



Vrede of Vrijheid? Dilemma's, dialoog en misverstanden tussen Nederlandse en West-Duitse linkse organisaties en de Poolse oppositie in de jaren tachtig.
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Summary: Peace or freedom? Dilemmas, dialogue and misunderstandings between Dutch and West German left-wing organizations and the Polish opposition in the 1980s

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In the 1980s the populations of Eastern and Western Europe had widely divergent views on the East-West conflict. In the West many were convinced that a stable situation in Europe was necessary to maintain peace on the continent. That amounted to the temporary acceptance of the Iron Curtain and of the existence of communist dictatorships. For the Eastern Europeans who had to live in an unfree situation, it was much more difficult to consent to the status quo. This refusal to accept the current situation was expressed in periodic uprisings in Eastern Europe, such as the strikes in Poland in 1980 and the subsequent creation of the independent trade union *Solidarność*. Throughout 1980 and 1981 the new trade union attempted to reform the country from below, until General Wojciech Jaruzelski put an end to these developments by declaring martial law on 13 December 1981.

These kinds of uprisings challenged the East-West divide and presented the West with difficult dilemmas. Supporting the Eastern European populations' call for freedom was not easy as long as the Eastern European regimes considered Western human rights criticism and open support to their internal opponents incompatible with good relations between East and West. From the 1970s onwards many Western Europeans considered détente with the Eastern European regimes to be a condition for maintaining peace in Europe. The détente policy of the 1970s had diminished the level of distrust towards Eastern Europe. Many Western organizations had started a dialogue with the Eastern European authorities which had slowly become routine. Criticism was increasingly omitted. This happened at the same moment that the Eastern European opposition appeared as an independent conversation partner. The establishment of *Solidarność* raised the question in these Western organisations whether they should contact the opposition as well. Besides that, it confronted them with the choice between prioritizing peace and détente or taking the risk of undermining the good relations with the governments in Eastern Europe by openly showing solidarity with the freedom struggle of the opposition.

This study focuses on the question of how left-wing organizations dealt with these dilemmas and how they sized up the possibilities to start a transnational, independent dialogue. The context is given by the developments of the opposition in Poland between 1980 and 1989. The research focuses on left-wing organizations, because they cherished both disarmament and détente as well as solidarity and freedom struggle highly. The chosen case studies are the Interchurch Peace Council (*Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad*; IKV) and the West German Greens as examples for the peace movement, the social democrat parties Dutch Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*; PvdA) and the German Social Democrat Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*; SPD) and the trade union confederations Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (*Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging*; FNV) and the German Confederation of Trade Unions (*Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund*; DGB). In all six organizations *Solidarność* caused worries about the relationship between peace, détente, solidarity and human rights, and the dialogue with the opposition.

For the IKV the exceptional developments in Poland happened simultaneously with the mass mobilization against nuclear weapons in the Netherlands. For this reason it was inclined to see the strikes and reforms in Poland as the counterpart of their own struggle in the West. Martial Law led to the emerging insight that direct contact was needed for a 'natural alliance' with the opposition in Eastern Europe. Counteraction by the Eastern European regimes and lack of interest in the Eastern European opposition hindered the establishment of these contacts. Also anxiety existed in their own ranks that the new strategy might hurt the peace struggle and the official contacts with Eastern Europe. Only in 1985, when the deployment decision was also taken in the Netherlands and the interest in the peace movement in the Eastern European opposition grew, could the IKV truly start to breathe life into its new strategy. The IKV

leadership considered true peace and détente to be unattainable without involvement of the population but it also continued to cherish the institutional dialogue with the Eastern European leadership. To the IKV all contacts with Eastern Europe, 'from below' and 'above', were part of the search for a political solution to the arms race and the division of Europe. Solidarity with the Eastern European opposition was an important side effect of that, but never the only goal.

In the Federal Republic martial law in Poland made a split visible in the already barely homogeneous Green party. On the one side there were party members who wanted to occupy themselves only with the struggle for unilateral disarmament, as stated in the Krefeld Appeal. On the other side there were activists who wanted to address the roots of the conflict, as formulated in the European Nuclear Disarmament (END) Appeal. In 1983 the balance in the party shifted from a majority position for the END-activists to dominance of the Krefeld faction. This expressed itself in a decline of open solidarity with the opposition and more rapprochement towards the Eastern European authorities. In dealing with Poland's past as a victim of the Second World War many Green politicians behaved as *de facto* allies of the government in Warsaw. Because large sections of the Green party were only interested in the GDR and Poland as a victim of the war, the END activists could create close contact with the Eastern European opposition in the margin.

In the PvdA in the 1970s the Atlantic old guard was slowly replaced by a younger generation that wanted to give more priority to détente. This led to the official declaration by the party that in the short term disarmament had priority over human rights. In the long term détente would automatically lead to liberalization in Eastern Europe, because states that did not feel threatened from outside would more easily liberalize internally. *Solidarność* challenged this assumption, which led to fierce discussions between 'solidarists' and 'détentists' in the PvdA. The new International Secretary Maarten van Traa tried to find a middle ground between these positions with his policy of 'dynamic' détente policy in which human rights activism and contact with the opposition would play an important role next to the dialogue with the authorities. By successfully supporting the opposition in Czechoslovakia the PvdA showed that also a party which valued peace and détente highly could support the opposition. In the end, however, these activities remained a footnote to the official détente dialogue with the authorities.

For SPD, which stood at the basis of European détente, the maintenance of peace and détente was even more important than for the PvdA. After the establishment of *Solidarność* many party members feared a repetition of the crackdown on the uprisings in Budapest in 1956 and in Prague in 1968. This would endanger the good relations with the Eastern European authorities which the SPD deemed necessary to maintain peace and détente in Europe. The party was prepared to go a long way to prevent this. It was remarkably conciliatory after the declaration of martial law. The SPD was very eager to believe the promises of the Polish leadership that it would continue reforms, because it did not see another way to change the situation in Eastern Europe other than through gradual changes from above. It considered open protest to be counterproductive. Only diplomacy behind the scenes would be able to convince the authorities to liberalize. This way the SPD ignored the symbolic value of political positioning for the Eastern European opposition. Anxious that the official dialogue about détente could be harmed, the SPD avoided contact with the opposition. This caused long-lasting mistrust of the Eastern European opposition towards the SPD. Nonetheless many in the SPD remained convinced that its détente policy indirectly provided the most optimal support to the opposition.

Also for the FNV during the 1970s the dialogue with the authorities had become so self-evident that it was not inclined to give that up after the establishment of *Solidarność*. At the same time the FNV did not consider *Solidarność* to be a threat for détente. It was however anxious that a careless Western reaction could prompt a Soviet invasion. Although it was obvious for the FNV that it would contact *Solidarność*, its first stance was reticent and genuine contact therefore started off late. After 13 December 1981 the FNV protested fiercely and refused relations with the new official Polish trade union confederation. The dialogue of the FNV with other Eastern European trade union confederations that remained loyal to their regimes, however, was hardly hindered at all by the events. Inside the organization there was remarkably little discussion about how to combine solidarity and détente.

In West Germany the DGB, which for years had loyally supported the foreign policy of the SPD just like the FNV, now considered the Western reactions, not the Polish workers, the greatest potential threat for peace and détente. West Germans in particular could too easily be branded as revanchists. The ensuing support was mainly conducted in silence, in agreement with *Solidarność*, in order not to provoke an anti-German propaganda campaign. This way in the West German media the idea could come into existence that DGB kept itself far from the struggle of the Polish workers out of fear of harming détente. This image was confirmed by the fact that the DGB was little interested in demonstrations and protest after the declaration of martial law. By its refusal to establish contacts with the new official Polish trade union confederation, it, however, showed it understood the importance of symbolic choices. Beyond rules and loyalty to the SPD contact with the Polish underground trade union leadership and risky actions, however, appeared possible.

The choice the six organizations made in the dilemmas and the dialogue was heavily influenced by the extent to which they considered themselves to be responsible for the maintenance of détente. The SPD, as a big political party in state at the front of the East-West conflict, considered it its duty to prevent a nuclear war. It was convinced that attempts to create change in Eastern Europe 'from below' would endanger the stability on the continent and it therefore refrained from open solidarity with the opposition.

Also the PvdA and the labour movement in both countries felt a social responsibility for the maintenance of détente. Contrary to the SPD they were however less prepared to sacrifice the freedom of the people in Eastern Europe for it. With cautious behaviour they tried to support *Solidarność* politically and morally without harming the Polish trade union nor détente.

A part of the IKV and the Greens explicitly chose solidarity over détente. As countermovement the peace movement could more easily and with fewer consequences detach itself from the broadly felt responsibility for peace and détente in society. Many peace activists valued the traditional détente less and less. From a position of 'equidistance' they equally mistrusted the authorities in both blocs, and ever more frequently considered them to be interchangeable. For this reason they were little inclined to leave the solution to the problems between East and West only to high-level politicians and instead placed their hopes in détente between movements 'from below'.

All organizations maintained contacts with the authorities in Eastern Europe, which throughout the majority of the 1980s the Eastern European authorities seemed to be unavoidable conversation partners. The organizations differed more in how they dealt with contact with the opposition. This also influenced the content of the dialogue. Organizations that had an unconventional, informal approach in contacting the opposition were often confronted with differences of opinion in an early stage, but that way could work to create respect and mutual understanding. Organizations that favoured a formal approach and mainly contacted the opposition in the fringes of an official programme, did not have the time nor openness to speak out and overcome the mutual mistrust and lack of understanding. Similar differences were visible in showing solidarity. The more established and formally operating SPD, DGB and FNV were also so focused on effectiveness of support that symbolic actions were subordinated to it. This was less the case for organizations such as the IKV, the Greens and surprisingly also the PvdA, that dealt with things on a more ad hoc basis. To the opposition effective material help was important, but symbolic and political recognition from the West was perhaps just as crucial.

Both in the Netherlands and West Germany, Polish emigrants played a role in the discussions about the dilemmas and the establishment of a transnational dialogue. In the Netherlands very little knowledge about Poland existed. This way emigrants could become desired conversation partners in the media and organizations. In the Federal Republic this was less the case because of the existence of more expertise on Poland. Polish emigrants in the Netherlands developed understanding for the Western point of view and could play a bridging role, because they were close to the decision making process. At the same time Polish emigrants in the Federal Republic remained stuck in misunderstanding.

The extent to which these emigrants were able to gain influence in organizations differed among the movements. The labour movement was willing to listen, but only to official representatives of *Solidarność*. The peace movement and the PvdA were open to the broader Polish community, but because of the fact that the sometimes contradictory advice and criticism did not have the authority of a direct message from *Solidarność*, they felt less inclined to follow up on it. The SPD tended to ignore the Polish emigrant community, which did not have the network, reputation or knowledge of the social democrat habitus needed to be heard by the SPD, almost totally. All organizations were mainly willing to listen to what suited their own point of view, wishes and doubts. For emigrants it was most effective to confront their Western conversation partners directly with the opposition in Poland itself. The misunderstandings and walls of incomprehension that they ran into in contact with the opposition, forced them to learn the lessons that they had refused to accept from the emigrants at home.

This research is part of a recent tendency to write the history of the East-West conflict on the level of civil society and transnational connections. It shows how diplomatic concepts such as *détente* also gained a role on the level of transnational relations between social organizations and gained a new meaning. The case of the peace movement, that is usually left out in research on the Western reaction to *Solidarność*, illustrated that the Western reaction to the events in Poland was not always determined by national factors, but could also have important transnational components. The research furthermore shows that reticence out of fear of harming *détente* was a widely existing phenomenon that did not only exist in the Federal Republic, but was more understandable there than in other countries, because of the justified fear of anti-German propaganda campaigns. However, by showing their attachment to Poland mainly through humanitarian help, West German organizations disregarded the equally crucial political symbolic support to the Polish opposition. Lastly, this thesis also shows that the way the West dealt with *Solidarność* often had far less to do with negative presumptions than with wishful thinking. Only the direct dialogue across the Iron Curtain was able to tackle both. In most cases the more unconventional an organization was in this dialogue, the more successful it could be in eradicating misunderstanding, myths and incomprehension. All organizations struggled with the question of whether peace or freedom had priority over the other. Only those that were prepared to nuance their own attachment to peace were able to find an answer that suited the answer of the Polish opposition. Freedom, in that answer, was not a result of peace, but a necessary condition for a peace truly worthy of that name.