

Step 13 – 28-09-09

Last week a professor of public administration expressed his concern in the newspapers about the state of democracy in the Netherlands and he used the rise of the Party for the Animals as an example of the deteriorated state of parliamentary democracy. I would like to share my response with you, as you will also face similar reproaches if you set up a Party for the Animals in your own country. Professor Roel in 't Veld is worried about the state of democracy. He uses such terms as 'an impending destruction of our democracy' and sees personalistic politics and the rise of what he calls 'single issue parties' such as the Party for the Animals as proof. In 't Veld's argument is characteristic of the current political system's short-sightedness as well as that of the scientists and administrators attached thereto. In 't Veld would not dream of calling his own social democratic party – The Labour Party (PvdA) a single issue party, as they do carry out more than one mission. Even with such parties as the PvdA, it's not always clear what they believe on certain subjects, even on the topic of labour. Nor do we know where they stand on raising the age of retirement, the public funding of pensions, or cut backs in care provision. We also have no information on their stance on the acquisition of new jet fighters, Georgia's NATO membership, the parliamentary investigation into the attack on Iraq, free public transport for high school students, dual appointments at the highest court of law, or the mission in Afghanistan. To make a long story short, voters have no way of predicting the way in which their incumbent politicians will represent them. And that applies not only to the Labour Party – many traditional parties apparently do not feel obliged to provide the voters with what they promised during the run up to elections.



Professor Roel in 't Veld

Alienation

Traditional politics moves within a limited spectrum of greys, alienating the voter as a result. This is why the parties that lie to the extreme left and right hand sides of the spectrum are benefiting from the highly mobile voter's market. This is also the reason that parties that advocate an entirely different point of view have a chance to succeed. The Party for the Animals is indeed the first party in the history of the world to not focus on human short term needs. However, this is the reason it is set aside as a 'single issue party'.

Anyone who sees how much time and attention the traditional parties devote to westerners and their money has more reason to assign that moniker to the other parties.

Broad vision

Where is their broad vision on the connection between the credit crisis, food crisis, water crisis, biodiversity crisis, climate crisis and the moral crisis that plagues us? Just look the

sums of money used to keep the banking and insurance industries afloat. Compare them to the funds available to ensure a sustainable society and the conclusion is foregone. We continue to fritter away the most important things we have: clean air, clean soil, clean water, biodiversity and a stable climate.

Destruction

Democracy is not under fire from supposed single issue parties or individual politics, but from politics that does not recognise the fact that we are irrevocably destroying our surroundings. Humans are the only living species guilty of this kind of short-sighted behaviour. Mankind has taken the qualities that separate man from the animals – higher intelligence and the ability to make moral and ethical choices – and turned them to our disadvantage. These actions have consequences for humans, animals, the environment and democracy. The calamities we as humans call down on ourselves and other living beings lead to an insurmountable chasm between citizens and the parties that thought to or claimed to serve their interests.

During the Ecclesia, the ancient Athens public assembly, they believed it important that not only the strongest speak but that the weakest also have their say. Democracy from the year 2009 could learn a thing or two from this example. The Party for the Animals makes its choices based on the criteria of sustainability, compassion, personal freedom and personal responsibility and therefore has developed a consistent voting pattern in all the democratic bodies in which it is represented, such as the Lower House, Upper House, Provincial States and district water boards. The party is moreover the only one to produce a comprehensive annual report of more than 900 pages.

Public administrators would be better served by providing real solutions to traditional political parties' failures and the voter alienation that results. The rejection of new democratic developments, such as parties for people who are prepared to look further than their own short term needs, adds nothing creative or new.