

The Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat between Two Wars: Revolutionary Syndicalism in the Netherlands, 1919-1940

by Erik HANSEN* and Peter A. PROSPER, Jr**

Within the broad contours of Dutch labour history the *Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat* (NAS = National Labour Secretariat) occupied a unique position between the two world wars. From its origins in 1893 until the First World War, the NAS evolved into a revolutionary syndicalist federation of highly decentralized affiliates. As early as 1896 the NAS trade-union leaders rejected all ties with political parties, including the recently formed Social Democratic Workers Party, arguing that the syndicalist social order which the movement had quickly come to advocate could only be realized through revolutionary action and that participation in the parliamentary process was thus futile. Instead the NAS leaders contended that through constant strike actions working-class consciousness would be driven to such a point that at some vague and distant date in the future a proletarian revolution would destroy the existing bourgeois social order. Labourers would then assume control of their factories and firms and a polity of autonomous productive units based upon common ownership at the local level would subsequently emerge. Since the state apparatus was perceived as an instrument of bourgeois repression it would quite naturally be dismantled, thus freeing the labouring population from *étatiste* oppression. In part, the NAS leaders laid claim to the revolutionary legacy of Karl Marx. At the same time, they were bitterly critical of the Dutch social democratic movement and its trade-union allies. Their contention was that Dutch and European social democracy, both in their trade-union and party forms, represented bureaucracy, *étatisme* and, ultimately, oppression. A social democratic polity would simply replace one set of masters with another. Furthermore, social democratic trade-union federations were regarded as bureaucratic, *élitist*, and reformist. Although the social democratic trade unions might achieve some modest reforms within a capitalist framework, they failed to hold out the prospect of an alternative, and vastly superior, social order. At this point an important qualification must be made. The ultra-revolutionary rhetoric of the NAS leadership was

* Department of History, Union College, Schenectady, N.Y.

** Department of Economics, Union College, Schenectady, N.Y.

never translated into direct action and violent political deeds. From its origins until the First World War, the *NAS* did not lash out blindly against the established order, but concentrated upon strike and strike-support actions. As a consequence, the tone of the movement, while syndicalist, was clearly not anarchist in the conventional sense of the word.

Between the wars the *NAS* thus constituted the only revolutionary trade-union federation in the Netherlands. However, its unique position in this regard was partially compromised by the problems which the movement faced during the inter-war era. Despite the continued revolutionary rhetoric, the organization was increasingly involved in practical concerns of a conventional, trade-union character. Membership drives, fund raising, administrative issues, strike-support policy and the like came to dominate the *NAS* agenda. As well, the movement began consciously to court ties with appropriate political parties and thus the official rejection of participation in the political process faded into the background. In a certain sense, the inability of the *NAS* to mount an effective organizational, or revolutionary, drive between the wars reflected a general European trend. During this same era syndicalist movements waned, and in some cases disintegrated, across Scandinavia and in Germany. By the end of the era, the Northern European trade-union movement was dominated by the social democratic federations. Syndicalist federations, if present at all, played a secondary, and usually minor, role.

Since the turn of the century the *NAS* federations had struggled against three major trade-union rivals. This struggle continued between the two world wars. From the beginning, the *NAS* was flanked, on one side, by Protestant and Roman Catholic labour movements, which, as they evolved into trade-union federations, cut deeply into a working class characterized by a certain measure of religious loyalty. On its other flank, the *NAS* was in direct competition with social democratic federations for the loyalties and support of secular or religiously indifferent workers.

The *NAS* was formed in 1893 by the leadership of revolutionary syndicalist elements in the *Sociaal Democratische Bond* (*SDB* = Social Democratic League), a party then functioning as the Dutch section of the Second International. In 1894, the parliamentary socialist wing of the *Bond* withdrew and founded the *Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij* (*SDAP* = Social Democratic Workers Party) as an alternative to the syndicalist leadership of the *Bond*.¹ In 1897 the *SDAP* replaced the *Bond* as the Dutch section of the Second International. The revolutionary rhetoric of the *Bond* leadership resulted in the dissolution of the *Bond* by state authorities. Although it was subsequently reconstituted as the *Socialisten Bond* (*SB* = Socialist Federation), the currents of a syndicalist character faded from the

¹ For a systematic discussion of the origins of the *SDAP* see D. J. WANSINK, *Het socialisme op de tweesprong. De Geboorte van de S.D.A.P.* (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Wilink & Zoon, 1939). All citations in this essay are to titles as they were published; thus capitalization and spelling will not be consistent. The authors would like to express their appreciation to Mevrouw J. M. Welcker and Juffvrouw Mies Campfens for their assistance in the preparation of this essay.

mainstream of Dutch public life. The *SDAP* emerged as the major political spokesman for the Dutch working class.² With a membership of 18,000 workers in 1895, the *NAS* was the largest national confederation of trade-union federations.³ During the initial decade of its existence, social democratic, as distinct from syndicalist, affiliates and federations withdrew from it. Although by 1906 the *NAS* had dwindled to 3,250 members and stood on the brink of total disintegration, it was able to recover and by 1914 reached a membership of 9,000.⁴ Then came the First World War. During the war, the *NAS* experienced explosive growth; its membership rose to over 33,000 by the summer of 1918.⁵ Meanwhile in 1905 the social democratic trade unions had coalesced into a national confederation, the *Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen* (*NVV* = Dutch Federation of Trade Unions).⁶ The *NVV*, while not directly linked with the *SDAP*, came to dominate the trade-union movement just as the *SDAP* dominated the left wing of the political spectrum.

Between the two world wars the *NAS* evolved within the following socio-economic context. The Netherlands experienced a general, if brief, three-year boom immediately after the First World War, followed by a severe recession. Recovery began in 1924 and a relative prosperity characterized the economy until 1930. In that year the magnitude of the global economic crisis began to assert itself. The pulse of economic activity was reflected in the unemployment figures. Unemployment fell from 7.5 percent in 1918 to only 5.8 percent in 1920, then rose to 11.2 percent in 1923 and declined to 7.3 percent in 1926.⁷ The unemployment rate stabilized at 5-7 percent between 1926 and 1929, and in 1930 exploded to 15 percent. By 1934-35 probably over thirty-four percent of the total labour force was unemployed.⁸ Despite the magnitude of the crisis, the government did not devalue until 1936. A partial recovery, due to, or in spite of, devaluation, began in 1937, and by 1938 only twenty-six percent of the labour force was registered as unemployed.⁹ The critical unemployment problem from 1930 to 1939 presented golden opportunities to the *NAS* movement.

The nature of the Dutch economy presented a number of problems to *NAS* organizers and propagandists. The 1920 census listed a total labour

² The evolution of the *SDAP* from 1894 to its dissolution by German occupation authorities in 1940 is surveyed by H. VAN HULST, A. PLEYSIER and A. SCHEFFER in their volume, *Het roode vaandel volgen wij. Geschiedenis van de S.D.A.P. van 1880-1940* ('s-Gravenhage: Kruseman, 1969).

³ *NAS, Gedenkboek. Uitgegeven door het Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat ter gelegenheid van zijn 25-jarig bestaan* (Amsterdam: NAS, 1918), p. 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵ *Jaarverslagen over 1918 en 1919* (Amsterdam: NAS, n.d.), p. 29.

⁶ Frits DE JONG, Edz., *Om de plaats van de arbeid. Een geschiedkundig overzicht van ontstaan en ontwikkeling van het Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1956), pp. 58-71.

⁷ CENTRAAL KANTOOR VOOR DE STATISTIEK (hereafter CKS), *Het Rijk in Europa, Jaarcijfers 1923* ('s-Gravenhage: Landsdrukkerij, 1924), p. 89, and *Jaarcijfers 1932*, p. 98.

⁸ *De Nederlandse volkshuishouding tussen twee wereldoorlogen*, 3 vols (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1952), 1, section III: 175.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, section III: 250.

force of 2,722,407.¹⁰ By 1930, this force had grown to 3,185,816, of which 1,028,155 and 1,235,912 were listed in the total industrial sector by the 1920 and 1930 censuses respectively. The agricultural sector constituted the second largest category, encompassing 622,514 and 639,026 independent farmers, tenants and farm labourers in their respective census years. In 1920 trade and commerce accounted for 271,718, transport for 261,577, household servants and domestic personnel for 221,135, and the free and liberal professions, 142,720. By 1930, the commercial sector had grown to 398,718, the transport to 296,737, the household and domestic to 243,555, and the professions to 171,312. With less than forty-five percent of the total labour force involved in industry and fabrication, the *NAS*, given its blue-collar orientation, was immediately confronted with sociological limitations. The Netherlands, unlike Germany, Belgium and Great Britain, did not contain heavy industrial concentrations. Apart from the Twente textile complex, Dutch industry was light, scattered and contained a large craft component. The 1920 census counted managerial personnel, technicians, white-collar employees, and blue-collar workers alike when it listed the total industrial labour force at 1,028,155. Of this number only 335,519 were listed as workers in factories employing more than twenty-five people.¹¹ Small productive units often led to closer personal relations between employer and employee and generated a more traditional atmosphere of paternalism and social deference, thus rendering effective unionization difficult. While anarcho-syndicalist groups developed considerable momentum within the relatively retarded sectors of both the Italian and Spanish economies, across northern Europe effective unionization, as distinct from radicalization, was generally concentrated in the heavy industrial sector and in substantial productive units.

The *NAS* enjoyed some opportunities in the agrarian sector. Of the 622,514 people in this sector in 1920 only 221,649 were either owners or tenants, the remaining 400,000 were farm labourers. Beyond this only fifty-six percent of the 221,649 owned their plots.¹² This meant that half a million people were either tenants or labourers. However, tenants frequently employed labourers; consequently class distinctions in the Dutch countryside were often blurred. As in the industrial sector, the units of production were small. In 1920 there were only 250 farms larger than 100 hectares and half of all farms fell in the 1-5 hectare range.¹³ The rural poor, both tenant farmers and especially farm labourers offered the *NAS* a natural constituency.

Between the two world wars Dutch social critics and sociologists began to note the seeming fragmentation of their society into what were termed *zuilen* (pillars).¹⁴ The process of *verzuiling*, or pillarization, began

¹⁰ The following discussion is based upon the 1920 census as published in *CKS, Jaarcijfers 1932*, pp. 78-81, and *Jaarcijfers 1940*, pp. 100-5.

¹¹ *CKS, Jaarcijfers 1923*, p. 83.

¹² *CKS, Jaarcijfers 1932*, pp. 206-7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

¹⁴ The literature on the *zuilen* is too extensive to survey here. The recent volume by J. C. H. Blom, *De Muiterij op de Zeven Provinciën* (Bussum: Fibula-Van Dishoek, 1975),

in the mid- and late nineteenth century and reached an advanced stage by the inter-war era. By this time there were four major blocs in Dutch society, the Protestant, the Roman Catholic, the liberal, and the working class. The four groupings found political expression in the two Protestant parties, the Christian Historical Union and the Anti-revolutionary Party, the Roman Catholic State Party, one of three liberal parties which for electoral purposes often formed political cartels or concentrations, and the *SDAP*. The churches were central to two of the four *zuilen*. Embracing thirty-five percent of the population in 1920, the Roman Catholic community maintained its own school systems, trade-unions, press, clubs and athletic associations. As radio developed into a major national medium, it also acquired its own station and an allotment of broadcasting time.¹⁵ The Dutch Reformed Church claimed forty-one percent of the nation in its membership and was flanked by the more strictly Calvinist *Gereformeerde* (Reformed) Churches. Here again, one encounters the phenomenon of separate school systems, trade unions, newspapers, clubs and associations and broadcasting stations with sending allotments. The liberal community, though less inclined toward clubs, associations and trade unions, maintained political, press and radio arms. The labour *zuil* centred around the *SDAP* and the trade unions of the *NVV*. While liberals often enrolled their children in private, neutral schools, the labour *zuil* did not maintain schools; the children were sent to the secular, state schools. Of the four *zuilen*, two were obviously rooted in social class, the liberal and labour blocs, while two, being religious in character, cut over class lines. It must be noted that the political, social, economic and cultural leadership of the two clerical blocs was bourgeois in the broadest sense and that in terms of social and economic policy, little difference existed between the parliamentary leadership of the clerical bloc and the liberals. Both groups supported the capitalist mode of production, relatively limited social reforms and programmes and both were inclined towards fairly conservative fiscal and monetary policies.

The fragmentation of the Dutch bourgeoisie along confessional lines meant that no single party within the nation could achieve a parliamentary majority. Of the ten coalitions which governed the Netherlands between the two world wars, only the De Geer coalition, effectively a government of national union which was formed in 1939, included the *SDAP*.¹⁶ The social democrats were excluded from all other cabinet formations and com-

pp. 9-35 contains an analytic evaluation of the *zuilen* literature and an excellent bibliography. The best historical introduction of a general nature is Johan GOUDSBLOM's *Dutch Society* (New York: Random House, 1967).

¹⁵ For an examination of the Roman Catholic *zuil* see J. M. G. THURLINGS, *De wankele zuil. Nederlandse katholieken tussen assimilatie en pluralisme* (Amersfoort-Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1971). For the Protestant community of a strict Calvinist character see Jan HENDRIKS, *De emancipatie van de gereformeerden. Sociologische bijdrage tot de verklaring van enige kenmerken van het huidige gereformeerde volksdeel* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Samsom, 1971).

¹⁶ The following discussion of coalition combinations is based upon Louis DE JONG, *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de tweede wereldoorlog*. Volume I, *Voorspel* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), pp. 727-31.

binations between 1918 and 1939. The coalitions were all clerical; the Protestant parties and Roman Catholic State Party participated in every coalition and at no point during the inter-war era did a liberal serve as Prime Minister. Twice coalitions were formed without liberal participation and only once was a cabinet formed that included more than one liberal. The other seven coalitions included only one liberal at the cabinet level. For all practical purposes, the nation was governed between the wars by the Anti-Revolutionary Party, the Christian Historical Union and the Roman Catholic State Party. The confessional coalitions were drawn from the right wing of the clerical blocs and did not represent the interests of either the confessional trade unions or the Christian democratic currents in Dutch society.¹⁷

As noted, the clerical groupings maintained their own trade unions. Before the First World War, the confessional unions were relatively small and the trade-union movement, still in its infancy, was dominated by the *NVV*. Between the two world wars, however, the confessional trade unions experienced explosive growth, a phenomenon which followed in part from the moral force of the churches and the increasing and accelerated pillarization of Dutch society. The pattern of trade-union growth is reflected in the following table.

Table 1. — MAJOR TRADE-UNION FEDERATIONS
IN THE NETHERLANDS, 1919-1939.

Year	NAS	NVV	Christian National Trade-Union Federation	Roman Catholic Workers Federation
1919	33,626	190,942	46,338	91,804
1920	51,570	247,748	66,997	141,002
1921	37,125	216,616	73,819	146,030
1922	31,391	217,467	71,332	142,035
1923	23,280	196,806	61,365	117,115
1924	13,759	180,340	53,265	98,054
1925	13,753	184,493	50,042	91,905
1926	13,615	190,179	48,327	90,475
1927	13,698	196,959	51,217	96,403
1928	14,250	203,042	52,704	102,076
1929	16,079	217,390	57,518	110,384
1930	17,361	251,487	71,300	130,894
1931	16,929	271,009	80,288	145,815
1932	20,199	315,023	101,454	176,646
1933	22,512	336,158	115,006	192,655
1934	19,562	321,806	115,606	190,396
1935	12,956	298,555	112,196	179,717
1936	12,018	285,649	108,514	173,535
1937	11,346	283,382	108,235	168,661
1938	11,207	293,654	110,395	170,623
1939	10,652	306,226	113,885	177,909

Source: Adopted from Ger HARMSEN and Bob REINALDA, *Voor de bevrijding van de arbeid. Beknopte geschiedenis van de nederlandse vakbeweging*, pp. 430-34.

¹⁷ For a summary view of the confessional parties between the wars see the essay by I. SCHÖFFER, "Ontstaan en ontwikkeling van de christelijke partijen", in *De confessionelen*, ed.: I. SCHÖFFER (Utrecht: Amboboecken, 1968), pp. 41-60.

The movement of trade-union membership rose dramatically immediately after the First World War and then began to decline during the 1921-23 recession. This was true not only of the *NAS* but of the *NVV* and confessional federations as well. The surge in trade-union membership directly after the war reflected a partial and ephemeral radicalization during the last year of the war and the years immediately thereafter. This was a general European phenomenon and the Netherlands were no exception. During the 1924-29 recovery, membership levels stabilized as revolutionary and radical enthusiasm waned and then surged forward during the early years of the depression crisis. By the mid-nineteen thirties, however, a new period of stagnation and decline began. Most commentators and students of Dutch public life attribute this stagnation to the staggering levels of unemployment which had been reached by 1934. As recovery began in 1937, trade-union membership in the *NVV* and confessional federations rose again. This did not apply to the *NAS*. For reasons to be developed later in the essay, the *NAS* alone had fewer members in 1939 than in 1929.

While the *SDAP* was held in opposition during the inter-war period, the social democratic trade unions enjoyed a certain measure of participation in the decision-making process, both at the governmental and industrial levels. Collective bargaining, which had begun before the First World War, evolved into a fairly common practice between the wars. In 1911 there were eighty-seven collective bargaining agreements in force in the Netherlands, involving 1,126 employers and 23,002 labourers.¹⁸ By 1930 these figures had grown to 23,538 and 385,783 respectively.¹⁹ In 1919 the *Hoge Raad van Arbeid* (High Council of Labour) was created, which included representatives from the *NVV*, the Protestant, and Roman Catholic trade unions, along with the major employer associations, high civil servants and private or academic labour relations experts. The *Hoge Raad* supervised labour relations and also played a role in the drafting and implementation of labour and social legislation. As a consequence, social democratic trade-union leaders participated in the establishment and development of policy in areas of special concern to their own constituency. In the eyes of the *NAS* leadership, however, collective bargaining was at best a way station to revolution and of relative unimportance in and of itself. *NAS* propaganda stressed a revolutionary goal and although *NAS* federations did bargain collectively between the two world wars, the process of bargaining was clearly subordinate to the realization of a revolutionary mission. The *NAS* was not represented on the *Hoge Raad*, nor did its leadership have any real interest in this bourgeois institution.

The membership of the *NAS*, from 1919 to 1939, must be analysed at three levels. The *NAS* embodied three types of affiliates: national federations in a given trade or occupation; single trade unions which were locally organized in a specific trade or occupation and which chose not to affiliate to a national federation; and the *Plaatselijk Arbeids Secretariaat* (Local

¹⁸ Ger HARMSSEN and Bob REINALDA, *Voor de bevrijding van de arbeid. Beknopte geschiedenis van de nederlandse vakbeweging* (Nijmegen: Socialistiese Uitgeverij Nijmegen, 1975), p. 426.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

Labour Secretariat). The Local Labour Secretariat was a grouping of local individual *NAS* trade unions into a general umbrella organization. The local secretariat then affiliated directly with the *NAS*. During the late nineteenth century, the revolutionary syndicalist leadership of the *NAS* preferred to encourage the formation of local secretariats and also encouraged direct affiliation of individual local unions with the *NAS* central. This practice reflected a fear of strong national federations which might come to dominate the *NAS* and which could easily generate a reformist trade-union bureaucracy. Local secretariats could serve as a revolutionary vanguard at the local level. Given the revolutionary goals of the *NAS* and the nature of the organization, it was of secondary importance that local secretariats would generally not be effective bargaining agents. Between the world wars, the *NAS* leadership gradually lost its fear of national federations. The national federations, however, were never large in the sense that *NVV* federations were and the *NAS* continued to maintain local secretariats and to allow affiliation by single trade unions direct to the central. The movement of the *NAS* membership between 1919 and 1939 can be evaluated within certain limitations. From 1919 until the end of 1933, the *NAS verslag* (report) broke its membership down into typological and geographic categories. This practice stopped in 1934 and the two reports covering the years 1934-37 and 1937-39 give only aggregate data without detailed membership breakdowns. The aggregate pattern of the *NAS* membership assumed the following contour between the wars.

Table 2. — *NAS* MEMBERSHIP MOVEMENT, 1919-1939.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Membership</i>	<i>Increase</i>	<i>Decrease</i>
1919	33,638	15,235	—
1920	48,764	15,129	—
1921	36,038	—	12,726
1922	31,644	—	4,439
1923	21,758	—	9,886
1924	13,527	—	8,231
1925	14,050	523	—
1926	14,098	48	—
1927	13,751	—	298
1928	14,417	666	—
1929	16,184	1,761	—
1930	17,525	1,341	—
1931	17,457	—	68
1932	20,742	3,286	—
1933	22,500	1,758	—
1934	19,562	—	2,938
1935	12,946	—	6,606
1936	12,018	—	38
1937	11,356	—	662
1938	11,200	—	156
1939	10,650	—	550

Source: Adopted from the *NAS verslagen*, 1919-1939.

There was a socially radical surge in the Netherlands during the last year of the First World War and immediately thereafter. The *NAS* experienced its greatest growth during the post-war boom and suffered a sharp decline during the recession of 1921-23. In 1923 it voted to join the *Rode Vakbonds Internationale* (*RVI* = Red Trade Federation International), and thus to establish ties with Moscow. This action led to the walkout of 7,713 members in 1923-24 and the creation, in June 1923, of the *Nederlands Syndicalistisch Verbond* (*NSV* = Dutch Syndicalist Confederation).²⁰ The *NSV* leadership argued that by moving in a communist direction the *NAS* was deserting true syndicalist principles. Although the *NSV* central initially jolted *NAS* membership levels, its impact on the *NAS* during the next seventeen years was slight. The *NSV* declined to 2,900 members by 1929 and by 1939 had dwindled to 1,600. The *NAS* experienced a renewed increase in membership during the first four years of the depression, growing from 16,000 in 1929 to over 22,000 by 1933.²¹ A sharp decline followed, however, particularly during the years 1933-34, and the organization stagnated until the coming of the Second World War. The sharp decline in 1933-34 followed in part from the fact that in the aftermath of a mutiny on the cruiser *Zeven Provinciën* off the northwest Sumatra coast, the Defence Ministry banned all communist, revolutionary socialist, syndicalist and social democratic publications from military quarters and ruled that employment in the Defence Ministry was incompatible with membership in either a left-wing party or a left-wing trade union.²² The mutiny, which occurred in January 1933, and was repressed on 4 February 1933, led directly to these measures. One of the largest *NAS* federations, the Federative League of Personnel in Public Service, vanished, along with its 5,000 members, under the impact of the government decree.²³

The typological contours of the *NAS* affiliates for the period 1919-39, are extremely difficult to discern. On the one hand, the Local Labour Secretariats, which in their nineteenth-century origins could affiliate with the *NAS* central as entities in their own right were now simply local secretariats and included members of the national federations who happened to reside in a particular area. On the other hand, by 1924 all *NAS* locals that were not affiliated with a national federation did so, thus *NAS* membership data henceforth were based solely upon the national federations. At the beginning of 1919, the *NAS* contained eighteen unaffiliated local unions. During the course of 1921, the number shrank from seventeen to three and during 1924 this type of union vanished entirely.²⁴ The *NAS verslag* for 1919 listed twenty-nine Local Labour Secretariats with their respective membership, a number which rose to thirty-one in 1920-21.²⁵ After the

²⁰ *Verslag van het Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat in Nederland over 1922-1923-1924* (Amsterdam: *NAS*, n.d.), pp. 76-84, narrates the events leading to the walk-out.

²¹ *Verslag van het N.A.S. over de periode 1 Juli 1931 — 31 December 1933* (Amsterdam: *NAS*, n.d.), p. 43.

²² DE JONG, *Voorspel*, p. 193.

²³ *Verslag van het N.A.S. over de periode 1 Juli 1931 — 31 December 1933*, p. 46.

²⁴ *Verslag van het Nationaal*, pp. 32-38.

²⁵ *Jaarverslagen over 1918 en 1919* (Amsterdam: *NAS*, n.d.), pp. 116-17, and *Jaarverslagen over 1920 en 1921 van het Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat in Nederland* (Amsterdam: *NAS*, n.d.), p. 211.

1920-21 *verslag*, however, the *NAS* no longer listed the membership or composition of Local Labour Secretariats and consequently membership analysis by area over time is not possible. In the *verslag* for 1922-24 the local secretariats were not mentioned. The 1928 *verslag* for 1925-27 lists fifteen local secretariats, the *verslag* 1928-31 lists twenty-six and the 1931-1933 *verslag* lists thirty-one.²⁶ The data on geographic distribution are no more satisfactory. The 1920-21 *verslag* listed membership by province, the last time that the membership was so listed.²⁷ Subsequent reports only indicated the aggregate membership of each federation (Table 3).

Table 3. — *NAS* FEDERATIONS, 1919-1934.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Federations</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Federations</i>
1919	13	1927	11
1920	12	1928	11
1921	13	1929	11
1922	13	1930	10
1923	10	1931	11
1924	13	1932	11
1925	13	1933	13
1926	13	1934	10

Source: Adopted from the *NAS verslagen*, 1919-1934.

Table 4. — *NAS* MEMBERSHIP BY PROVINCE, 31 DECEMBER 1921.

<i>Province</i>	<i>Number of Members</i>
Drente	43
Friesland	735
Gelderland	1,040
Groningen	3,974
Noord-Holland	16,514
Zuid-Holland	5,987
Limburg	199
Noord-Brabant	136
Overijssel	3,133
Utrecht	363
Zeeland	745
Total	31,644

Source: *Jaarverslagen over 1920 en 1921 van het Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat in Nederland*, p. 209.

The strength of the *NAS* was concentrated in the harbour cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. The last report to give data on municipal membership indicated that, out of a total membership of 44,000 at the end of 1920, just under 19,000 were enrolled in the Amsterdam Local Labour

²⁶ *N.A.S. verslag over de jaren 1925, 1926, 1927* (Amsterdam: *NAS*, n.d.), p. 56, *N.A.S. verslag over het tijdvak 1 April 1928 tot 1 Juli 1931* (Amsterdam: *NAS*, n.d.), p. 58, and *Verslag van het N.A.S. over de periode 1 Juli 1931 — 31 December 1933*, pp. 47-48.

²⁷ *Jaarverslagen over 1920 en 1921*, p. 209.

Secretariat.²⁸ Rotterdam enrolled another 7,200 which meant that these two cities alone accounted for almost sixty percent of the total membership as of 1920. There is no evidence to indicate that this percentage changed dramatically over the next two decades. The 1920-21 report also gives us the following picture of provincial membership distribution (Table 4). One province, Noord-Holland, that included Amsterdam accounted for just over fifty percent of the total *NAS* membership.

The *NAS* reports offer more systematic data on the federations which composed the *NAS* (Table 5), although the report for 1937-39 gives only aggregate data without affiliate listings, while the 1934-37 report gives membership data by federation for the year 1937 alone.

Table 5. — MAJOR *NAS* FEDERATIONS, 1919-1934.

Year	Total Membership		Public Employees	
			Number	% of Total
1919	33,626		5,788	17
1920	51,570		5,435	10
1921	37,125		4,278	11
1922	31,391		3,855	12
1923	23,280		3,775	16
1924	13,759		3,951	28
1926	13,615		3,697	27
1927	13,698		3,872	28
1928	14,250		4,345	30
1929	16,079		4,706	29
1930	17,361		5,162	29
1931	16,929		5,442	32
1932	20,199		5,630	28
1933	22,512		5,562	24
1934	19,562		5,283	27

Year	Construction Workers		Transport Workers	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
1919	8,097	24	10,586	31
1920	13,449	26	12,825	24
1921	9,179	24	8,575	23
1922	7,993	25	6,423	20
1923	4,809	20	3,200	13
1924	3,353	24	4,468	32
1925	3,015	21	4,753	34
1926	3,511	26	4,969	36
1927	3,726	27	4,642	34
1928	3,832	27	4,788	33
1929	3,762	23	4,855	30
1930	4,152	23	5,070	29
1931	4,507	26	3,839	22
1932	5,300	26	4,728	23
1933	5,426	24	5,043	22
1934	5,027	25	4,640	23

Source: Adopted from the *NAS verslagen*, 1919-1934.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

At any time, about a quarter of the *NAS* membership was encompassed by the construction workers federation, which was composed of labourers concentrated largely in Amsterdam. Between 1919 and 1930, the construction workers were somewhat over-shadowed by the transport workers federation. The majority in the latter were harbour labourers in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. The public employees federation, comprising mainly unskilled labourers and not white-collar employees, disintegrated in 1934 under the impact of the governmental ban on the employment of members of left-wing organizations by the Defence Ministry. Its disintegration constituted a crippling blow to the *NAS*. From ten percent of the total *NAS* membership in 1920, the public employees federation had grown to thirty-two percent in 1931 and thus had become the single largest federation in the *NAS*. However important these federations may have been to the *NAS* organization, they did not constitute an important force within the employment sector as a whole (Table 6).

Table 6. — *NAS* MEMBERS WITHIN CERTAIN INDUSTRIAL SECTORS.

<i>Federation</i>	<i>Total Sector in the 1920 Census</i>	<i>NAS Members as % of Total</i>	<i>Total Sector in the 1930 Census</i>	<i>NAS Members as % of Total</i>
Construction	190,937	7.0	257,466	1.6
Transport	261,577	4.9	296,737	1.7

Source: Adopted from CENTRAAL KANTOOR VOOR DE STATISTIEK, *Het Rijk in Europa. Jaarcijfers 1932*, pp. 78-81; *Jaarcijfers 1940*, pp. 100-2; and the *NAS verslagen* for 1920 and 1930.

As noted, the *NAS verslagen* for 1934-37 and 1937-39, gave membership data by federation only once and these figures showed the composition of *NAS* membership as of 1 July 1937. On that date, the *NAS* had a total membership of 11,406, of whom 3,694 were construction workers and 3,404 were in the transport sector.²⁹ Only one other federation, the cigar-makers, had over 1,000 members while two of the *NAS*' nine federations, commercial employees and furniture workers, had less than one hundred.

In terms of its financial posture and organizational structure, the *NAS* inherited a repertoire of pre-1914 syndicalist attitudes. Originally the *NAS* organization was extremely hostile to salaried trade-union administrators, high dues, compulsory trade unions, and strong, centrally administered strike support funds.³⁰ Instead, the organization stressed part-time or amateur administration, low dues and relatively weak strike support funds. Under the leadership of Harm Kolthek just before the First World War, the organization came to accept the principle of salaried officials,

²⁹ *Verslag van het N.A.S. over de periode 1 Januari 1934 — 1 Juli 1937* (Amsterdam: *NAS*, n.d.), p. 8.

³⁰ For a summary discussion of the *NAS* during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century see DE JONG, *Om de plaats van de arbeid*, pp. 37-44.

although these remained few in number, and compulsory dues, which remained quite low by *NVV* standards. Though the level of administration would remain quite professional between the two world wars, the central mission and philosophy of the *NAS* remained the same. In the final analysis, the *NAS* was designed to destroy the capitalist social order through a series of strike actions and to generate a sense of class consciousness which would ultimately lead to a final, and devastating, social upheaval. This philosophy meant that the *NAS* federations did not attempt to develop strong unemployment, illness, accident and contingency funds of a social service nature which became so characteristic of the *NVV* trade unions. The funding of continual strike actions and, whenever possible, the generation of popular, revolutionary enthusiasm were central to the entire *NAS* operation. Since strikes were viewed as a type of propaganda and agitational device, the *NAS* leadership, both at the federative and national level, was rarely concerned with the timing of strikes and negotiation strategy. Until the Spring of 1918, the *NAS* refused to endorse collective bargaining; even after its endorsement in April 1918, collective bargaining played a relatively minor role in *NAS* strategy and calculations.³¹ Without doubt, the allocation of strike support funds was by far the most important issue facing the *NAS* administration. In their 1893 origins, *NAS* organizational forms changed between the two world wars as the leadership sought to establish more effective financial and organizational forms for mounting strike actions. The legislative realization of social reforms remained outside the *NAS* frame of reference.

The daily administration of the *NAS* was in the hands of an administrative board composed of a first and second chairman, a first and second secretary, and a first and second treasurer. These six were supplemented by representatives of the national federations, whose exact numbers varied between the two world wars. The representatives sitting with the inner core of administrators constituted the governing board of the *NAS*. The *NAS* further maintained a general council which brought the governing board together with a broader spectrum of federation representatives. Both bodies were responsible to the general *NAS* congress. Until 1930, the administrative board was elected by the congress. After the 1929 revision of the *NAS* by-laws, all officials on the board were elected by the membership at large. Alterations in the *NAS* by-laws had to be approved by a general, membership-wide referendum.

Originally, *NAS* strike support funds flowed from a central treasury to striking labourers and were supplemented by monies in the affiliate treasury, if such existed. During the Kolthek administration, the organization moved to the position that affiliates should maintain their own strike support funds, however limited these might be. Since *NAS* dues were low, irregularly collected, and since the affiliates were often small and highly decentralized, the monies on hand to support strike actions were generally inadequate.³² Furthermore, *NAS* leadership was quick to support minor

³¹ *Jaarverslagen over 1918 en 1919*, p. 69.

³² DE JONG, *Om de plaats van de arbeid*, pp. 37-44.

strikes, wildcat strikes and strikes by unorganized workers. This practice drained away funds and precluded the accumulation of strong accounts that could be used to launch major strikes in target industries. Too often, *NAS* strategy lacked a grand design and was purely responsive to strike situations as they arose spontaneously.

In an attempt to strengthen its fiscal base, the *NAS* leadership introduced a resolution at the congress held in May 1920 calling for the creation of a central strike fund that would be maintained by special compulsory dues.³³ Although the measure passed, and was subsequently approved by referendum (1,305 for; 143 against), it generated heated debate at the congress.³⁴ The syndicalist values of the organization and the principled distrust of centralized leadership were reflected in the contention by the representative of the Amsterdam Local Labour Secretariat that a central fund would have an evil impact on the whole organization. "It might pop up, and I am against this, that the *NAS* administration will have a treasury and the federations will be without funds ... In general, the federations must strengthen their own finances and carry out the internal reorganization to do this".³⁵ It is also interesting to note that only 1,648 members of the rank-and-file even bothered to vote in the subsequent referendum,³⁶ whereas in 1920 total *NAS* membership stood at 48,764.

The central strike fund proved to be inadequate in the course of the 1920s; consequently in January 1929, the governing board of the *NAS* drafted an alternative approach to the problem.³⁷ During the 1925 congress, a stamp plan was approved which provided for the sale of coupons ranging at five cent intervals from ten cents to one florin.³⁸ The coupons would be transferred to each federation and the federations would supervise their sale to the rank-and-file. Fifteen percent of the monies raised by sale would be returned to central headquarters. The federation would retain the balance plus an additional due paid by each member to the federation's limited and inadequate unemployment fund. In return the central headquarters would furnish free copies of the *NAS*' weekly newspaper, *De Arbeid (Labour)* to the federation members once a satisfactory number of coupons had been sold. Central headquarters further proposed to bear the cost of all future *NAS* congresses, to pay the salary of the two propagandists already in their service, and to place one-third of the monies received minus the cost of *De Arbeid* in the central strike support fund. The coupon system gave the *NAS* treasurers tighter control over finances than ever before. The 1929 proposal entailed the re-entitlement of the general strike support as the *Centrale Weerstandskas (CW = Central*

³³ *Officieel verslag van het vervolg — Congres van het Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat op 29 en 30 Mei 1920 in het gebouw "Musis Sacrum" te Arnhem (Amsterdam: NAS, 1920), pp. 7-8.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁶ *Jaarverslagen over 1920 en 1921*, p. 61.

³⁷ *N.A.S. verslag over het tijdvak 1 April 1928 tot 1 Juli 1931*, pp. 93-104.

³⁸ *Verslag van het NAS congres gehouden op 25, 26, 27 December 1925 te Amsterdam (Amsterdam: NAS, 1926), p. 40.* It was subsequently approved by referendum.

Resistance Treasury).³⁹ The *CW* was funded by a remittance of fifteen percent of each federation's income into a central fund. Since public employees had been denied the right to strike by an act of parliament in 1903, the contribution of the public employees federation was fixed at five percent on the grounds that this particular federation would not be striking under normal circumstances.⁴⁰ One-third of the monies received by headquarters from coupon sales conducted by the federations themselves, minus the cost of *De Arbeid*, would also be placed in this account. The fund would be administered by the two *NAS* treasurers in concert with the treasurers from the component federations.⁴¹ The *CW* remained a key *NAS* institution throughout the decade of the depression.

The same 1925 congress that launched the coupon system also adopted a resolution instructing individual local affiliates to join national federations directly. Given the *NAS*' syndicalist heritage, this act was symptomatic of a centralizing thrust within a movement that took great pride in its democratic, decentralized structure. Still, throughout the 1920s the *NAS* relied upon strike support funds which were raised *ad hoc* after a strike action had begun. As in the late nineteenth century, monies were raised in working-class neighbourhoods during strike actions and were used to supplement the relatively modest accounts maintained by the federations and by the central headquarters.

The outbursts of fund raising explain in large part the highly unstable *NAS* budgets. A brief examination of the published budgets gives clear indication of the *ad hoc* strike strategy's fiscal impact. *NAS* contributions and subsequent monies paid rose dramatically during years of major strike confrontation and then collapsed during relative lulls. For example, during the 1920 transport workers' strike, the *NAS* raised 627,340.14 florins.⁴² The following year monies received to support strike actions fell to 88,999.80 florins.⁴³ This pattern was repeated again during the Twente textile strike in 1932. The *NAS* received 292,259.08 florins in strike support funds for the *CW* during 1932, yet in 1933 only 82,684.64 were contributed to the *CW*.⁴⁴ The organization failed to maintain strong surpluses in times of labour peace and thus was continually strapped for funds when major strike actions began. As noted, the absence of strong surpluses, taken in concert with the highly federative nature of the *NAS*, rendered carefully planned strike actions impossible. The following data illustrate the highly unstable nature of the budgets (Tables 7, 8).

³⁹ For a full discussion of the proposal see *N.A.S. verslag over het tijdvak 1 April 1928 tot 1 Juli 1931*, pp. 88-104.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-1.

⁴² *Jaarverslagen over 1920 en 1921*, p. 92.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁴⁴ *Verslag van het N.A.S. over de periode 1 Juli 1931 — 31 December 1933*, pp. 134 and 142.

Table 7. — *NAS* EXPENDITURES, 1920-1939 (IN FLORINS).

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expenditures</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Expenditures</i>
1920	92,378.04	1930	262,057.58
1921	99,957.40	1931	250,882.24
1922	94,815.14	1932	491,838.04
1923	132,999.63	1933	250,784.95
1924	107,642.03	1934	208,232.91
1925	75,818.20	1935	180,709.38
1926	87,635.72	1936	144,471.77
1927	99,439.93	1937	175,325.91
1928	198,215.50	1938	142,493.26
1929	319,294.77	1939	234,185.99

Source: Adopted from the *NAS verslagen*, 1920-1939.

The same instability also characterized the *Centrale Weerstandskas*.

Table 8. — *CENTRALE WEERSTANDSKAS*' BUDGETS, 1931-1939 (IN FLORINS).

<i>Year</i>	<i>Funds Received</i>	<i>Expenditures</i>	<i>Balance</i>
1931	69,134.29	76,160.91	- 7,026.62
1932	188,585.17	234,024.38	-45,439.21
1933	79,268.25	66,518.30	+12,749.95
1934	28,969.21	16,142.31	+12,826.90
1935	31,377.07	23,950.72	+ 7,426.35
1936	20,434.74	10,895.87	+ 9,538.87
1937	26,374.49	11,882.16	+14,492.33
1938	20,522.68	20,956.26	- 433.58
1939	21,119.01	24,502.50	- 3,383.49

Source: Adopted from the *NAS verslagen*, 1931-1939.

The massive strike support effort mounted in Twente during 1932 exhausted the *NAS* for the next half-decade. A survey of the budgets from 1929 to 1939 also reveals a considerable decline in voluntary contributions throughout the 1930s. General socio-economic conditions, a collapsing membership level and high unemployment rates combined to constrict voluntary donations. This technique of fund raising — which had been so important during the late nineteenth century — began to fade from *NAS* financial strategy during the 1920s. In 1923, the *NAS* received 24,126.15 florins from the federations for strike support purposes and 24,764.63 through voluntary giving.⁴⁵ In 1924-25, voluntary giving shot up to 43,603.71 and 47,732.42 florins respectively while the federations, now experiencing dramatic levels of membership decline, contributed only 10,223.14 and 16,189.89 florins respectively.⁴⁶ As the coupon system began to assert it-

⁴⁵ *Verslag van Het Nationaal*, p. 159.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 170, and *N.A.S. verslag over de jaren 1925, 1926, 1927*, p. 211.

self, contributions rose from 8,383.87 florins in 1926 to 47,227.05 in 1927, while voluntary giving during these two years stood at only 99 and 1,546.44 florins.⁴⁷ The practice of raising funds on a donation basis, particularly during major strikes, was continued until the Second World War.

Since the *NAS* leadership perceived its mission in revolutionary and not reformist terms, the relations between the *NAS* and political forces within the Netherlands became important during the inter-war era. While the *NAS* continued to function as a trade union, its leadership became deeply involved in questions of political orientation and between 1921 and 1927 these issues completely dominated the public life of the organization. During the late nineteenth century, the *NAS* functioned as a revolutionary movement unto itself. In the course of the First World War this orientation began to change, especially during the last year of the war. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia naturally raised questions concerning the relationship between the *NAS* and an emerging international communist movement. In the course of the inter-war era the political orientation of the *NAS* went through three distinct phases. Between 1918 and 1923, B. Lansink Jr served as the chairman of the *NAS* and in concert with his father, B. Lansink Sr, struggled to maintain its syndicalist orientation.⁴⁸ During these years, the *NAS* participated in a number of front organizations which included the Communist Party. During this same period, a strong communist, or proto-communist, current centring around E. Bouwman developed within the *NAS*. This faction was reinforced in 1923 by the return of Henk Sneevliet from Russia.⁴⁹ In 1923, a *NAS* congress approved *NAS* entry into the Red Trade Union International, or Profintern, an association that lasted for only four years.

Sneevliet became chairman of the *NAS* in 1923 and guided the organization until the German occupation of 1940; the grouping around the two Lansinks withdrew from the *NAS* in 1923 and founded a rival organization which sought to maintain independent syndicalist principles. Relations with the Communist Party in the Netherlands were affected by Sneevliet's growing sympathy for Trotsky and his hostility toward the emerging Stalinist leadership. As a result of these forces, the *NAS* left the Profintern in 1927.⁵⁰ This decision ushered in a third phase of ideological orientation. Sneevliet, though a revolutionary, was not a syndicalist. Consequently, he was the major founder of a Trotskyite revolutionary political party, the *Revolutionair Socialistische Partij* (*RSP* = Revolutionary Socialist Party), in 1929.⁵¹ When the left-opposition faction within the *SDAP* was forced out of the party in 1932, the grouping around P. J. Schmidt and Jacques de Kadt immediately created a left-marxist, revolutionary alternative to the

⁴⁷ *N.A.S. verslag over de jaren 1925, 1926, 1927*, pp. 220 and 224.

⁴⁸ See, for example, the brochures: B. LANSINK Sr, *De juistheid van doel en tactiek der onafhandelijke vakbeweging* (Amsterdam: NAS, 1919), and B. LANSINK Jr, *Eenheid in de vakbeweging* (Amsterdam: NAS, 1921).

⁴⁹ For a handy and brief biography of Sneevliet see Fritjof TICHELMAN, *Henk Sneevliet. Een politieke biografie* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1974).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-66.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-71.

SDAP, the *Onafhankelijk Socialistische Partij* (*OSP* = Independent Socialist Party).⁵² In 1935, after painful negotiations, the *RSP* and *OSP* merged to form the *Revolutionair Socialistische Arbeiders Partij* (*RSAP* = Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party).⁵³ Though *De Arbeid*, the official *NAS* forum, urged members to vote for *RSP* candidates and then for *RSAP* candidates, the *NAS* organization continued to function as an independent entity. The linkage between revolutionary trade union and revolutionary party lay in Henk Sneevliet who served as the titular leader of both.

Immediately after the First World War, the two Lansinks quickly moved to re-assert the syndicalist nature of the *NAS* organization. Just before the end of the war, in April 1918, the *NAS* congress approved collective bargaining as a device to be used by affiliates *en route* to final revolutionary goals.⁵⁴ With the immediate post-war implementation of universal suffrage and a series of social reforms, it became important that the *NAS* continue to assert its revolutionary mission. The pressure to do so was further heightened by the rapid increase in membership, especially in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and hence the adhesion of previously unorganized labourers who now were beginning to radicalize. During the period 1918-23, the leadership of the *NAS* carried the organization into a number of fronts involving various revolutionary groups.⁵⁵ The most important of these was the *Landelijk Revolutionair Socialistisch Comité* (*LRSC* = National Revolutionary Socialist Committee) which included the *SDP* before it became the Communist Party. During the November crisis of 1918 and immediately thereafter, the *LRSC* had some contact with the *SDAP* and the *NVV*. In the course of 1919, the *LRSC* disbanded. The *SDAP* and *NVV* broke off contact and went their own ways. The Lansinks were not Communists in the final analysis and hence the grounds for co-operation between the Communist movement and the *NAS* simply did not exist. Still, as late as December 1919, a joint congress of *NAS* and *NVV* officials agreed on a common resolution calling on the government to force down food prices. This led to a common propaganda and agitational action against inflation which collapsed in the Spring of 1920 when *NVV* officials refused to sanction a general protest strike.⁵⁶ The *NVV* decision was condemned by the *NAS* congress in April 1920, thus widening the already immense gap between the two rival trade unions.⁵⁷ The 1922 congress adopted a series of resolutions which, in condemning the capitalist mode of production, underscored the revolutionary nature of the *NAS*.

⁵² VAN HULST, PLEYSIER and SCHEFFER, *Het roode vaandel volgen wij*, pp. 224-33.

⁵³ For a discussion of the events leading into the fusion see TICHELMAN, *Henk Sneevliet*, pp. 76-82.

⁵⁴ *Jaarverslagen over 1918 en 1919*, p. 69.

⁵⁵ The various front actions are detailed in the *NAS verslagen*. For a discussion of the *NAS* role in the *Landelijk Revolutionair Socialistisch Comité* see *Jaarverslagen over 1918 en 1919*, pp. 14-21 and 189-92.

⁵⁶ *Jaarverslagen over 1920 en 1921*, pp. 70-76.

⁵⁷ *Officieel Verslag van het Congres van het Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat op 4, 5 en 6 April 1920*, pp. 73-74.

As noted, the year 1923 marked a crucial turning point in the evolution of the *NAS*. In April, a *NAS* congress voted to affiliate with the Pro-fintern.⁵⁸ Henk Sneevliet was central to this decision. In 1912, Sneevliet was chairman of the Dutch Union of Railway and Tram Personnel and a member of the *SDAP*.⁵⁹ Closely associated with Henriëtte Roland Holst and the relatively small left-opposition faction which was grouped around her in the aftermath of the 1909 split within the party, Sneevliet bitterly protested the cautious position the *SDAP* had taken during the 1911 harbour strike in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. This protest led Sneevliet to resign from the party and join the *SDP* of David Wijnkoop, Willem van Ravesteijn and J. Ceton. As a consequence of this action, Sneevliet was forced to resign his trade-union post. In 1913, he left for the Dutch East Indies where he once again became deeply involved in trade-union work and revolutionary politics. During these years, Sneevliet returned to the *SDAP* and in May 1914, played a major role in the creation of the *Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging (ISDV = Indies Social Democratic Union)*, an organization which transformed itself into the Communist Party of Indonesia in 1919 and which affiliated with the Comintern in 1920. In the meantime, Sneevliet was arrested and tried for the advocacy of social revolution in 1917. By 1916, he had once again left the *SDAP* and returned to the *SDP*. Although acquitted, Sneevliet was finally expelled from the islands in December 1918. Arriving in Rotterdam on 31 January 1919, he immediately threw himself into Communist Party work, as the *SDP* had become the Communist Party of Holland, and he joined the *NAS*, becoming the treasurer of the *NAS* transport workers federation.⁶⁰

Sneevliet pursued a dual political career from 1920 to 1923. Serving as a salaried trade-union official in the *NAS*, he also functioned as a Comintern agent in Asia, playing a role in the formation of the Chinese Communist Party and advising the Comintern on Asian affairs. Within the context of this essay we are concerned solely with his career in Europe. As early as the 1920 *NAS* congress, Sneevliet was the subject of sharp attacks by the syndicalist Harm Kolthek, who argued that Sneevliet, having just joined the *NAS*, now threatened to push the organization into the arms of the communist movement. Kolthek further contended that Sneevliet's tactical orientation was incorrect and that he was not a true syndicalist.⁶¹ Between May 1920 and April 1923 a ferocious debate raged within the *NAS* as to whether or not the organization should affiliate with the Pro-fintern.

Sneevliet and the transport workers federation pressed for affiliation, while the more purely syndicalist group around the Lansinks was bitterly

⁵⁸ *Officieel Verslag van het Congres van het Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat in Nederland gehouden op 31 Maart, 1 en 2 April 1923 in het voormalig Tolhuis te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: *NAS*, 1923), p. 34.

⁵⁹ The following discussion is based upon TICHELMAN's survey of the initial phases of Sneevliet's career, *Henk Sneevliet*, pp. 9-30.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶¹ *Officieel Verslag van het Congres van het Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat op 4, 5 en 6 April 1920*, pp. 37-45.

opposed. An international congress of revolutionary syndicalists was held in London from 27 September to 2 October 1913.⁶² The congress did not result in the creation of a meaningful syndicalist international. The *NAS* administration was authorized in 1916 to call a second congress,⁶³ but, given the wartime social and political environment, it was never held. In 1919 a call for a congress of European syndicalists came from Danish, Swedish and Norwegian syndicalists meeting in Copenhagen. As a result of this conference, at which *NAS* representatives were not present, the *NAS* was asked to host a general European congress, which never took place because syndicalist revolutionaries in the various European nations were refused passports. When Moscow called for a conference of all revolutionary trade-union organizations in 1920 and agreed to host such a conference in the Spring of 1921, the syndicalist *Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands* responded by hosting a preliminary conference in December 1920.⁶⁴ Although the Moscow conference resulted in the formation of the *RVI*, the preliminary conference held in Berlin eventually led to the creation of the *Internationale Arbeidersvereniging* (*IAV* = International Workers Union) as a left-revolutionary alternative to the *Profintern*, even though delegates at the Berlin conference had endorsed the formation of the *Profintern*.⁶⁵ The question arose as to which organization the *NAS* would join.

The Lansinks pressed for entry into the Berlin international while Sneevliet, Th. J. Dissel and E. Bouwman argued on behalf of Moscow.⁶⁶ The *NAS* affiliated with Moscow in the Summer of 1923. The act of affiliation was delayed for two years by the original *Profintern* by-laws of 1921 that provided for an organizational link between the *Comintern* and the *Profintern*. This link violated the *NAS* principle that the revolutionary trade-union movement be free of party ties — even ties with a communist party. In 1922 the link between the two was temporarily dissolved. The major barrier to *NAS* entry was removed and the 31 March—2 April 1923 *NAS* congress approved entry. As mentioned, this led to a withdrawal of the purely syndicalist elements from the *NAS*.

The *NAS* experience in the *Profintern* was brief and unhappy. In the first place, the leadership of the Dutch communist party, the Communist Party of Holland (*CPH*), had, from its origins as the *SDP* in 1909, advised

⁶² *Jaarverslagen over 1920 en 1921*, p. 113.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-16.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-21.

⁶⁶ The *Profintern* issue dominated two consecutive *NAS* congresses, see *Officieel verslag van het Buitengewoon Congress van het Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat in Nederland op 25 en 26 Maart 1922 in Musis Sacrum te Arnhem* (Amsterdam: *NAS*, 1922), pp. 30-92, and *Officieel verslag van het congres van het Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat in Nederland gehouden op 31 Maart, 1 en 2 April 1923*, pp. 8-34. See also the brochure by B. LANSINK JR and T. J. DISSEL, *Internationale verbinding van het N.A.S., Berlijn of Moskou?* (Amsterdam: *NAS*, 1923): Lansink makes the case for Berlin while Dissel supports entry into the *Profintern*.

workers to join the *NVV*.⁶⁷ The strategy of Wijnkoop, Van Ravesteijn and Ceton was to force a radicalization of the *NVV* from within. Despite the co-operation of the *SDP* with the *NAS* during the last two years of the First World War, relations between the two remained strained. Sneevliet gravitated toward an opposition faction within the CPH which led him to attack the Wijnkoop leadership in both the Netherlands and in Moscow. Although Wijnkoop was forced out of the CPH in 1925, the new leadership was equally hostile toward the *NAS*.⁶⁸ A situation thus developed in which a Comintern affiliate and a Profintern affiliate continually attacked each other inside the same nation-state. Secondly, the decision taken in Moscow by the Comintern leadership in the Spring of 1927 to instruct member communist parties to encourage workers to join the centralized, social democratic trade unions and to press for radicalization from within, forced the *NAS* out of the Profintern.⁶⁹ Its application in the Netherlands would have entailed the total dissolution of the *NAS*. Finally, Sneevliet himself was now ready to break with Moscow over the Stalinist course, and to support Trotsky. The *NAS* thus withdrew from the Profintern in 1927. As noted, between 1929 and 1940 Sneevliet was central to both the *RSP* and the *RSAP*. However interesting and important both parties might have been as case studies in left radicalism, neither had organizational links with the *NAS*. In a sense, they all represented a social revolutionary current in European life and certainly constituted a community of sentiment. For all practical purposes the *NAS* functioned as a special type of trade union down to the German occupation in 1940.

The inability of the *NAS* to generate momentum during the inter-war era followed from a number of forces in Dutch society. The strength of religion throughout some sectors of the working-class community acted as a brake upon both the *NAS* and its *NVV* rivals. Also, the Dutch working class, like its Scandinavian, Belgian, Swiss and German counterparts, did not contain strong revolutionary impulses. Consequently the vast majority of organized workers in non-confessional unions were drawn into the *NVV* federations. The *NVV* offered more effective services and stronger bargaining positions than did the *NAS*. Finally, the *NVV* remained consistently social democratic and throughout the entire era supported the *SDAP*. The *NAS*, on the other hand, despite its revolutionary rhetoric, was hardly in a position even to attempt a revolutionary move. Unable to link official ideology with daily practice, it swung from revolutionary syndicalism to philo-communism, to a type of Trotskyite orientation. In the process, it lost its initial post-war momentum, stagnated, and during the depression years was reduced to the status of a relatively minor sectarian grouping.

⁶⁷ For a general discussion of the origins of the Dutch communist movement and its evolution down to 1940, see A. A. DE JONGE, *Het Communisme in Nederland. De geschiedenis van een politieke partij* (Den Haag: Kruseman, 1972), pp. 9-67.

⁶⁸ TICHELMAN, *Henk Sneevliet*, pp. 58-66.

⁶⁹ The break with Moscow generated a number of *NAS* brochures: see the essay by Henk SNEEVLIET, *Tien Jaren RVI* (Amsterdam: NAS, [1927]). See also E. BOUWMAN, *De Zevenjarige Oorlog tegen de C.P.H. om den uitbouw van het N.A.S.* (Amsterdam: NAS, 1927).

RÉSUMÉ.

Dans le cadre général de l'histoire des travailleurs aux Pays-Bas, le Secrétariat national du travail occupe une situation exceptionnelle au cours de l'entre-deux-guerres. De ses origines à la Première guerre mondiale, le Secrétariat prit la forme d'une fédération syndicale révolutionnaire aux affiliations largement décentralisées. Juste après la guerre, le Secrétariat se centralisa et se mit à adopter l'organisation propre aux syndicats sociaux-démocrates conventionnels, tout en conservant une idéologie révolutionnaire, socialiste et, jusqu'à un certain point, marxiste. Il eut brièvement des affiliations communistes dans les années vingt; ces liens furent rompus deux ans avant la grande dépression. Le Secrétariat se présenta alors aux travailleurs hollandais comme une solution de remplacement au communisme soviétique d'une part, et au réformisme des syndicats sociaux-démocrates d'autre part.