

What is happening to the Social Contract?

It is not only that the arts and culture are in danger, but, the whole Social Contract is at stake! The programme of the new Cabinet marks the already- started transformation towards a liberal economic and cultural structure in the Netherlands. It is the demarcation line of a new beginning: the withdrawal of the welfare state and the official launching of neo-liberalism in its most extreme conservative form. According to this programme, all aspects of a caring society, from childcare subsidy to cultural funding and, from healthcare to identity issues are being worn down and swallowed up to compensate for the adverse effects of the credit crunch that has shaken the globe financially over the past few years.

All these decisions are the consequences of the preference and priority of the new Cabinet. But what has changed? Is Dutch society no longer willing or able to support women, who wish to continue their career and have children at the same time? Why are we now starting to evaluate the impact and success of art and cultural institutions according to market parameters? What was the role of cultural institutions before and how will they function now? According to which criteria? The change, ultimately, is a question of transforming the mentality of a society that at one time believed in solidarity and support for its fellow citizens, and valued the arts and culture for their power of criticism, and for their ability to open up nascent horizons for individuals and society as a whole. Is this just the beginning? What will come next? Will Dutch society judge all its value systems from the perspective of market rules and regulations? Will it call for the clearing away of the "scum", the removal of immigrants and move to push the commoners down to where they perhaps belong? Undoubtedly these conclusions may appear extreme, but if we fail to act now, these developments could in fact turn out to be the logical consequences of such a programme.

The new Cabinet, with its current programme should have had strong self-reflection that anticipated the rise in social unrest and the upsurge in criminality likely to emerge in the near future; hence arguments in favour of substantially increasing the number of active police officers. In fact, the programme of this new Cabinet is simply the concretisation of sentiments that have been gradually emerging for a long time. If we look at the scale and future prospect of the overall social programme, the cuts in the cultural sector appear relatively less worrying in the face of such major adversities to come.

The Netherlands was once a place for the social utopia of an open society and civil rights. The 1960's dreams of freedom and equality were translated in the Netherlands into a Social Contract that into the 1970s secured basic civil rights and equal access to education, health care and culture for all Dutch citizens. Coming myself from Turkey, I know all too well the indispensable value of living and operating in a society in which resources are shared with one's fellow citizens, and I recognise fully how, at present, it is almost impossible to establish such contracts, particularly when neo-liberal 'ethics' and culture are at work, in full force. It has taken almost a century for society to secure these rights, but as has been revealed by the new programme of the Cabinet, they can be eradicated in just a few days!

It is time to act!

I hereby invite you to join us in the SKOR garden at 15.00 hours on Saturday 20 November 2010, and then to walk together with us to the Leidseplein for the Nederlands Schreeuwt Om Cultuur.

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17.11.2010