortion. The enactment of these laws heralded the post-1900 political hegemony of the religious political parties over liberalism and were intended to place sexuality firmly away from public view.<sup>14</sup> This conservative sexual morality, argue Keuzenkamp and Bos, was due to a phenomenon known as *verzuiling* ('pillarisation') – the political-denominational segregation of Dutch society. From the birth of the Dutch state and nation in the sixteenth century, society was divided in three different pillars: a Catholic pillar, which consisted of formal members of the Catholic Church; an orthodox Calvinist pillar uniting members of several orthodox Protestant churches; and a third pillar, which was more secular, and included the majority of those who identified as Dutch reformed (a liberal Protestant doctrine), liberals, and a small group of non-practising Roman Catholics. In addition, a social-democratic pillar appeared at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> These four pillars had their own institutions, newspapers, broadcasting corporations, trade unions, schools, hospitals, building societies, universities, sports clubs and choirs. Every pillar, which united people from all classes, amounted to a, sometimes isolated, subculture within society. The Catholic, Protestant, and social democrat pillars especially competed with each other in their quest to keep members on the moral straight and narrow, note Keuzenkamp and Bos.<sup>16</sup> However, as we'll see below, despite this prevailing conservative sexual morality, a progressive undercurrent in Dutch society continued to do important work in terms of sexual reform.

After 1911, the organisation that had promoted birth control and family planning since its creation in 1881, the NMB became the object of hostility. In its early years the NMB, which shared Malthus's ideas on population but not on contraception, had enjoyed both popularity *and* respectability. In fact, it had been given royal assent by justice minister Sam van Houten, a radical liberal and a dedicated supporter of neo-Malthusianism. This royal assent was revoked in 1927 by Calvinist justice minister Jan Donner, who argued that the NMB, which had been offering in-person birth control counselling and provided its

members with printed information on birth control methods and available contraceptives, posed a clear and present danger to law and order. Donner's decision prompted an acceleration of campaigns against neo-Malthusianism, and local authorities began to prohibit meetings and the sale of contraceptives.<sup>17</sup>

Organisations fighting neo-Malthusianism were as old as the NMB itself, and, in 1899, these predominantly Christian groups merged to form the *Vereeniging tot Bestrijding van het Nieuw-Malthusianisme* ('Society for the Fight against New-Malthusianism'). Aside from Catholic and Protestant opposition, many socialists also initially opposed neo-Malthusianism. They refused to view poverty as the result of large families – instead they were of the opinion that poverty was the result of unequal social and economic conditions. Despite widespread opposition, the NMB was able to carry out its programme relatively undisturbed, continuing to produce leaflets and brochures on how to use condoms, pessaries, and other rubber articles, as noted by Jenneke Quast. Similarly, the passing of morality laws didn't affect the sale of these products or the distribution of educational materials.<sup>18</sup>

A year after the foundation of the NMB, Aletta Jacobs – a Dutch physician, women's suffrage activist and supporter of neo-Malthusianism – opened the world's first birth control clinic in Amsterdam, where she provided working-class women with free advice on birth control, sexual health and infant welfare. Jacobs was known within the international birth control movement for her successful clinical trials to test diaphragms – also known as the 'Dutch cap' – and her extensive counselling on the use of this method. A decade later, Johannes Rutgers, physician and long-time NMB secretary, began to provide similar counselling to women in his Rotterdam surgery, and trained midwives and nurses to sell contraceptives from their own homes and consult with women on birth control methods.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Rutgers soon became involved in radical politics, mainly feminism and socialism. And whilst Rutgers shared socialists' criticism of Malthusian claims, this did not stop him from becoming the motor behind the NMB. Rutgers's wife, the feminist Maria Wilhelmina Hendrika Hoitsema, was equally pivotal and served as the NMB's president from 1899 to 1912. Until the turn of the century, the NMB had been known for its anti-socialist tradition,



but, under the influence of Rutgers and Hoitsema the NMB distanced itself from this tradition and became appealing to socialists. After the Bolshevik revolution, the NMB began to look to Soviet Russia for inspiration and moved even further left politically.<sup>20</sup>

Rutgers was a great admirer of Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, anarchist and founding father of Dutch radical socialism, and corresponded with him between 1893 and 1894.<sup>21</sup> In a candid letter dated 7 November 1893, Rutgers provided Domela Nieuwenhuis with information about the use of condoms and the sponge, and disclosed his desire to legalise abortion and promote the idea of 'free love'.<sup>22</sup> The latter, according to Rutgers, would benefit women as they also suffered from the effects of abstinence. It should be noted that Rutgers, while extraordinarily progressive in private, was less outspoken about his views on politics and sex in public, so as not to jeopardise his practice and his role in the NMB.<sup>23</sup>

Following Rutgers and Jacobs, the NMB opened its first counselling clinic, the *Aletta Jacobshuis* ('Aletta Jacobs House'), in 1931, soon to be followed by twelve other clinics, which were called *Rutgershuizen* ('Rutgers' Houses').<sup>24</sup> NMB physician Bernard Premsele, a pioneering sexologist in the Netherlands and a member of the *Sociaal Democratische Arbeiderspartij* ('Democratic Workers Party' or SDAP), was appointed chief medical officer of the Aletta Jacobshuis. Premsele was deeply inspired by Magnus Hirschfeld and his *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* in Berlin. Hirschfeld had organised the First Congress for Sexual Reform in 1921, which led to the formation of the World League for Sexual Reform (WLSR). Premsele found the WLSR's comprehensive view of sexuality and its commitment to changing legal and social attitudes about sexuality particularly appealing, and became intent on establishing a Dutch section.<sup>25</sup> The founding committee he put together was predominantly left-leaning, and included NMB members, freethinkers, social democrats and a lone communist. Instead of adopting the WLSR's manifesto, the committee came up with its own. It called, among other things, for the decriminalisation of medical abortion, though it promoted education to reduce the need for terminations. It also urged the repeal of legislation that criminalised homosexual acts between consenting adults.<sup>26</sup>

Eleven years after Hirschfeld instigated the foundation of the WLSR, the Dutch section's inaugural meeting took place in Amsterdam, on 17 February 1932. Yet its life under the wing of the WLSR was short-lived. In May 1933, the Nazis ransacked the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* and destroyed its archives, books and WLSR records. Hirschfeld had already left the country and was living in exile in Zürich, where he died two years later. Due to disagreements about the future direction of the WLSR, the organisation was disbanded; however, national sections were encouraged to continue. During these years, the Dutch section was predominantly concerned with sex education. Its publications on the matter propagated the idea that attitudes toward sex should be natural, open, pure, without feelings of shame or guilt.<sup>27</sup> In the meantime, the communist on the Dutch WLSR committee, the lawyer Johan Valkhoff (1897-1975), busied himself with a proposal for abortion reform. Much like Rutgers, Valkhoff condemned abortion because it posed a danger to women's lives, especially when performed by amateurs. He regarded the sections in the criminal law code that penalised abortion as ineffective, since few people reported abortions, and perpetrators were rarely prosecuted. Valkhoff also felt Soviet Russia could serve as an example. After all, the country had legalised abortion in 1924, and, while the number of abortions had increased, female mortality rates had decreased significantly. Inspired by the Bolshevik example, Valkhoff proposed that abortion should no longer be considered a crime when performed – with the consent of the pregnant woman – by a specialist in a hospital during the first trimester of the pregnancy. Clandestine abortion practices, however, should be prosecuted with the full force of the law.<sup>28</sup>

The response to Valkhoff's propositions varied dramatically, and exemplifies just how polarised society was on morality issues. The liberal newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* published a short article in its legal column in 1931 that summarised Valkhoff's ideas and focused primarily on his view that existing Dutch law was insufficient in the fight against illegal abortion. The article doesn't explicitly condemn or condone abortion.<sup>29</sup> The Catholic newspaper *De Tijd*, on the other hand, unleashed an anti-NMB crusade around the same time. Its anger was mostly directed toward Valkhoff and Soviet Russia. In a front-page article about Valkhoff's book, *Het vraagstuk van de abortus provocatus*

(‘The question of induced abortion’), published by Erven F. Bohm in 1932, the author states:

We believe that aside from those who, like Valkhoff, look at Soviet Russia with blind admiration, not many people will allow such a terrible crime as the murder of unborn children under any circumstances. Abortion isn’t good or recommendable and is always a great danger to public health ... Valkhoff promotes the use of contraceptives to decrease the number of abortions. But throughout his book, it becomes clear that neo-Malthusianism leads to abortion. We read for example on page 77, ‘Those who provide contraceptives also practice abortion.’ And on page 29, the astonishing announcement that, according to the Chief of the Vice Squad in Den Haag, 7 out of 8 contraceptives providers also busy themselves with abortion.<sup>30</sup>

Curiously, the NMB was officially against abortion, though there is evidence that those providing contraceptives and birth control advice to women did indeed perform abortions.<sup>31</sup> The WLSR, whose goal, much like the NMB, was to ultimately reduce the number of abortion procedures, was more outspoken about the topic, and advocated the legalisation of abortion under certain circumstances to protect women’s reproductive health. However, the idea that neo-Malthusianism encouraged abortion was widespread, especially among Christians, and served as ammunition to fight the birth control movement in the Netherlands.

### **Communist support for sexual reform**

Valkhoff’s ideas and, more generally, sexual reform did find support in *De Tribune*, the Dutch Communist Party’s newspaper, and in the Communist Party itself.<sup>32</sup> In fact, *De Tribune* had already begun propagating the right to abortion on medical *and* social-economic grounds even before it was legalised in Soviet Russia. In 1917, for example, the newspaper’s legal column discussed whether a ban on induced abortion was justifiable from a revolutionary-socialist perspective. ‘Absolutely

not', writes the author, before proclaiming that society's smallest organisational unit, a household, should have the right to self-determination in regard to abortion. The state, imperialist or socialist, should not have the right to interfere in these matters.<sup>33</sup> A 1919 article titled '*Geen Malthusianisme!*' ('No Malthusianism!') is even more outspoken about matter. While it rejects Malthus's theories on overpopulation, poverty and working-class fertility, it supports abortion on medical *and* social grounds: 'To allow children whose demise is inevitable to be born, is a crime'.<sup>34</sup>

In the following years, as the NMB's leadership became more socialist, communists began to clearly align themselves with the organisation and fought for its right to exist. In 1924, communist member of parliament Willem van Ravesteyn vehemently opposed those politicians who wanted to curb the existence of the NMB by revoking the organisation's royal assent. According to *De Maasbode*, a Catholic daily newspaper, Ravesteyn had remarked during a political debate about the matter: 'It would be yet another stupid attempt by the most backward segment of society to force their outdated views, morals and attitudes onto the people of this country'.<sup>35</sup>

Communist women felt especially offended by the propositions by this 'backward segment of the Dutch population' – i.e. Catholics and Calvinists. A communist member of the NMB wrote the following in a July 1927 letter to the editors of *De Tribune*:

'[The NMB], under the pretence of fighting abortion, is actually encouraging it.' This is what the NMB is accused of with little to no evidence. It is also said that preventing life is closely linked to killing life. The men who make these claims are the same men who also bring us white terror, fascism and wars that kill millions of people in the prime of their lives ... For hours they babble about the crime of stopping new life from being created, while thousands of women in the society they try to uphold are physically worn and mentally broken within their monogamous marriages ... Women who don't want to have a child for the simple reason that they can't feed it have to rely on amateur doctors who make money off their misery and problems. Oftentimes, these women sustain perma-

nent internal damage due these illegal procedures, and are thrown in jail. But these men do not seem to realise that their own society is creating the problems they accuse the NMB of.<sup>36</sup>

Judging by the number of articles published on the topic in *De Tribune*, communist support of the NMB and the legalisation of abortion had intensified by the mid-1920s. These articles never failed to emphasise that more affluent women were able to afford abortions performed by qualified physicians, whereas proletarian women had no other choice than to see a quack to terminate their pregnancy. Additionally, proletarian women, compared to their middle and upper-class peers, had less access to reliable contraceptives. To fight this disparity, the Dutch communists campaigned to legalise abortion. The following statement appeared in the *Tribune* in 1925:

Motherhood is a cross to bear for proletarian woman. The party must agitate to change the criminal code. It has to become a possibility for proletarian women, under certain circumstances, to terminate an unwanted pregnancy, free of charge, and performed by a qualified medical doctor.<sup>37</sup>

Until July 1936, when abortion was once again criminalised in the Soviet Union, *De Tribune* published numerous articles about sexual health and abortion practices in the Soviet Union. These candid articles usually discussed the disastrous effects of criminal abortions performed by unskilled people under clandestine and unsafe conditions, and explained how the Soviet Union had eliminated these effects by introducing progressive laws that legalised abortion when carried out by experts in state hospitals and with women's consent. Instead of portraying them as immoral baby killers, these articles characterise (working-class) women as victims of the system, and call for societal changes to protect these women instead of vilifying them.<sup>38</sup>

The 'sudden' introduction of the repressive Soviet family code of 1936, which included the criminalisation of abortion, came as quite a shock to communist supporters of sexual reform. The communist press emphasised that, in the Soviet Union, gender equality had been

achieved, free childcare was available for everyone, and new mothers received generous financial aid. Abortion, once seen as a necessary evil and therefore legalised, was no longer needed.<sup>39</sup> Still, as illustrated by the following letter from Greetje, sent to Annie (the editor of *De Tribune's* women's page), women who had been passionate supporters of legalised abortion, felt unsure about how to defend Soviet Russia's decision to criminalise the procedure:

Dear Annie. I am always very interested in any news about the Soviet Union. I truly believe that workers have it much better in that country. But there are things I just don't understand. Like the new abortion law and the reintroduction of the family as the basic social unit. How is that possible? First, abortion is legalised, and the nuclear family rejected, but now all of that has been reversed. Do you think that's right? Isn't it just another way to restrict women's rights? When people ask me what I think of this, I simply do not know what to say. I don't want to attack the Soviets, but I can't say that I agree with the government's decision in this context either. When I read in the [non-communist] press that the Soviet Union has returned to its old morality and that it has restored the conventional family unit, I can sense that this isn't quite accurate, but still, I don't know how to respond. Can you help me? What should I tell my acquaintances when they attack me?

Annie's response to Greetje stresses that women in the Soviet Union suffered under the earlier, more progressive, family law:

It is correct that, in 1920, women gained the freedom to have an abortion as often as they wanted. No Soviet woman will deny that women but also men have been exploiting this freedom. It has encouraged carelessness, especially among men. In fact, it was women who initiated the request to re-criminalise abortion. They witnessed first-hand the damage multiple abortions can do to a woman's overall health ... In 1936, Soviet citizens know what they didn't know in 1920. That they are responsible for all their actions, and that it depends on those actions whether true democracy can

be achieved ... They also know that their government does everything in the best interest of all the people, and only introduces laws that are in the best interest for all people. Don't forget that women in the Soviet Union can get everything they need: sex education by specialists if they don't wish to have multiple children, and care for mother and child if they do wish to have a large family. But the Soviet government, and all other citizens with a sense of responsibility, will not allow Soviet women to knowingly and willingly mutilate their bodies – bodies that also belong to the community, or in other words, Soviet society.

Annie's emphasis on women's welfare in response to the Soviet government's decision to overturn a number of progressive laws, including the abortion law, is echoed within communist movements in Western Europe. In Germany, for example, CP member Dr Friedrich Wolf – who had fought for the legalisation of abortion for many years and had been arrested for performing abortions – released a statement that he fully supported Moscow's decision to outlaw abortion.<sup>40</sup> He remarked that, in the Soviet Union, excellent care for mothers and their children formed the main weapon against the 'evil of abortion', commenting that, whilst many German women could not bear the thought of raising children in a society shrouded in hunger, sorrow, hopelessness and servitude, they would be delighted to do so in 'a free socialist Soviet Germany'.<sup>41</sup>

As illustrated by this quote, Wolf, like other communist advocates of the legalisation of contraceptives and abortion, appears to make a distinction between the situation in Soviet Russia and in his own country, and implies that abortion should be legalised until those evils that cause women to resort to this measure are resolved.<sup>42</sup> Advocates, nonetheless, became noticeably less vocal about women's right to terminate their pregnancies after Stalin had outlawed abortion, and instead began to focus on contraceptives and reproductive education to limit the need for abortion; the latter less publicly. In the Netherlands, abortion, a topic previously frequently reported on, all but disappeared from the pages of the communist newspaper.<sup>43</sup>

These developments didn't mean that communists ceased their support for the NMB and the Dutch section of the WLSR. On the

contrary, the successor of *De Tribune, Het Volksdagblad* (1937-1940), religiously updated its readers on NMB news, and especially reported on any attempts by the authorities to stop the NMB from meeting or organising events. The newspaper usually reminded its readers that it condemned neo-Malthusian social theories, but fully supported people's right to contraception.<sup>44</sup> Readers with questions about contraception methods were also advised to go to their nearest NMB clinic for information.<sup>45</sup>

Despite opposition from Catholics and Calvinists, these clinics and the NMB in general prospered in the 1930s. When the *Aletta Jacobshuis* opened, the NMB expected about six hundred patients in its first twelve months. Instead, 3000 women visited the clinic in its first year, which prompted the opening of clinics in nine other cities. The NMB announced that, between 1931 and 1936, the *Aletta Jacobshuis* in Amsterdam alone had assisted 15,343 women (who between them had visited the clinic 44,875 times). About seventy per cent of these patients had come for information about birth control.<sup>46</sup>

Whereas the NMB focused on sexual education for married couples, in the 1930s, the communist press also stressed the importance of such education for children. From a pedagogical viewpoint, the advice given is remarkably progressive, even by today's standards. These articles urge readers to provide children with sexual education at a young age, before their own sexuality begins to emerge, and to answer any questions a child may have truthfully. One such article, published in 1936, firmly condemns parents' 'backwardness and stupidity about sex', which 'directly contributes to so much misery including venereal diseases, abortion and divorce, three ever worsening phenomena associated with capitalism'. When a child is fully enlightened about sex, according to the article, there won't be any mystery, and if there is no mystery, there is also less interest. And when a child isn't obsessed with sex, it can focus its attention on things that are important, such as social and political work. Parents were warned that the communist movement could not cultivate revolutionary young people when they were brought up with a capitalist bourgeois sexual morality characterised by 'stupidity, fear and fairy tales'.<sup>47</sup>

This advice echoes some of Lenin's concerns, mentioned in this article's introduction. Lenin observed that sex appeared to be the central



feature of youth psychology, and that, instead, youth should adopt physical and intellectual pursuits. The latter would mean more, Lenin asserted, than eternal lectures and discussions on sex problems. His answer to the problem was the introduction of a new type of sex education led by the medical profession. The materials produced by these medical educators 'enlightened' youth about sex and sexual hygiene, but didn't mention sexual satisfaction, notes Bernstein. Instead enlighteners promoted sexual restraint and abstinence, and warned that collective health was more important than individual pleasure. As such, sex in the Soviet Union was stigmatised through the establishment of a connection between intercourse and sickness.<sup>48</sup> Whereas sex education in the Netherlands and in the Soviet Union focused on fighting problems such as abortion and venereal diseases, and demystifying sex so the youth could concentrate on more important things such as overthrowing capitalism and worldwide revolution, Dutch communists, as illustrated by Alie's account in this article's introduction, did not divorce sex from satisfaction, and never promoted abstinence. This is most likely due to the fact that communists continued to rely on the non-communist NMB for sexual advice and education. The communist press recommended its readers to purchase works by, among others, the NMB's Dr A.C. Oerlemans. Inspired by Hirschfeld, Oerlemans wrote extensively about the importance of female orgasms and eroticism, and the harmful effects of abstinence and coitus interruptus.<sup>49</sup>

Overall membership of the NMB had increased steadily through the 1930s, and, in 1938, the NMB boasted about 30,000 members. Yet internal strife about organisational aspects simmered under the surface of success and eventually caused a schism. Premsela left the NMB and the Dutch section of the WLSR in 1938. He continued to write sex advice books and also set up a new organisation, the *Prof. A. Forelstichting* ('Professor A. Forel Foundation'), though this was short-lived.<sup>50</sup> In that same year, Valkhoff succeeded Premsela as president of the Dutch section of the WLSR. But by then the organisation had lost its appeal. The 1938 annual meeting of the Dutch section was poorly attended, and its last known organised event – a lecture at a hotel in the centre of Amsterdam – took place on 16 May 1939. According to Brandhorst, it is unclear whether the Dutch section disbanded itself voluntarily or was

forced to do so by German occupiers after 1940. Valkhoff survived the war, but many other prominent neo-Malthusians did not. Premsele and his family were transported to Auschwitz in 1944, where he, his wife and his daughter were murdered. His son Robert survived.<sup>51</sup>

After Premsele left the NMB in 1938, Ge Nabrink, an anarchist who was also deeply inspired by Domela Nieuwenhuis, became the organisation's secretary. Unlike the older, more moderate, generation of neo-Malthusians, Nabrink wanted to steer the organisation toward sexual reform. Influenced by Wilhelm Reich's radical theories about sexuality, Nabrink was of the opinion that the NMB's manifesto was outdated and a new version should reflect trends and scientific findings within psychology and sexology. The general assembly of the NMB agreed with Nabrink and passed a resolution to rewrite the organisation's manifesto. The NMB board also proposed a name change – 'Society for Birth Control and Sexual Reform'. But before these plans could be realised, Germany invaded the Netherlands and the NMB was dissolved.<sup>52</sup>

## **Dutch Association for Sexual Reform**

During the war years, Nabrink and NMB physician Dr W.F. Storm became active within the radical socialist resistance group around the underground paper *De Vonk*, a publication of the *Internationale Socialistische Beweging* ('International Socialist Movement' or ISB).<sup>53</sup> Some of those involved with the *De Vonk* had been members of the Communist Party but had left in the 1930s after concluding they couldn't support the developments that had taken place in the Soviet Union since the revolution. After the war, the magazine was renamed *De Vlam*, and united myriad radical socialists, such as anarcho-syndicalists, religious-socialists and council communists, who condemned any kind of totalitarian system, including that of Soviet Russia, and who advocated solidarity instead of class struggle and revolution.<sup>54</sup>

In 1945 Nabrink, closely assisted by Storm, continued his efforts to change the very nature of the NMB. He propagated the notion that 'a satisfactory sex life was the prerequisite for a healthy social-spiritual development'. He envisioned a 'brand new humane culture', charac-

terised by sexual freedom, equality, independence, togetherness, and a sense of accountability and responsibility.<sup>55</sup> He proposed a progressive NMB manifesto that recognised the sexual rights of children, unmarried people and homosexuals; a woman's right to choose; and the right to nudity. Though shared by many rank-and-file communists, Nabrink's ideas were too radical for most, and during the NMB's first post-war national congress in May 1946 a much more moderate manifesto was adopted. The assembly also decided to rename the organisation *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Sexuele Hervorming* (NVSH).<sup>56</sup> In 1946, Storm was appointed president of the NVSH and served in this capacity until he was dismissed from the organisation in 1953 for performing illegal abortions; Nabrink was secretary from 1946 until 1954, when he was voted out and replaced by someone less radical.<sup>57</sup>

Influenced by the polarising tendencies of the Cold War, the CPN became increasingly rigid and critical of anything that wasn't exactly in line with its own narrow political views. As a result, the party's relationship with the NVSH deteriorated dramatically during these years. Whilst still advertising NVSH meetings and referring readers to their local NVSH clinics, *De Waarheid* published a number of inflammatory articles in which it attacked the organisation's leadership who were branded Trotskyists due to their activities around *De Vonk*. These articles accused Nabrink, Storm and other prominent NVSH members of exploiting *Verstandig Ouderschap* ('Sensible Parenthood') as a platform to promote their own political opinions that were pro-American, anti-communist and Soviet Union, and pro-Willem Drees, the Dutch prime minister who was despised among communists.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, in 1950, Ger Harmsen published an article in *Politiek en Cultuur* (the theoretical journal of the CPN) in which he accused the NVSH of Malthusianism and reactionary tendencies. Harmsen argued that the NVSH leadership was using the organisation to spread unscientific reactionary theories that suggested that many societal disasters were caused by overpopulation.<sup>59</sup> This theory diametrically opposed the one held by the CPN, which posed that the earth could easily absorb an increasing population if all its resources were divided equally among people, and all 'imperialist parasites' eliminated.<sup>60</sup>

These contrasting theories led to intense debate within the ranks of the NVSH. Nabrink, who according to the *De Waarheid* had promised

during the NVSH's annual congress in 1950 that both theories would be discussed in the organisation's publications, decided in January 1951 that articles containing opposing theories to those held by the NVSH leadership would no longer be published in *Verstandig Ouderschap*.<sup>61</sup> Nabrink had reportedly come to this decision after several NVSH branches had complained about a piece published in *Verstandig Ouderschap* in December 1950, written by CPN and NVSH member Jules De Leeuwe (discussed by his daughter at the beginning of this article). De Leeuwe – whose daughter, as we have seen, described him as a 'tiresome and rigid communist' – fervently opposed the idea that overpopulation would lead to poverty and other social ills. His article – which according to *De Waarheid* meant to disprove this reactionary theory 'once and for all' – had met with outrage in the NVSH.<sup>62</sup>

Active in the NVSH from the 1940s until the 1970s, De Leeuwe represented the loudest communist voice within the organisation.<sup>63</sup> Aside from De Leeuwe, who was a psychologist, there was another communist in the NVSH worth mentioning. This was the renowned sexologist, Dr Coenraad Van Emde Boas, who was a founding member of the NVSH and active in its upper echelons. Though a member of the CPN according to some sources – others refer to him as a sympathiser – he was much more moderate than De Leeuwe, and willing to work with fellow board members regardless of political affiliation.<sup>64</sup> Both men, however, were passionate advocates of sexual reform – a passion not shared by the CPN during this period. Rather than supporting the NVSH's important mission, the CPN appeared more concerned with its board's political disposition. Internal party correspondence indicates that, by 1953, the CPN was convinced that the whole of the NVSH was run by Trotskyists. Instead of urging communist NVSH members to leave, the CPN instructed them to work within the organisation to eliminate any reactionary and pro-American elements.<sup>65</sup> Whether this was indeed the reason they stayed on is debatable. Instead of fighting the enemy within the NVSH, it is much more likely that rank-and-file communists wanted to remain members because they felt the practical benefits of NVSH membership outweighed these abstract theoretical differences. Corroborating this, Röling observes that, during these years, many members – communist and non-communist alike – did

not read the articles in *Verstandig Ouderschap* as they were extremely complex and theoretical, and just not that interesting for laypeople. The average member did, however, enjoy the advice column, and found its content very useful.<sup>66</sup> The parents of the participants in my research, for example, were first and foremost members of the NVSH because they firmly believed in people's right to contraception and family planning. They felt it was an intrinsic part of their radical beliefs and heritage, as many of their parents had been members of the NMB. As such, it appears that rank-and-file communists' NVSH membership was not dependent on the party's whims or agenda.

This loyalty to the NVSH didn't necessarily benefit the latter. In fact, during the height of the Cold War, the NVSH was suspected of being a communist front organisation, and the Dutch intelligence agency and local police forces kept close tabs on the organisation and its members. Interestingly, recently available intelligence reports describe the attacks on the NVSH in *De Waarheid* as an attempt to discredit Storm, weaken the board, and increase communist influence in the organisation. Alarmed by this development, the Dutch intelligence agency began a large-scale investigation into the NVSH in the early 1950s. A May 1952 intelligence report, distributed among police commissioners, indicates that communists had successfully increased their influence in the Zaanstreek, a region in the province Noord-Holland, and a follow-up report in November of that same year stated that the president of the Amsterdam NVSH branch was a member of the CPN. In 1955 the investigation came to an end with the conclusion that the CPN had tried to steer the NVSH into a communist direction, but that the latter had successfully halted these attempts and had remained a politically neutral organisation that welcomed members from all different political and religious backgrounds.<sup>67</sup>

## **Sex education, homosexuality and abortion**

Like most communists, De Leeuwe was an outspoken supporter of sex education for children. In the early 1960s, he published several articles in *De Waarheid* about his studies into youth, young adults and sexuality

– studies that were also discussed at NVSH congresses. These studies discussed the complaints of many general practitioners, educators and social workers regarding the lack of comprehensive and factual sex education – a lack De Leeuwe deemed had many harmful consequences. According to De Leeuwe’s research, about half of the population under twenty-two years of age were told that babies were delivered by storks; a quarter of girls were not informed about menstruation before menarche; and only thirty per cent of Dutch boys knew anything about ejaculation. ‘The list is endless’, writes De Leeuwe.<sup>68</sup> This situation was all the more worrisome as pre-marital sex was on the rise, especially among teenagers. This trend prompted the NVSH to introduce youth membership, and consultation clinics for youth, in the mid-1960s. At these clinics, people under the age of eighteen were able to obtain education about contraception and sexual health, and, with parental consent, prescriptions for the pill or a pessary.<sup>69</sup> One participant recalled that, in Amsterdam, the youth branch of the NVSH teamed up with the communist youth organisation for high school students, the OPSJ, to set up such clinics in the red light district.<sup>70</sup>

Around the time consultation clinics for youth opened, the NVSH had reached its zenith. From 1966 onward, membership – which stood at an impressive 220,000 in that year – began to decline. In a way it had contributed to its own demise. The NMB and the NVSH had filled important roles when contraception and associated education were hard to come by. By the late 1960s, this was no longer the case. Under the influence of the economic prosperity of the late 1950s and 1960s, which expanded educational opportunities for the generation born after the Second World War, the Netherlands rapidly secularised. In this new climate of economic and cultural expansiveness, traditional social controls and their associated morality were no longer tolerable. The aforementioned progressive sexual culture that had always been present in the Netherlands, albeit in the background, now became the norm. New laws that reflected this shift were introduced, including the 1969 law that allowed the unrestricted sales of contraceptives, and all kinds of contraceptives became readily and widely available. Mainstream women’s and teen magazines began providing their readers with detailed information about sex and contraception, and informative programmes

about sex and sexuality were broadcast on public television. Due to these trends, the NVSH became somewhat redundant after 1966, but it didn't disappear. It shifted its focus from the provision of contraception and sex education to the fight for additional legal changes, including the legalisation of abortion and the removal of legal discrimination against homosexuals.<sup>71</sup>

As discussed above, Nabrink had already suggested in the 1930s and again in 1946 that the sexual rights of homosexuals and a woman's right to choose should be included in the NMB/NVSH manifesto. Nevertheless, the post-war NVSH was surprisingly hesitant in both areas. For example, as noted by Röling, in the late 1940s, the NVSH refused to help a group of workers in their protest against workplace discrimination against homosexuals, and resisted publishing an advertisement for the *Cultuur en Ontspannings Centrum* ('Cultural and Recreational Centre' or COC), one of the oldest gay rights organisations in the world.<sup>72</sup> Instead, Van Emde Boas was instructed to write an article about homosexuality, in which he argued that same-sex desires should be accepted based on the fact that people were inherently bisexual.<sup>73</sup> His article ruffled more than a few feathers and prompted some *Verstandig Ouderschap* readers to send homophobic letters in response. The NVSH leadership concluded that, considering the roots and rationale of the organisation, the right to homosexuality should be acknowledged; but in practice it was a hard sell to its members. The gap between the NVSH's progressive rhetoric – inspired by sexologists like Reich – and its day-to-day practices was significant, and it only widened as it went from being a vanguard organisation, as people like Nabrink and Storm had envisioned, to a mainstream organisation for the masses.<sup>74</sup>

The NVSH's stance on abortion was similarly muddled. In 1946, the founders of the organisation ensured that abortion law reform was prominently on the agenda and had proclaimed that women had the right to choose and were in charge of their own bodies. Almost immediately these progressive ideas and aspirations disappeared into the background, and they didn't reappear until the late 1960s. Instead, the NVSH emphasised that it wanted to prevent abortion by providing sexual education and contraceptives. This didn't mean that (board) members were against the procedure; in fact, it appears that quite a few

were supportive of a woman's right to choose: it just meant they didn't think abortion should be discussed in public. In 1951, the president of the NVSH branch in Alkmaar was convicted of having had an abortion. The woman in question and her husband, who was the branch's treasurer, were both expelled from the NVSH. Surprisingly, it was Storm who insisted that the couple had to leave. He was also the person who blocked any attempts within the NVSH to form a study committee into the abortion question. The communist Van Emde Boas was in favour of such a committee, but didn't find much support within the NVSH. Storm's opposition was remarkable because he himself had been performing the procedure on a regular basis; but this has been in secret rather than in public, unlike some of his colleagues in the NVSH, who had sought to raise awareness. Storm defended his actions with the argument that he didn't want to discredit the NVSH and jeopardise the progress it had made in terms of the promotion of the use of contraceptives to reduce the number of abortions. As already noted, Storm was convicted of carrying out illegal abortions in 1953, and received a six-month prison sentence, after which he was fired from his role as NVSH physician, though he wasn't formally expelled from the NVSH, leaving of his own accord.<sup>75</sup> It would take another decade before the NVSH's paradoxical attitude toward abortion would change, and by then it was merely following a younger generation who were demanding change, instead of taking the lead.<sup>76</sup>

Cradle communists, who reached puberty in the 1950s and 1960s, agreed that their parents were much more progressive in their views on abortion than the official NVSH line on the topic. In fact, communist views on sexuality appear to have been more in line with Nabrink's proposed manifesto, which was inspired by that of the WLSR. There was one exception – generally communists did not acknowledge the sexual rights of homosexuals. Their ideas regarding homosexuality corresponded with those of the NVSH in the 1950s and, more generally, with Dutch public opinion.<sup>77</sup> Whilst some participants' parents taught their children that people should be free to express their sexual identity, most didn't discuss homosexuality at all. Again, others were convinced it was a disease, a popular misconception among Dutch people in the 1940s and 1950s:



Gay people were sick, according to my father. I can't remember when my parents finally realised that this wasn't true. Most people felt that way. My parents thought homosexuality could be cured. In my group of friends in the ANJV (a communist youth organisation), late 1960s, there was a gay man who was really open about his sexual orientation ... I can't recall it was ever a problem. We would always go out together ... He was accepted, but homosexuality didn't exist beyond that. It wasn't discussed (Mark b. 1950 Amsterdam).

These negative attitudes towards homosexuality disappeared in the early 1970s, when openly gay communists put gay rights on the party's agenda.<sup>78</sup>

Participants' parents' ideas regarding heterosexual sex, contraception, marriage and sex education contrasted dramatically with Soviet pedagogy. In the Soviet Union, sexuality had completely disappeared from the public sphere by the 1950s. Soviet pedagogues, such as Anton Makarenko, spoke of 'the secret of childbirth' and 'the sex problem'. They advised parents to promote chastity and leave it to teachers and medical professionals to enlighten their children about sex.<sup>79</sup> The experience of Dutch participants couldn't be more different.<sup>80</sup> Promiscuity was not condoned, but their parents allowed sex before marriage if the child in question was in a steady relationship. Many female participants started taking the pill around the age of seventeen and recall it was their mothers who suggested their daughters use birth control.

Whilst contraception was available and its use encouraged in communist families, mistakes could still happen. Whenever this was the case, abortion was an option when having a child wasn't. Several participants divulged that they had had an abortion in the early 1960s when the procedure was still illegal, and explained that it was their parents who had suggested they terminate the pregnancy and had made the arrangements.<sup>81</sup> Marriage was also optional and was definitely not forced when pregnancy occurred. Many participants' parents and grandparents weren't married or had married late:

My parents were very progressive in terms of sexuality. Living together, homosexuality, none of these things were an issue. My

dad's parents married when my father was fourteen. For financial reasons, it saved them a quarter a week. Otherwise they would have never married (Anna, b. 1945 Rotterdam).

Overall, participants agreed that their parents were tremendously open, honest and practical about sex:

I had a boyfriend, I was sixteen at the time, and when we started dating my parents contacted his parents to discuss our relationship. They decided that we could sleep together, but that we needed to use contraception. So I went to the Rutgershuis. They didn't want to prescribe the pill because they thought I was too young. Half a year later, or maybe a year later, it was okay and they prescribed me the pill. My parents supported this, they were a little ill at ease and were new to the situation. They agreed. Really modern come to think of it (Guus, b. 1946 Amsterdam).

Unsurprisingly, once the campaign to legalise abortion in the Netherlands began in earnest in the early 1970s, many communists, especially the generation born after the war, enthusiastically supported the cause.<sup>82</sup> They joined the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s that demanded acceptance of sexual freedom and satisfaction, and gender equality – values communists themselves had grown up with. The CPN, however, was slow to adapt to the changing times and shake off its sexually conservative attitudes. As the participants' generation, which was definitively shaped by the social movements of the 1960s, began to move into the party in the 1970s, the official party line changed accordingly, and the right to abortion – finally legalised in 1984 – and gender equality became important focal points.<sup>83</sup> Gay rights were subsequently added to the political agenda in the late 1970s, when the first fruitful collaborations with gay advocacy groups were established, and communist gay groups were formed in the party and in its youth organisations.

## Conclusion

By the mid-1970s, the CPN had come full circle in terms of its stance on sexuality and abortion. However, instead of being the trailblazer it had been in 1920s and 1930s, by the 1970s the party was – much like the NVSH – merely a follower of much larger and more influential social movements. Its rank-and-file members, on the other hand, continued the radical traditions of the earliest party. Unlike the CPN, their support for sexual reform had never wavered. Communist parents' progressive views on sexuality, abortion and marriage had remained the same and were transmitted to their children, with or without their party or Moscow's blessing. Their – sexually enlightened – children, in turn, would play important roles in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In movements such as the women's and gay rights movements, participants and their communist peers worked closely together with non-communists. These fruitful collaborations ended three decades of severe political and social isolation. As illustrated by the CPN's attacks on the NVSH, its isolation was partly self-inflicted, and partly the product of cold war attitudes that were widespread in the Netherlands. As the Cold War intensified, each of the four mainstream pillars, already not particularly welcoming to outsiders, closed their ranks to keep communists out. The NVSH was a rare exception in this context and remained open to communists. It provided an important space where communists and non-communists could work together when those collaborations were not possible elsewhere. Regardless of political ideology, many NVSH members felt connected due to a shared culture, and a progressive set of values that were radical though not necessarily Marxist, which had been passed on for generations. Though no longer relevant by the late 1960s, the NVSH, and its predecessor the NMB, was pivotal in breaking down sexual taboos, promoting emancipation, and encouraging personal and moral liberation.

## Notes

- 1 These interviews were conducted between 2001 and 2019 and form the basis of my book, *Growing up communist in the Netherlands and Britain*.

*Childhood, political activism, and identity formation*, forthcoming 2021, Amsterdam University Press. Respondents were interviewed on more than one occasion to investigate whether their attitudes changed as time went by and their circumstances changed. The majority of the respondents grew up in cities with relatively large concentrations of communists; Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Den Haag. The respondents were born between 1937 and 1956 and their parents were part-time communist activists or organisers. The parents, who generally belonged to the working or lower middle classes, considered themselves to be representatives of the working class.

- 2 *De Tribune* was founded in 1907 by a Marxist opposition within the *Sociaal Democratische Arbeiderspartij* ('Social Democratic Workers Party' or SDAP), which officially split away and formed the *Sociaal Democratische Partij* ('Social Democratic Party' or SDP) two years later. The SDP changed its name to CPN in 1918 in support of the Bolshevik revolution, and joined the Comintern in 1919. The Netherlands is one of a very few European countries in which a conflict between Marxists and revisionists resulted in a split within the socialist party before the First World War. Due to its powerful and influential radical tradition rooted in home-grown Marxism and late nineteenth-century anarchism, the early CPN assigned itself a vanguard status and was known for its stubbornness and refusal to follow Moscow's orders (see: A.A. de Jonge, *Het communisme in Nederland. De geschiedenis van een politiek partij*, Kruseman, Den Haag 1972, pp36-7).
- 3 These topics were however widely discussed in books published by the communist publishing house, Pegasus.
- 4 It should be noted that first-generation-communist parents raised in Catholic and Protestant families were significantly more uncomfortable about sex and sex education than those who came from long lines of radicals.
- 5 To name a few: Josie McLellan, *Love in the time of communism – Intimacy and sexuality in the GDR*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011; Kate Weigand, *Red feminism – American communism and the making of women's liberation*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2001; and Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen and Andrew Flinn, *Communists in British society 1920-1991*, Rivers Oram Press, London 2007.
- 6 Frances Lee Bernstein, *The dictatorship of sex: Lifestyle advice for the Soviet masses*, Northern Illinois University Press, DeKalb 2007, p63.
- 7 See for more information about homosexuality in the Soviet Union: Dan Healey, *Homosexual desire in revolutionary Russia. The regulation*

- of sexual and gender dissent*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2001.
- 8 J.L. Mickenberg, 'To be his storm over Asia: American women, sex, and revolutionary tourism in Russia, 1905-1945', in P. Rabinowitz, R. Barraclough, and H. Bowen-Struyk (eds), *Red love across the pacific. Political and sexual revolutions of the twentieth century*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2015, pp6-14.
  - 9 Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex*, p16.
  - 10 Ibid, p4.
  - 11 Ibid, p7.
  - 12 Ibid, p15.
  - 13 Ibid.
  - 14 E. Euchner, *Morality politics in a secular age. Strategic parties and divided governments in Europe*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p131.
  - 15 Due to their historically hostile relationship, Dutch communists were excluded from all social-democratic organisations and were therefore forced to form their own pillar.
  - 16 S. Keuzenkamp and D. Bos, 'Out in the Netherlands. Acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands', The Netherlands Institute for Social Research/SCP The Hague, September 2007, p23.
  - 17 H. Brandhorst, 'From Neo-Malthusianism to sexual reform: The Dutch section of the World League for Sexual Reform', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol 12 No 1, 2003, p43.
  - 18 'Neo-Malthusianism: Birth control in the Netherlands', An exhibit by the International Institute of Social History: <http://www.iisg.nl/exhibitions/neomalthusianism/index.php>.
  - 19 Biography of Johannes Rutgers (1850-1924), Huygens ING: <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/bwn1880-2000/lemmata/bwn3/rutgersj>.
  - 20 Biography of Maria Wilhelmina Hendrika Hoitsema (1847-1934), Biografisch woordenboek van het socialisme en de arbeidersbeweging in Nederland: <https://socialhistory.org/bwsa/biografie/hoitsema>.
  - 21 Many Dutch participants' grandparents had been supporters of Domela Nieuwenhuis before joining the Communist Party in 1909. As such, the Dutch communist movement was deeply influenced by anarchism.
  - 22 Letter from Dr J Rutgers to F. Domela Nieuwenhuis, dated 7 November 1893, International Institute of Social History Collection, Archive Domela Nieuwenhuis 205.
  - 23 Biography of Johannes Rutgers, 1850-1924, Biografisch woordenboek van het socialisme en de arbeidersbeweging in Nederland: <https://socialhistory.org/bwsa/biografie/rutgers-j>.
  - 24 Brandhorst, p43.
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- 25 Ibid, p46.
- 26 Ibid, p48.
- 27 Ibid, p52.
- 28 Ibid, p59.
- 29 *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 27 July 1931, 'Rechtzaken', p6.
- 30 *De Tijd*, 1 July 1933, 'Een misdadig misbruik', p1.
- 31 Biography of Johannes Rutgers (1850-1924), International Institute of Social History: <http://www.iisg.nl/exhibitions/neomalthusianism/rutgers-nl.php>.
- 32 *De Tribune* advertised Valkhoff's lectures about abortion and urged its readers to attend. See *De Tribune*, 8 June 1931, 'Article 218 = Art. 251bis', p2. Furthermore, in 1932, it published the programme of the Dutch section of the WLSR in full and encouraged readers to become members. See 'Wereldbond voor Sexueele Hervorming', *De Tribune*, 22 April 1932, p6.
- 33 'Juridische Kroniek – Eenige opmerkingen over abortus provocatus', *De Tribune*, 15 February 1917, p1.
- 34 *De Tribune*, 'Geen Malthusianisme', 4 September 1919, p2.
- 35 'Verouderde Moraal', *De Maasbode*, 31 March 1924, p1.
- 36 'Vrouwen', *De Tribune*, 23 July 1927, p2.
- 37 *De Tribune*, 'Over Abortus', 18 August 1925, p1.
- 38 'Moeder- en kindzorg in de Sowjet-Unie', *De Tribune*, 6 June 1934, p5; 'Moeder- en kindzorg in de Sowjet-Unie', *De Tribune*, 20 June 1934, p5.
- 39 'Uit de Sowjet-Unie. De ontwikkeling van het gezin', *De Tribune*, 13 July 1936, p7.
- 40 A. Grossman, 'Abortion and economic crisis: The 1931 campaign against §218 in Germany', *A New German Critique*, No 14, 1978, pp119-37.
- 41 'Dr Friedrich Wolff en de abortuswet', *De Tribune*, 18 June 1936, p7.
- 42 'Sowjet-Unie zorgt voor het gezin!', *De Tribune* 28 May 1936, p6.
- 43 Curiously, when the procedure was once again legalised in the Soviet Union in November 1955, *De Waarheid* published a two-sentence article on the topic on the bottom of page 2. This was in stark contrast with other national newspapers that featured full-length articles on the reversal of Soviet abortion policy, presenting this fact as an apparent defeat of socialism. See 'Verbod Abortus Opgeheven', *De Waarheid*, 30 November 1955, p2; and 'Abortus is weer toegestaan in de Sowjet Unie', *Het Parool*, 2 December 1955, p3.
- 44 'In het belang der democratie. Openbare vergadering van de Nieuw

- Malthusiaanse Bond', *Het Volksdagblad*, 14 April 1938, p3; 'Vrouwen in de Strijd', *Het Volksdagblad*, 19 April 1938, p6; 'De ordeverstoring op de vergadering van de Nieuw Malthusiaanse Bond in Utrecht', *Het Volksdagblad*, 1 June 1938, p5; and 'Onzedelijke Wanorde', *Het Volksdagblad*, 7 December 1938, p2.
- 45 'Antwoorden op Vragen', *Het Volksdagblad*, 20 April 1938, p2; and 'Het spreekuur van den dokter', *Het Volksdagblad*, 19 Augustus 1938, p2.
- 46 'Dr Aletta Jacobshuis – Bij het vijfjarig bestaan', *De Tribune*, 10 October 1936, p8.
- 47 'Onze Medische Rubriek. Sexuele Voorlichting van het kind', *De Tribune*, 4 June 1936, p3.
- 48 Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex*, pp16, 30.
- 49 A.C. Oerlemans, *Bewuste Geboorteregeling. Beschrijving van liefde en leven*, Uitgave van de Nieuw Malthusiaanse Bond, Den Haag 1938.
- 50 Brandhorst, p64; and 'De "Forel Stichting" een sectarisch groepje', *Het Volksdagblad*, 1 July 1938, p4.
- 51 Brandhorst, p64.
- 52 Ibid, p66.
- 53 See Manifesto ISB: <http://dnpprepo.ub.rug.nl/11128/1/ISB%20Ontwerp%20Beginselprogramma%201944.pdf>. *De Vonk*, a translation of the Russian word Iskra, was named after the socialist paper managed by Lenin around 1900 (H. Galesloot and S. Legène, *Partij in het verzet: de CPN in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Pegasus, Amsterdam 1986, p59).
- 54 Manifesto ISB: <http://dnpprepo.ub.rug.nl/11128/1/ISB%20Ontwerp%20Beginselprogramma%201944.pdf>; F. van den Burg, 'De koude oorlog en de minderheid', *De Gids*, Vol 147, 1984, pp55-70.
- 55 A.L. Constandse, 'Een eeuw seksuele hervorming', *De Gids*, Vol 145, 1982, p186.
- 56 Brandhorst, p66.
- 57 Constandse0, p180.
- 58 Prime Minister Drees, who served from 1948 to 1958, was the co-founder of the Partij vd Arbeid (Dutch Labour Party or PvdA), and had been a member of the SDAP prior to the war. The relationship between social democrats and communists in the Netherlands had always been notoriously tense. See 'NVSH en trotskisme', *De Waarheid*, 7 June 1950, p3.
- 59 Hugo Röling, 'De kortstondige, stille triomf van een "volksbeweging voor het geluk" De jaren vijftig vanuit het perspectief van de NVSH', P. Luykx and P. Slot (eds), *Een Stille Revolutie? Cultuur en mentaliteit in de lange jaren vijftig*, Verloren, Hilversum 1997, p154; and 'Amerikaanse

- koers in Nederlandse Vereniging voor Sexuele Hervorming Leden moeten zich hiertegen teweerstellen', *De Waarheid*, 19 January 1951, p3.
- 60 Röling, p154.
- 61 'Amerikaanse koers in Nederlandse Vereniging voor Sexuele Hervorming Leden moeten zich hiertegen teweerstellen', *De Waarheid*, 19 January 1951, p3.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Röling, p154.
- 64 Intelligence Services Report dated 24 December 1953: <https://www.inlichtingendiensten.nl/groepen/nvshbvd40totnu.pdf>. This report is written by an informant attending a CPN education night. Educator Chris Bischof accused the NVSH leadership of being trotskyists, according to the informant. He also mentions that Van Emde Boas was in fact a member, not a communist sympathiser as indicated by Hugo Röling.
- 65 See, for example, 'Wie de overbevolkings-leugen verbreiden', *De Waarheid*, 8 March 1951; 'Er zijn geen mensen te veel op aarde', *De Waarheid*, 30 January 1951; and 'Het NVSH-Congres', *De Waarheid*, 30 April 1951, p3.
- 66 Röling, p156.
- 67 Inlichtingendienst, Collection of intelligence reports concerning the NVSH 1951-1970: <https://www.inlichtingendiensten.nl/groepen/nvshbvd40totnu.pdf>.
- 68 'Sexuele Voorlichting aan jongeren en aan ouderen', *De Waarheid*, 5 December 1962, p4; and 'Sexuele Voorlichting aan jongeren en aan ouderen', 29 January 1963, p4.
- 69 'NVSH stelt jeugd lidmaatschap in', *De Waarheid*, 7 November 1966; and G.A. Kooy, 'Voorechtelijk geslachtsverkeer', in J.D. Noordhof (ed), *Sex in Nederland*, Prisma Boeken, Utrecht 1966, pp26-56.
- 70 2019 Interview with Els b. 1946 Amsterdam.
- 71 Constandse, p186.
- 72 The COC was the successor of the *Nederlandse Wetenschappelijk Humanitair Komitee* ('Dutch Scientific Humanitarian Committee or NWHK'), an organisation which was established in 1912 to protest against anti-gay legislation and fight for better education about homosexuality. The NWHK was disbanded upon the German occupation of the Netherlands in 1940. Its work was continued by the COC which was founded in 1946 (see H. Röling, p166).
- 73 It should be noted that his views on homosexuality were not representative of the wider communist movement.



- 74 It wasn't until 1966 that a fruitful relationship between the NVSH and the COC was established and homophobic articles disappeared from the pages of *Verstandig Ouderschap* (see Röling, p167).
- 75 Röling, pp176-7.
- 76 In 1969, the radical feminist group *Dolle Mina* was founded, which became a motor behind the fight for women's right to abortion, equal pay for equal work, and childcare.
- 77 S. Keuzenkamp and D. Bos, 'Out in the Netherlands. Acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands', p32; and S. Meilof-Oonk, 'Meningen over homosexualiteit', Stichting tot bevordering sociaal onderzoek minderheden, Amsterdam 1967.
- 78 The Dutch communist movement as a whole began to support the gay rights movement from the late 1970s onwards, though people such as Evelien Eshuis, a gay woman who joined the party in 1972 and was a member of the House of Commons from 1982 until 1986, had been active in gay rights groups at an earlier stage. *De Waarheid* featured articles that informed its readers about discrimination against gay people, especially in the workplace, and the fight against it. In an attempt to educate communists who were not particularly knowledgeable on the subject of homosexuality the newspaper also provided readers with accurate figures and research findings concerning gay people. There was a special concern with lesbians, who, due to persistent gender discrimination and related economic inequalities, already faced so much adversity. *De Waarheid* also acknowledged that the end of legal discrimination towards gay individuals did not end their social discrimination; readers, reminded of the fact of CPN's long history of advocacy for victims of discrimination, were spurred to take action and join the fight (see 'Homofielen in ons land nog veel gediscrimineerd', *De Waarheid*, 29 October 1977, p5; 'Homosexuelen kunnen leraar blijven – Referendum in Californië', *De Waarheid*, 10 November 1978, p5; 'Homo-ouders', *De Waarheid*, 28 April 1978, p7; and 'Kinsey Rapport over homofilie', *De Waarheid*, 14 August 1978, p2).
- 79 A.S. Makarenko, *A book for parents*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow 1954, p257.
- 80 Participants came of age around the same time as Makarenko's books were published. These books, which also contained a lot pedagogically sound and progressive advice, were translated into Dutch and praised in *De Waarheid*. Whilst parents adopted much of his pedagogy – no physical punishment, foster love and trust, treat your children with respect etc, etc – they collectively ignored all his sexual advice.

- 81 A large-scale survey, 'Sex in Nederland,' conducted in 1969 among people twenty-five years and older shows that about forty-four per cent of women and thirty-two per cent of men condemned abortion under any circumstance. Reasons to terminate a pregnancy considered valid were primarily medical risks for the mother (forty per cent of men and thirty-two per cent of women) and rape (fourteen per cent of men and ten per cent of women). The overwhelming majority of men and women surveyed indicated that a person's financial situation and age weren't valid reasons for abortion. Also of interest is the fact that members of the working class were more likely to condemn abortion under any circumstance than those of the middle and upper class (see J.D. Noordhoff, *Sex in Nederland*, Het Spectrum, Utrecht/Antwerpen 1969, second edition).
- 82 The first article that discussed women's right to abortion was published in the communist youth magazine *Jeugd* in 1971 (see 'Abortus', *Jeugd*, November/December 1971). Around the same time, the communist women's magazine, *Vrouwen*, began to demand legalisation.
- 83 These issues became so important to the party that the 1981 election poster of CPN leader Marcus Bakker carried the slogan, 'It's a woman's decision. Legalise abortion. Vote CPN. Marcus Bakker'. IISG Poster 1981, De vrouw beslist zelf. Published in Amsterdam. 10622/684372EF-D7C8-4B0A-9FB2-2FA6F53D5221.