

DEMOCRATS, AND OTHER EXTREMISTS

**A Comparative Analysis of Extremist Parties
in Germany and The Netherlands**

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Introduction (Abstract)

Extremism is usually defined as (or used in the sense of) opposition to democracy; while democracy is identified with the prevailing regime. In this paper I will challenge this view and argue that:

- (a) the political system of countries like the Netherlands or the Federal Republic should be seen as a mixture of democratic, aristocratic and monarchic elements (in the Aristotelian sense);
- (b) extremist parties and movements wish to reduce this mixture to a more pure form of democracy or aristocracy or monarchy, if they focus on the political sphere; extremism in the socio-economic and socio-cultural sphere can be interpreted also as an attempt to reduce mixtures to something 'pure' (pure socialism or pure capitalism, ethnic or religious purity).

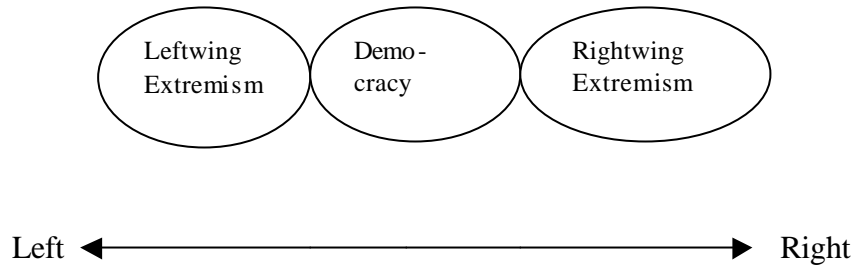
The conceptual analysis will be followed by empirical case studies of extremist parties in Germany and the Netherlands.

Extremism and Democracy: a Conceptual Analysis

According to the conventional view, political extremism and democracy are deadly enemies. Even without defining extremism, political scientists and sociologists seem to take this for granted (see for example Lipset, 1963: 127-179). In Germany, constitutional lawyers and political scientists agree on this: 'Extremismus ist der Gegenbegriff zur freiheitlichen Demokratie' (Backes & Jesse, 1987: 19). Extremists may disguise themselves as democrats, but in the end they will only abuse the democratic system in order to subvert it and establish their own minority rule (Funke, 1978; Merk, 1978: 127-129). Leftwing and rightwing extremists share this anti-democratic intention, whilst they disagree about the kind of society they wish to build: a more egalitarian and planned socio-economic order or an ethnically and culturally homogeneous but more hierarchical society respectively (Pfahl-Traughber, 1993: 14-23). Democrats may also pursue these ideals, but always in a spirit of compromise and respect for law and parliamentary institutions.

This conventional view can be summarized in a simple image (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Conventional View on Political Extremism and Democracy



It can be criticized on several grounds, however. For one thing, its conception of extremism is entirely negative, hence theoretically not very coherent. When Uwe Backes and Eckhard Jesse try to add some positive characteristics, they seem to be describing a type of personality rather than an ideology: extremists think in friend/foe dichotomies, they do not accept any norms but their own, they believe in ‘objective truth’ and in conspiracy theories, they tend to be dogmatic fanatics and activists prone to violence (Backes & Jesse, 1987: 22-24; cf Pfahl-Traughber, 1993: 14-16). Lipset does the same in his – for the rest rather original – analysis of extremism of the left, the right and the centre: ‘Extremist movements have much in common. They appeal to the disgruntled and the psychologically homeless, to the personal failures, the socially isolated, the economically insecure, the uneducated, unsophisticated, and authoritarian personalities at every level of the society’ (Lipset, 1963: 178). Quite likely this type of personality will be attracted by extreme political ideas, but not exclusively; some may feel more at home in the political centre or the ‘unpolitische Mitte’ (a-political centre), as Funke argues (Funke, 1978: 45). At the same time, it is difficult to imagine that mass parties like the French or Italian Communist parties in the fifties and sixties could recruit only this type of people.

Moreover, the conventional notion of extremism is ahistorical, as Pfahl-Traughber admits (1993: 15-16). It is tied too much to a particular time and place: the political system of the USA and its allies in the Cold War, to put it provocatively. At any rate, the political regimes prevailing in Western Europe and North America (at least until the 1980s) are taken as an absolute norm of democracy and any systemic opposition to these regimes is regarded as extremist. Whereas this may make sense if one looks

at the opposition within those countries at the time – especially the Communist movement and its allies – it seems inappropriate to apply this criterium to other places and times. To qualify, for example, the supporters of the more or less enlightened monarchies in the Middle East in this period (like Jordan or Kuwait), or the aristocratic system in eighteenth century Britain or the Dutch Republic of the seventeenth century as ‘extremist’ would make very little sense. In fact, democrats would be regarded as extremists in these countries under those circumstances.

This brings us to a third criticism. As will be shown below, even in contemporary Germany and the Netherlands, opposition to the political system comes not only from Communists and Fascists, but also from groups that favour radical or direct democracy. Some politicians considered these people more dangerous than rightwing extremists.¹ This seems to be the case in the USA as well, where many extremist groups want to decentralize and give power ‘back to the people’ rather than concentrate it in the hands of a party or another oligarchy (Sargent, 1995). In the conventional view, this is impossible and unintelligible.

Even worse, until the middle of the nineteenth century democrats were considered extremists or revolutionaries in most European countries, including the Netherlands and Germany (Rosenberg, 1938: 206-208; Van de Giessen, 1948: 65, 73-74). The liberal and conservative groups that ruled Europe at the time feared democracy would usher in a social revolution or social chaos. This may have had two reasons. First of all, democracy was seen as rule by the poor, workers or farmers – the majority of the population at the time. This interpretation goes back to Plato and Aristotle: ‘democracy originates when the poor win’ (Plato, VIII, 6 [Lee, 1972: 329]); ‘the difference between oligarchy and democracy is poverty and riches (..) a constitution under which the poor rule should be a democracy’ (Aristotle, III, VIII, 1279 b- 1280 a, [Barker, 1958: 116]). Secondly, and related to this, democracy was defined since antiquity until about the end of the eighteenth century as direct rule by the people, ‘what is now tendentiously termed direct democracy’ (Arblaster, 1987: 24; also Christophersen, 1968: 287-288). To quote again Aristotle: ‘the system of all ruling over each, and each, in his turn, over all (..) the popular assembly should be sovereign in all matters – or, at any rate, of the most important’ (Aristotle, VI, II, 1317b, [Barker,

¹ For instance Jan van Zijl, MP for the Dutch Labour Party, said about the Schiermonnikoog Club: ‘If these clubs gain influence, that will worry me more than the perversity of the Centre Democrats’

1958: 258-259]). Decisions which were taken by the people (i.e. the free men: slaves, women and foreigners were excluded) on the town square had to be prepared and executed by officers appointed by lot (Aristotle, VI, II, 1317b, [Barker, 1958: 258]; Plato, VIII, 6 [Lee, 1972: 329]). This would guarantee equality, the essence of democracy; whereas elections would favour ‘the best’ (in the perception of the electorate) and foster aristocracy: ‘an arrangement which fits an aristocracy is one under which a section appoints from all, or all appoint from a section, by the method of election’ (Aristotle, IV, XV, 1300 b [Barker, 1958: 199]). One need add, perhaps, that Plato and to a lesser extent Aristotle preferred aristocracy over democracy (Morall, 1977: 76-103; Finley, 1973: 4-5).

In the nineteenth century, democrats abandoned the ideal of popular assemblies and appointment by lot and accepted the idea that the people would elect parliamentary representatives. Even then, however, democrats argued for a close and permanent control of these representatives by the people, through primary assemblies, imperative mandates, annual elections, people’s initiatives and referendums, or the right to recall representatives (Lucardie, forthcoming). By the end of the nineteenth century, these radical demands were gradually dropped. Something like a tacit compromise, or even a merger, was reached between democrats and liberals: the latter ended their resistance against universal suffrage, while the former accepted the liberal ideas about parliamentary representation. Only the extreme leftwing fringe of the democrats, anarchists and leftwing-communists, continued to fight for imperative mandates and other forms of (direct) democracy, at the beginning of the twentieth century. By now, democracy had been identified with universal suffrage and was accepted by every party except for fascists or national-socialists. From a controversial and revolutionary ideal it had become an almost meaningless word which ‘implied approval of the society or institution so described’ (Finley, 1973: 9). Especially after the defeat of the fascist and national-socialist enemies of democracy in World War II, ‘democracy’ turned into a taboo nobody could challenge without incurring heavy social or even legal penalties. Thus regimes that would be regarded as fine examples of an aristocracy or monarchy, or of a balanced mixture, by Aristotle or Plato felt compelled to disguise and defend themselves as (another variety of) democracies: ‘popular democracy’, ‘liberal democracy’, ‘authoritarian democracy’, ‘basic

democracy’ and so on (Burdeau, 1985: V, 117-118). In the Cold War both sides claimed to be the better democrats. Perhaps now that the Cold War is over, the notion of democracy can be purged from perversions and tarnishes, and restored to its ancient meaning: a political system where offices rotate between citizens and decisions can be taken by all citizens, whether in real or virtual popular assemblies, in referendums or whatever.²

If one accepts this redefinition of ‘democracy’, most polities we know should be considered mixtures of democracy, aristocracy and perhaps monarchy, in the classical Aristotelian sense.³ Take for example the Dutch political system. It is a constitutional monarchy, even if the monarch has very little power; he or she can still appoint an *informateur* who will prepare the formation of a coalition government after a new parliament has been elected. Monarchists defend this in terms of a ‘balance of power’ and argue that ‘sovereignty of the people’ may lead to oppression of minorities (Vonhoff, 2001). Moreover, the monarch, or in his/her name the government, appoints important officials like ministers, provincial governors (*commissaris van de koningin*: the Queen’s commissioners) and burgomasters, judges and other civil servants who would have been elected or selected by lot in a democracy. Of course, the Dutch people elect representatives at the local, provincial and national level who represent them and who can control the government. Parliament holds the supreme power in the Netherlands. Once elected, its members are independent, however, of their electorate: the constitution does not allow any imperative mandate (Grondwet, 1983: 67.3) A people’s initiative or referendum is not possible either – a constitutional amendment which would allow a referendum under certain conditions failed to pass the Senate in 1999.⁴ (The Senate, by the way, is elected not by the people but by members of provincial parliaments.) In theory, any Dutch citizen could be elected member of parliament (provided she or he is 18 years old and not committed to a mental institution or a prison - for certain crimes) (Grondwet, 1983: 54.2; Elzinga, 1997: 33,

weinig in nieuwe politieke bewegingen’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 8 March 1993.

² Need I add that ‘citizens’ today include women? Foreigners and slaves are still excluded, the latter are supposed to have disappeared from the earth, the former can acquire citizenship under certain conditions after some years of (legal) residence.

³ One might introduce a new term for this mixture, for instance ‘polyarchy’ (Dahl, 1956: 63-89); however, the ancient Greek notion of a ‘mixed constitution’ seems to me to require less clarification, and therefore preferable.

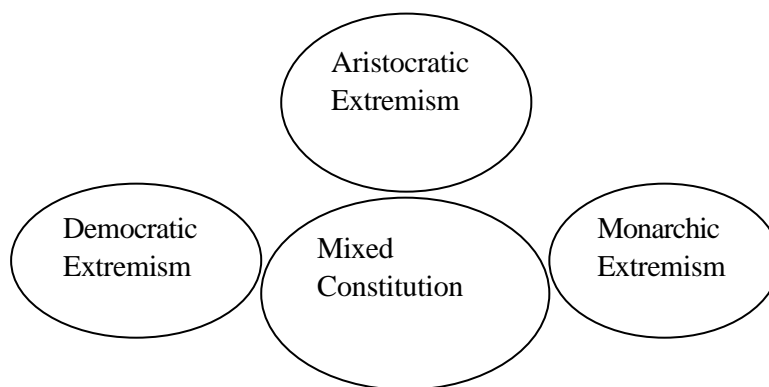
⁴ A new bill is being prepared in 2001, however; at the local level, referendums have been held but municipal authorities are free to ignore their outcome.

85-95). In practice, only prominent members of political parties and a few well-known representatives of large social organisations or media stars are nominated as candidates – by the political parties, which control the election process in fact. At the end of the twentieth century, only 2.5 per cent of the Dutch adult population can be considered a member of a party, and perhaps only 0.5 per cent an active member participating in the nomination of parliamentary candidates (Voerman, 1996: 199-202; Hillebrand, 1992: 142-161; Koole, Van Holsteyn & Elkink, 2000: 25-28). The elected candidates do not constitute a random sample from the electorate: they are predominantly middle-aged men, university graduates and often party officials (Hillebrand, 1992: 249-291). Unless one restricts the notion ‘aristocracy’ to people of noble blood, one would have to admit there is an element of aristocracy here. Members of parliament are selected as ‘the best’ (οἱ ἀριστοί) in terms of education and political experience, even if criteria of representativeness (there should be more women, more immigrants and more youngsters) may have gained more weight in recent years. No wonder politicians defend this regime in terms that remind a reader with some classical education of Aristotle and Plato advocating an aristocratic polity. Frits Bolkestein, for example, when leader of the Liberal party, argued against introduction of a referendum, because ordinary citizens would lack knowledge and concern for the public interest, as well as financial independence (Bolkestein, 1996). Of course, the Netherlands should not be conceived of as an aristocratic polity in the traditional sense. Politicians do not inherit positions and co-opt candidates, as they did in the Dutch Republic until 1795 (Israel, 1995: 125; De Wit, 1965: 15-21). They take public opinion very seriously and start worrying about re-election already a long time before the elections are called. Even if turn-out is declining gradually, elections are still having a significant impact on policy-making (Thomson, 1999). Moreover, citizens can influence decisions taken by politicians through petitions, demonstrations and other political activities. Hence, I would classify the Dutch political system as a mixed polity, where democratic elements prevail over aristocratic and monarchic elements.

Once one accepts this return to an aristotelian classification of regimes, it is easy to define extremism in a coherent and unbiased (‘objective’) way. Political extremists reject the mixed constitution and strive for a (relatively) ‘pure’ monarchy, aristocracy

or democracy (see Figure 2). In a similar vein, one could define socio-economic extremists as people who reject the ‘mixed economy’ (*soziale Marktwirtschaft*) which prevails in most of Western Europe in favour of either a pure capitalist system (where practically all public services have been privatized, perhaps including police, justice and defence) or a pure socialist system (where practically all private companies have been socialized). As a third category one might distinguish cultural extremists, who object to the multi-culturalism and religious diversity of most modern societies and hark back to a ‘pure’, homogeneous ethnic and/or religious system of norms and values.

Figure 2. An Aristotelian View on Political Extremism and Democracy



Empirical Illustrations: Extremist Parties in Germany and the Netherlands

The framework introduced above will be applied here to short case studies of extremist parties in two countries, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands. These two countries have been selected for (mainly) practical reasons: language and proximity. Their political systems seem sufficiently similar to allow systematic comparisons, yet sufficiently different to provide grounds for some generalization.

As the name indicates, the Federal Republic is not a centralized constitutional monarchy, as the Netherlands is. However, names may be misleading. Monarchic elements can be detected also in Germany, where the government is headed by a

rather powerful Chancellor, who can appoint the ministers and give them instructions (*Richtlinienkompetenz*). The *Bundeskanzler* is elected by parliament (*Bundestag*), but is usually also the leader of the largest political party. Significantly, the German regime has been called *Kanzlerdemokratie* (Rudzio, 200: 284-289; Smith, 1979: 59-62). Democratic elements may be slightly stronger than in the Dutch system, as burgomasters are usually elected by the people and often citizens can cancel decisions of parliament through a referendum, at least at the local and regional level (Rudzio, 2000: 50-51, 400-410). However, political power is concentrated also in the hands of party elites and professional politicians, to a large extent. Even if it may be exaggerated to refer to the Federal Republic as a *Parteienstaat*, parties do control the parliamentary elections as well as the appointment of many senior civil servants - and even leading journalists in the public broadcasting companies (Rudzio, 2000: 115-120). As in the Netherlands, only about 2.5 per cent of the electorate seems to be member of a political party (Rudzio, 2000: 185-186). The political elite or political class differs also from the electorate with respect to social origin, education, age and political experience (Rudzio, 2000: 511-528).

The parties are somewhat similar in both countries, at least in terms of ideology: the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) can be compared to the Dutch Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA), the *Christlich-Demokratische Union* (CDU) to the Dutch Christian Democratic party (*Christen-Democratisch Appèl*, CDA), *Die Grünen* to Green Left, the *Freie Demokratische Partei* (FDP) to the Dutch Liberals (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, VVD) and perhaps even the *Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* (PDS) to the Socialist Party (SP). The origins and historical development of the parties are rather different. The Dutch system, on the one hand, evolved gradually from an elitist two-party system dominated by the Liberals (from 1848 to 1917) to a multi-party system dominated by Catholic and Protestant parties (1918-1972) and finally a moderately polarized party system dominated by Liberals and Social Democrats (Daalder, 1989). The German polity, on the other hand, started with an authoritarian (imperial) regime opposed by a variety of powerless parties (1871-1918), followed abruptly by an extremely polarized and powerful party system (1918-1933), a totalitarian one-party-state (1933-1945) followed again abruptly by a moderately polarized two-and-a-half party system in Western Germany (1949-1983) and another totalitarian party system in the East (1949-1990), which merged finally into a system of two 'blocs' consisting of a major

party (SPD or CDU) and two minor parties (Greens and PDS or FDP and CSU) (Rudzio, 2000: 136-155).

Wary of totalitarian parties, the legislators of the Federal Republic inserted in the constitution a warning that ‘parties which, by reason of their aims or the behaviour of their adherents, seek to impair or abolish the free democratic basic order or to endanger the existence of the Federal Republic of Germany, shall be unconstitutional’ (Smith, 1979: 66).⁵ Since 1949 two parties have been banned by the Constitutional Court: the Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, KPD) and the *Sozialistische Reichspartei* (SRP) which displayed national-socialist tendencies (Rudzio, 2000: 121). Though the Dutch constitution does not mention parties at all, parties can be banned by a court of justice if they offend ‘the public order’ (*openbare orde*): a more ‘open norm’ than the German law (Eskes, 1988: 565-580). Since 1945 this has happened to three parties, all leaning towards national-socialism (see also below).

Even so, the Dutch party system seems more open to newcomers, because of its low electoral threshold; 0.67 per cent of the popular vote suffices to obtain a seat in parliament, compared to 5 per cent in Germany. A new German party may gain easier access to state funding, however, as it needs only 0.5 per cent of the vote to receive *Wahlkampfkostenerstattung*, a state subsidy of 1,30 DM for each voter (Rudzio, 2000: 129). Dutch parties are entitled to subsidies only if they have won seats in parliament (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2000).

As the stage has been set, we can now look at the parties that may qualify as extremist in the two countries: four German and four Dutch parties, that appear at first sight matched, as far as outlook and ideology are concerned. It is a selective sample from the more than fifty parties that have participated in national elections over the last decade.

⁵ Translation of Article 21.2 of the German Constitution: ‘Parteien, die nach ihren Zielen oder nach dem Verhalten ihrer Mitglieder darauf ausgehen, die freiheitliche demokratische Grundordnung zu

Leftwing extremist parties: MLPD and NCPN

The Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany (*Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands*, MLPD) could be considered an indirect offshoot of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), which had been banned in 1956. In 1968 former members of the KPD decided to found a new German Communist Party that would respect the constitution of the Federal Republic. A dissident minority condemned this ‘revisionism’ and preferred to revive the KPD as a revolutionary marxist-leninist organisation. They were inspired by the ‘thought of chairman Mao’, the founding father of the People’s Republic of China, and denounced the Soviet Union as a ‘revisionist’ regime which betrayed marxist-leninism. Apart from old Communist party cadre, mainly industrial workers, the Maoist KPD attracted quite a few students who had been radicalized by their experience in the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition of the 1960s. Soon workers and students clashed over ideological and organisational questions. The KPD fell apart in more than half a dozen groups of a rather sectarian nature (*K-Gruppen*), most of which did not last very long. Perhaps the only survivor is the MLPD, founded in 1972 as Communist Workers’ League (*Kommunistischer Arbeiterbund*) and renamed in 1982 (Langguth, 1976: 184-194; Interview Engel). The party presented candidates at the general elections in 1987, 1994 and 1998, always attracting less than 0.1% of the popular vote (Bothe, 1996: 45; Bundeswahlleiter, 1998).

The MLPD continued to fight for socialism, even after all socialist countries – including China – had degenerated into ‘bureaucratic capitalism’ (Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands, 1995: 91-113). The party did not clarify what it meant by socialism, except in very general terms: the working masses had to take charge of production and of society, under the leadership of the marxist-leninist party (Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands, 2000: 36; cf Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands, 1982: 20-21).⁶ Some kind of planning would be required, though not as centralized and bureaucratic as in former socialist countries (Interview Engel). Even if the MLPD criticized the bureaucratic style of Stalin and

beeinträchtigen oder zu beseitigen oder den Bestand der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zu gefährden, sind verfassungswidrig’ (Rudzio, 2000: 121).

⁶ The German text, adopted in 1999: ‘Es sind die Arbeitermassen und ihre Selbstorganisationen, die unter Führung der marxistisch-leninistischen Partei die Lenkung und Verwaltung von Produktion und Gesellschaft in die Hand nehmen müssen’ (Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands, 2000: 36).

even Mao – both underestimated the significance of ‘the proletarian way of thinking’ (*die proletarische Denkweise*) and the need for independent supervisory bodies – it still considered the early Soviet Union and China during the Cultural Revolution as examples of socialist states (Interview Engel; see also Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands, 1982: 23-24). It did not explicitly reject the political system of the Federal Republic – which might have provoked the Constitutional Court, of course – but regarded it as the instrument of monopoly capitalism which would have to be replaced by the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ (Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands, 1982: 20, 25). At the same time, it called for ‘development and maintenance of democracy for the broad masses’ (Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands, 2000: 37; cf Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands, 1982: 26). On paper, democratic rights were guaranteed also in the Soviet Union and in the People’s Republic (Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, 1978: [articles 44-59] 35-38; Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 1977: [articles 33-69] 37-52). The highest state bodies, the Supreme Soviet and the National People’s Congress, would be elected by the people. Yet the elections would be controlled carefully by the Communist Party in both countries. Candidates had to be selected or at least approved of by the party - according to the Soviet constitution, they could be nominated by branches of the Communist Party or organisations like trade unions, youth, co-operatives, work collectives or military units (Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 1977: [article 100] 73). Practically all public officials of any importance belonged to the party. The constitution of the Soviet Union of 1977 made it quite clear that ‘(t)he leading and guiding force of Soviet society and the nucleus of its political system, of all state organisations and public organisations, is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union’ (Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 1977: [article 6], 21). In a similar vein, the Chinese constitution defined the Communist Party as ‘the core of leadership of the whole Chinese people’ (Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, 1978: [article 2] 9). The party itself specified: ‘the organs of state power of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the People’s Liberation Army, and (..) must all accept the leadership of the party’ (Communist Party of China, 1969: 431, 434). Like other Communist parties, the Chinese party adhered to democratic centralism: leaders would be elected by lower level branches, but the latter had to obey their orders. Though it was a mass party with millions of members, it did not admit just anyone. Applicants for membership had to be

recommended by two party members, examined by a party branch and approved by the next higher party committee (Communist Party of China, 1969: 432-433). Once admitted, party members had to meet strict requirements : study the thought of Mao, Marx and Lenin, work for the interests of the people, consult with the masses, practice criticism and self-criticism, respect party discipline (Communist Party of China, 1969: 433). Plato might be quite pleased with this kind of aristocracy, even if he would cherish doubts about its social origins. Though it had started as a party of workers and poor peasants, once it had conquered power it developed into a political aristocracy with its own moral code of conduct and social hierarchy. Democratic elements could be observed also – leaders had to ‘listen to the opinions of the masses’ (Communist Party of China, 1969: 434) – but only within strict ideological and political confinements. Monarchist elements may still be present as well, in so far as local dictators have survived after the death of the great dictator, Mao-tsetung (Hamrin, 1992: 99).

Thus one might infer that the MLPD aimed at a political regime that would be more purely aristocratic than the Federal Republic at present, even if the party claimed to be democratic (Interview Engel). Hence, beyond any reasonable doubt it should be considered an extremist party, both in the political and in the socio-economic sphere. Other cases seem much more doubtful. True, some scholars regard even the Party of Democratic Socialism (*Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus*, PDS) as an extremist party, which would destroy German democracy from inside (Moreau, 1998: 324-326). A detailed analysis of programmes and other publications indicates a mixture of ideas from different traditions, marxist-leninism as well as libertarian socialism and social-democracy (Neugebauer & Stöss, 1996: 70-117). The party programme of 1993 called for democratization of all social and political institutions, direct participation of citizens in decision-making, democratic planning of the economy - possibly through social and economic councils at various levels (*Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus*, 1993: 8-9, 16). The proposals remain rather vague and might usher in a (more purely) democratic system or alternatively a kind of corporatist aristocracy – if the various councils would be dominated by organisational elites like trade union leaders for example. Even so, it seems exaggerated to accuse the PDS of totalitarian tendencies, also in view of its internal pluralism (but cf Moreau, 1998: 286-294). The MLPD maintained contacts with a small Dutch organisation, *Groep Marxisten-Leninisten/ Rode Morgen* (Marxist-Leninist Group Red Morning), which has not

participated in elections so far. The nearest equivalent among Dutch parties might be the New Communist Party of the Netherlands (*Nieuwe Communistische Partij* – NCPN), even if it belongs to a network of parties considered ‘neo-revisionist’ by the MLPD (MLPD, 1995: 274-279; see also Gleumes & Moreau, 1998: 643-646). The NCPN was founded in 1992 by two Communist groups: one had broken away from the old Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) when the latter abandoned marxist-leninism in 1984, while the other had stayed with the CPN then but refused to follow the majority of the party into Green Left in 1990/1991. The NCPN took part in general elections in 1994 and 1998, obtaining each time 0.1% of the popular vote. The party has remained true to marxist-leninist principles. Yet with the collapse of the Soviet Union, a rift appeared in the party. A majority of the editorial committee of the party journal and a minority of the party executive attributed the disaster to a lack of democracy, whereas the majority of the party executive and a minority of the party journal editors explained it in terms of a betrayal of marxist-leninist principles. The latter group won (Van de Klift, 1998; Smit et al., 1995). Thus the NCPN came to resemble maoist parties, which had always accused the Soviet Russians of revising or neglecting marxist-leninism. It began to co-operate with for example the Belgian Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid, Parti du Travail*) – denounced as ‘neo-revisionist’ by the MLPD, but originally also a Maoist party (Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands, 1995: 274-280). Unlike the MLPD, the NCPN still defends the remaining ‘socialist’ countries like Cuba, North-Korea and even Serbia or Yugoslavia (Voerman, 1998: 518-519). Thus one may assume the NCPN also strives for a socialist aristocracy, in the end. Even if it appears slightly more moderate than the MLPD, it can be qualified as extremist in the political as well as socio-economic sense.

Around 2000, the NCPN seems the only active extremist leftwing party in the Netherlands. There are other leftwing groups – Trotskyites, Anarchists, Maoists – which do not take part in elections, hence do not meet the classical criterium of a political party: presenting candidates at elections (Sartori, 1976: 64). A few years ago, the Socialist Party (SP) might have been seen as an extremist party. Like the MLPD, it was founded by Marxist-Leninists with a great admiration for Mao’s China. However, since 1972 it has dropped not only its leninism but also marxist references to revolution, socialization of the means of production and dictatorship of the

proletariat, whereas it has embraced parliamentary democracy and a mixed economy (Voerman, 1998: 515-517; Socialistische Partij, 1999).

Rightwing extremist parties: NPD and NVU

The National-Democratic Party of Germany (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, NPD) was founded in 1964 by several smaller groups as a way to unite the 'National Opposition' to the established parties which had failed to free Germany from domination by the Allied Powers (Maier & Bott, 1968: 8-10; Schmollinger, 1984: 1922-1929). Initially, it advocated a conservative, or even reactionary nationalism, aiming at restoration of the old borders and a sense of popular community (*Volksgemeinschaft*). In the 1980s it shifted its attention mainly to foreign immigrants. In the 1990s it adopted more and more anti-capitalist positions, calling for a 'new social order', a 'space-oriented national economy' (*raumorientierte nationale Volkswirtschaft*) directed by the state; a kind of 'German socialism' or 'social nationalism' (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, 1998: 3-4; Pfahl-Traugber, 1999: 155-156; Interview Eigenfeld). Though the socialist rhetoric might have helped the NPD to recruit quite a few members in the former German Democratic Republic, it did not contribute all that much to electoral growth. After a short period of initial successes in the 1960s, the party's share of the vote declined from 4.3% in 1969 to 0.6% in 1972, 0.3% in 1976, to 0.2% in 1980. In 1990 and 1998 it won 0.3% (Schmollinger, 1984: 1954; Bothe, 1996: 78; Bundeswahlleiter, 1998). If only to avoid the fate of the SRP, the NPD would not reject the political system of the Federal Republic. Its platform calls for minor reforms only: introduction of a referendum and election of the *Bundespräsident* (federal president) by the people (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, 1998: 3). At the moment, the federal president is elected by a meeting of the *Bundestag* and representatives from the regional parliaments and does not hold much power (Rudzio, 2000: 341-349). Election by the people might strengthen his position. Close reading of the party platform and other publications provides more circumstantial evidence for extremist tendencies, both monarchist and aristocratic: statements about 'natural inequality', hierarchy, organic unity of the people and the state, beyond 'group egoism' and class-struggle (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, 1998: 2-3, 8-9; Mudde, 1995: 215; Pfahl-Traugber, 1999: 152-156). One author in the party journal advocated

explicitly ‘a socialist aristocracy’, without elaborating this, however (Pfahl-Traugher, 1999: 156). Though the evidence may be thin, by the end of the year 2000 German authorities seemed to prepare for a ban on the NPD (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2000; Frankfurter Rundschau, 2000). Apparently, the NPD was considered more extreme than its rightwing rivals, the German People’s Union (*Deutsche Volksumion*, DVU) and the Republicans (*Die Republikaner*) (see also Backes, 1996; Pfahl-Traugher, 1993).

Much more outspoken was the Dutch counterpart of the NPD, the Dutch People’s Union (*Nederlandse Volksumie*, NVU), established in 1971 by Dutch and Flemish nationalists (Bouw, Van Donselaar & Nelissen, 1981: 57-69). Its first priority was the creation of a Greater Dutch State which would include the Netherlands and the Dutch-speaking parts of Belgium and France, but exclude alien ethnic elements. In 1972 it published a programme of political reforms that might be considered extremist – the more so, as it was presented as a compromise with the reality of parliamentary democracy by party leaders (Zoetmulder & Looij, 1980 [1972]). In the opinion of the NVU, both the King and the prime minister should receive more real powers. Both should be able to veto decisions of parliament and refer decisions to the people in a referendum. The prime minister would be appointed and dismissed by the King, hence he would be independent of parliament for all practical purposes. Political parties would lose weight, as part of the lower house of parliament and the entire upper house would be elected by socio-economic organisations and corporations of professionals (Zoetmulder & Looij, 1980 [1972]: 5). Parliamentary democracy was denounced as an egalitarian system, which ‘excluded the best from leadership’ (Los, 1980 [1972]). In the course of the 1970s, the NVU became more openly racist and even national-socialist. Joop Glimmerveen, appointed leader in 1974, campaigned with slogans like ‘Keep Holland white’ and did not hide his admiration for a national-socialist like Anton Mussert, condemned to death in 1946 for high treason, but in the eyes of Glimmerveen ‘a great patriot’ (Glimmerveen, 1979). The internal organisation of the party seemed to anticipate the monarchic structure it hoped to impose on the whole country: the party leader was not elected by the members but appointed by a Board of Directors (*Raad van Bestuur*), which itself co-opted its members (Glimmerveen, 1981). In 1977 the NVU obtained 0.4% of the vote, not quite enough for a seat in parliament. A year later the party was banned by the Court of The Hague. Though the Supreme Court qualified this decision on legal-technical grounds, participation in

elections became rather difficult for the NVU. In 1981 it received 0.1% of the popular vote, in 1982 even less. In the 1980s the party ceased all activities. Yet in 1996 Glimmerveen resuscitated it, with the help of some young activists. It did not present candidates at the 1998 general elections, but concentrated its activities on (mostly illegal) street demonstrations. It may count some 50 members (NRC Handelsblad, 2000).

There can be little doubt about the political extremism of the NVU. It favoured a different political regime, dominated by the monarchy but inspired also by aristocratic ideas. This cannot be said about other Dutch parties that are usually classified as right-wing extremist, such as the Centre Party and its various offshoots: Centre Democrats, Centre Party'86 and New National Party. Though its leaders denounced the prevailing political regime often in emotional terms, they did not present an alternative but at most some moderate reforms, like introduction of a referendum and exclusion of foreign immigrants from the right to vote in municipal and provincial elections (Mudde, 1998: 199-219, 229-253; Lucardie, 1998: 117-119). In 1996, outspoken National-Socialists – including former leaders of youth organisations affiliated with the NVU – captured the Centre Party'86, and might have adopted a more extremist platform if they had not been forced by the court to dissolve the party two years later. The court took this decision not because it feared the party undermined democracy, but because it promoted hatred and discrimination of foreign immigrants in its programmes and propaganda, thus endangering public order (De Volkskrant, 1998). The party's rejection of the multi-cultural and multi-racial society could be considered extremist, in the cultural rather than political sense. To a lesser extent this label fits the Centre Democrats and the New National Party as well.

Democratic extremists: Pogo Anarchists, Idealists, the Party of Non-voters and the Voters' Collective

The four parties to be discussed below share a concern with direct democracy, if nothing else. All are quite marginal in terms of votes (and members).

The largest is the Anarchist Pogo Party of Germany (*Anarchistische Pogo Partei Deutschlands*, APPD), founded as a joke by high school students in 1981, and only registered as a formal party in 1998. It obtained 0.1% of the vote in the same year (Interview Nagel/Altenburg; *Anarchistische Pogo Partei Deutschlands*, 1998a: 99-

123). It presented itself as a mixture of satire, provocation and serious reformism. The Pogo Anarchists rejected traditional anarchism and accepted the need for a state, provided it would be a modest and functional one. Citizens should be enabled to intervene directly in political decision-making processes, through the internet (Anarchistische Pogo Partei Deutschlands, 1998b: 12). Even more extreme seems its proposal for the ‘balkanization’ of Germany. The Federal republic should be divided into a number of small cantons, to accommodate the variety of people and ‘pogo-races’. The APPD distinguished three basic ‘pogo-races’: (a) *asoziale Parasiten*, punks, alcoholics and other people who prefer to live on welfare and enjoy themselves; (b) achievers (*Leistungswillige*) who like to work hard and pursue a career, even if they have to share their salaries with the former category; (c) aggressive types, criminals, psychopaths and neo-nazi’s, who can fight each other in violence-experience-parks (*Gewalt-Erlebnis-Parks*) (Anarchistische Pogo Partei Deutschlands, 1998b: 24-29).

There is no real equivalent of the APPD in the Netherlands, but the Idealists (*Jij en de Idealisten*) come close. This party was founded in 1997 by two members of ‘Little Louisa’ (*Loesje*), a network that has produced and distributed posters with provocative ideas and comments on social and political events through major Dutch cities since 1983 (Interview Verschure). The Idealists attracted quite a bit of attention from the media, but only 2500 votes (0.0%) in 1998. Their style resembled that of the APPD only to some extent: the Idealists seemed less satirical and more serious about their ideas than the Pogo Anarchists. The main idea was grass-roots democracy: ‘the separation between people who take decisions and people who carry them out, is eliminated’ (Idealisten, 1998: 27).⁷ Citizens should have not only the right to vote, but also the right to decide, on every issue that concerns them. This could be done through internet, but also through ‘Houses of Democracy’ in every neighbourhood, where process managers would facilitate the decision-making process. The principle of self-management should be applied not only to politics, but also to industry, education, urban planning and so on. Thus the ideals of the Idealists resemble those of the Pogo Anarchists, insofar as both hope to realize democracy through internet as well as radical decentralisation.

⁷ In Dutch: De scheiding tussen beslissers en uitvoerders wordt opgeheven.

Forms of (direct) democracy were also advocated by the Party of Non-voters (*Partei der Nichtwähler*), founded in 1998 by a former member of the Christian Democratic Union, Dr. Werner Peters.⁸ At the 1998 general elections it won almost 7000 votes. In order to reduce the power of bureaucrats and party officials, it proposed (a) nomination of parliamentary candidates through primaries; (b) referendum and people's initiative; (c) direct election of prime ministers, burgomasters and other public officials; (d) recall of elected politicians (Partei der Nichtwähler, 1998: 1-2). Though each proposal sounds fairly modest, taken together they might indeed reduce the power of political parties – even if it remains to be seen who will benefit most from this.

Somewhat similar proposals were put forward by the Dutch Voters' Collective (*Kiezers Collectief*), founded also in 1998. Voters should be able to nominate and select candidates for parliament through internet primaries. Party lists should become irrelevant to the distribution of seats: regardless of their position on a list, the candidates with most votes would win the seats.⁹ Moreover, the Voters' Collective promised that its members of parliament would hold public opinion polls before any important bill would be voted on; if for example two thirds of the population would favour the bill, two thirds of the parliamentary group would also vote for it (Kiezers Collectief, 1998: 5; Interview Steinen). Thus, parliament would directly reflect public opinion, almost like the popular assembly in ancient Athens. Few voters were interested, however: hardly 1700 voted for the Voters' Collective in 1998. Elements of direct democracy, like the referendum and people's initiative, were proposed also by other, established parties in both countries, like *Die Grünen*, Democrats '66, the Green Left and the Socialist Party (Bündnis '90/Die Grünen, 1998: 7.2; Democrats '66, 1998: 93; GroenLinks, 1998: 25; Socialistische Partij, 1998: 3). Besides, Democrats '66 suggested that the prime minister should be elected by the people, while the Green Left and the Socialist Party argued for election of the head of state. Though these reforms would make for a significant change in the political system, they would quite likely not do away with the party aristocracy. Hence, it seems to me these parties should not be regarded as democratic extremists, even if some of their proposals may be considered extreme in the Dutch context.

⁸ Reply to a questionnaire sent to the party in 1998.

⁹ At present, the order of the party list determines which candidates win seats, unless they obtain more than a specified number of preferential votes (25% of the electoral quotient).

Conclusions

The case studies show that only few parties meet the criteria of the aristotelian definition of political extremism, in the German Federal Republic and the Netherlands at the turn of the century. Socio-economic and cultural extremism seem slightly more common. According to our definition, political extremists strive for a more purely aristocratic, monarchic or democratic regime. As democracy has been sanctified in two world wars, nowadays hardly any party dares to attack it openly. Yet it can be argued that marxist-leninist parties which advocate 'socialist democracy', are in fact aiming for a party aristocracy (though usually not a hereditary one). Nationalist or rightwing extremist parties like the NVU and to a lesser extent the NPD seem to favour a more monarchic system, even if mixed with aristocratic elements, and disguised as liberal democracy (at least in the case of the NPD). More outspoken in their critique of the prevailing political system are the democratic extremists like APPD and Idealists, to a lesser extent also the Party of Non-voters and the Voters' Collective, which want to involve citizens directly in political decision-making and to reduce the power of intermediaries like political parties.

Possibly, democratic extremists might become a serious challenge to the prevailing regimes in the future. With rising levels of education and economic prosperity, political efficacy may grow in most post-industrial societies, and more citizens might demand democratic participation, in one form or another. For the time being, however, these groups will probably remain rather marginal. The overwhelming majority of citizens in countries like the Netherlands and Germany seem to accept the 'mixed constitution'. This would not surprise the ancient Greeks: after all, our so-called democracy combines in fact elements of aristocracy, monarchy and democracy, which makes for stability and equilibrium, while avoiding all extremes.

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