



European Foundation  
for the Improvement of Living and  
Working Conditions

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**INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND THE ENVIRONMENT**  
**Netherlands**

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Working Paper No.: WP/93/11/EN

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report gives an overview of the different ways in which industrial relations and the environment are interconnected in the Netherlands. In other words, this study deals with the measures promoted and/or taken within the realm of industrial relations aimed at protecting the environment, modifying the protection of the environment or modifying industrial relations in order to take account of the environment. In this context "industrial relations" are considered to be "the relations between the employers, the workers and their respective organisations and between these groups and the government, as far as these relations exercise a structuring influence on the position of the factor "labour" in industry and society" (Leisink, 1989, p. 5).

In order to provide the most comprehensive treatment of the subject possible, the report addresses itself to the following aspects: (i) Dutch legal conditions in which environment and industrial relations affect each other; (ii) voluntary agreements between employers' and workers' organisations, at national, branch and company level, to the extent that these are concerned with environmental issues and (iii) the policies, programmatical statements and demands from industrial actors. Each chapter ends with an assessment of the subject under discussion. The report concludes with a brief summary and some general recommendations.

## 2. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Introduction

Dutch legal conditions under which industrial relations affect or may affect environmental issues and vice versa can be subdivided into (i) environmental legislation, (ii) government-sponsored self-regulation at company level (with the use of financial incentives as well as the threat of legal sanctions) and (iii) legislation on working conditions. These three elements together form the framework for both employers', and workers' and their representatives' involvement in environmental issues. Until now environmental legislation has not extended to any significant degree into the realm of industrial relations. Traditionally workers' and union rights have not been greatly concerned with environmental issues. But this may change with the government's increasing interest in the potential role of the social partners in this sphere.

### 2.2 Environmental legislation

The Dutch government's environmental policy has acquired a much greater urgency in recent years, as the seriousness of environmental problems has become more visible and tangible. A former minister for the environment has divided the development of Dutch environmental policy into five phases (Winsemius, 1986, p. 34). The first phase was the pre-industrialisation period (until 1900). At this time hygiene and food production were the main concerns and the only environmental legislation was a Nuisance Act (in the Netherlands this Act dates from 1875). The second phase (from 1900 until 1960) consisted of a strong "concentration" of society, particularly in the Netherlands, the country with the highest population density in Europe, the most intensive exploitation of natural resources in agriculture and located downstream from some of Europe's most important and most polluted rivers. At this time policy was mostly concerned with public health and nature conservation.

In the third phase (from the 1960s until the 1980s) there was an attempt to ensure economic growth while at the same time limiting its impact on nature and the environment. There was growing awareness of the finiteness of natural resources, expressed through publications like "Limits to Growth" by the Club of Rome and "Silent Spring" by Rachel Carson. At this time the concept of "public health" was broadened to "environmental hygiene" and physical planning became predominant. The environmental laws emerging in this phase (for an overview, see Tweede Kamer, 1988-89, 21137, 1-2, p. 40) try to deal with polluting activities from different angles, such as:

- the environmental medium concerned (e.g. the Act on soil protection; the Act on fresh water contamination; the Act on sea water contamination);
- the type of pollution (e.g. the Act on noise pollution; the Act on waste disposal; the nuclear energy law; the Act on chemical waste disposal) or
- the source of contamination (e.g. the Nuisance Act, the mine law, the Act on the prevention of pollution by ships).

Because of this a situation arose in which laws partially overlap and environmental legislation is sometimes confusing, being sometimes contradictory and enforced by several different authorities demanding widely differing action. This in turn required more coordination, which was provided by the enactment of a general Act on environmental hygiene (Wet Algemene Bepalingen Milieuhygiëne, 1980). This Act is eventually intended to become an overall general environmental law, thereby fitting in with Winsemius' fourth phase.

This fourth phase, which began around 1980, Winsemius calls the "integration" phase, in which "environment" is the key concept and a goal in itself and is still continuing today. (The fifth phase, that of "survival", is posited for the future). At global level the fourth phase is epitomised by the Brundtland Report, "Our Common Future". In the Netherlands a similar role is played by the central government institute for public health and environmental hygiene (RIVM) report "Zorgen voor Morgen" (Caring for Tomorrow) and the government's subsequent key publication on environmental policy, the National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP) (Tweede Kamer, 1988-89, 21137, 1-2), later updated by the so-called NEPP Plus (Tweede Kamer, 1989-89, 21137, 20-21).

The NEPP outlines the strategy for environmental policy in the medium term. The report states that the strategy has been developed against the background of the desire to solve or bring under control environmental problems within one generation. It sets out the policy actions which are deemed necessary during the period from 1990 until 1994 in order to begin in the desired direction.

The report describes a number of instruments at the disposal of the government which could be used to influence the behaviour of business and industry and the public: voluntary and other agreements, legal regulations, financial incentives, information, setting a good example and penalties (Tweede Kamer, 1988-89, 21137, 1-2, p. 12). It also describes procedural safeguards for the drawing up of voluntary agreements.

The government wants to play an active and encouraging role and in doing so wants to employ the most effective means available, having reached agreement on them as much as possible through consultation with target groups such as groups of producers and consumers, government agencies and other concerned parties. Where regulation is necessary, the government believes it should be the end result of a consultation process.

The year the NEPP was published, 1988, can be regarded as the point at which government began treating the environment as an issue concerning industrial relations and vice versa. From then on, unions and employers' organisations have been seen as part of the aforementioned target groups, to be consulted and encouraged to become involved in environmental policy making. In the NEPP the government calls on the unions to help implement an environmental policy aimed at securing sustainable development (given their position and their responsibilities as contributors to environmental aspects) in consultation with employers.

A principal aspect being considered is the setting up of "internal environmental concern systems" (also called "corporate environmental protection systems" which are examined below) and encouraging members to take tangible steps to implement environmental policy. It is stressed that the role of the unions is important not only at company or branch level but also



internationally. Employers' organisations are urged to work for sustainable development, both within their organisations and through their contacts nationally and internationally (Tweede Kamer, 1988-89, 21137, 1-2, p. 229).

In the following year, 1989, the government issued a memorandum entitled "Company Environmental Protection" (Tweede Kamer, 1988-89, 20633, 2-3). Since this report deals with environmental management and hence in-company affairs, it devotes considerable attention to the role of workers and workers' organisations. Since employers' organisations had in fact already played a leading role in the formulation of the central concept of the report, its origins and contents merit a closer look.

### 2.3 Company environmental protection systems.

In the course of the 1980's the Dutch government realised that regulation alone does not produce an effective environmental policy. It realised that to counter further deterioration of the environment, it would have to rely on the cooperation and preventative actions of other social actors. The so-called "internalisation drive", intended to persuade producers and consumers to internalise environmental standards and values, has been an integral part of government environmental policy since the publication of the "Indicative Multi-Year Programme on the Conservation of the Environment 1985-1989". Here the government described its task not so much as one of regulating as one of encouraging.

Employers' organisations were quick to react to this development. In a publication jointly produced by the Federation of Dutch Industry (VNO) and the Netherlands Christian Federation of Employers (NCW), "Environmental Protection in Companies" (VNO/NCW, 1986), the two organisations proposed the creation of an environmental protection system in companies. The purpose of such a system would be "to ensure better compliance with environmental laws and regulations". The system is clearly presented as an alternative to "more government intervention and yet more regulation in this sphere" (VNO/NCW, 1986, p. 5).

In the Dutch language the term "company environmental protection system" ('bedrijfsinterne milieuzorgsystemen') tends to cause some confusion, since it suggests that it is referring to protection of the environment within the company. But the reason for this nomenclature must be sought in the course of its development. Environmental protection was initially a government matter and a company's pollution was inspected by the government. Only later was a system suggested in which environmental protection would also become a matter for companies, and companies would themselves control and manage their own pollution. It should be noted, incidentally, that the internal and external company environment and its protection, can of course be closely linked.

Following on from the system proposed by the employers' organisations, a commission was set up to investigate the desired and possible relationship between the government and companies with environmental protection systems in place, and to develop criteria for measuring how well such systems were functioning (Commissie Bedrijfsinterne Milieuzorgsystemen, 1988). The Commission on Company Environmental Protection Systems, a temporary research committee composed of government and employer representatives which advises the Minister for the Environment, formulated what it called a "standard company environmental protection system".

This system, which enjoys undisputed status in the Netherlands, consists of eight elements:

- a written environmental policy statement;
- the integration of environmental protection into the operation of the company;
- an environmental programme;
- a measurement and recording programme;
- an internal control system;
- internal and external reporting;
- internal information and training; and
- a regular audit of the company's environmental protection system.

The commission recommended that the government encourage the development and implementation of these systems and help develop model systems for particular groups of comparable companies.

In "Company Environmental Protection" Ed Nijpels, then Minister for the Environment, outlined his plans for the promotion and internalisation of responsibility for environmental matters in companies. In this paper the minister accepted in full the ideas previously articulated by the employers' organisations. The plan was for all large companies causing high or medium levels of pollution or with special environmental risks (between 10,000 and 12,000 companies) to have environmental protection systems in place by 1995. Smaller companies subject to the Nuisance Act (around 25,000 in total) were also to have taken steps towards a partial environmental protection system by then.

To achieve these goals the government opted for incentive subsidies. But the introduction of Company Environmental Protection Systems is only seemingly voluntary since prescriptive government rules are already being prepared. If it emerged from the planned interim evaluation of progress at the end of 1992 that voluntary means were proving inadequate, then the government would take recourse to legislative means.

In the meantime a programme of measures was presented with the aim of encouraging the development of company environmental protection systems (as recommended by the commission), disseminating information on this issue to target groups, companies, workers and government bodies, and financing professional and vocational training and specific research. More detailed programmes were subsequently presented (Ministerie VROM, 1990; Ministerie VROM, 1991).

These programmes illustrate the thrust of government policy. They devote resources to environmental protection projects, to information programmes organised by trade unions and employers' organisations, and to the creation of "corporate environmental services" (bedrijfsmilieudiensten). These are institutes, as yet still being planned, whose purpose will be to support in particular smaller companies in developing their environmental policies. It

seems that corporate environmental services are to be organised along similar lines to the corporate health services provided for by the Working Environment Act (see e.g. van den Berg and de Raaff, 1990).

As far as workers' interests are concerned, the memorandum "Company Environmental Protection" stresses in particular the relationship between the environment and working conditions, both with regard to the way in which matters are organised within the company and to their content. Where these relations are close, it is suggested, legislation on working conditions should have an effect on the environment as well.

#### 2.4 Legislation on the working environment

The most important legal instrument in the Netherlands on the quality of working life is the Working Environment Act (WEA, known in Dutch as the "Arbowet"). Intended to increase the level of safety in the workplace and to improve both the physical and mental health, and wellbeing of workers, this Act was adopted by Parliament in 1980, but was not fully enacted until ten years later. Since 1990 it has covered all persons working for an employer, both in the private and public sector, in large corporations and in small firms. The WEA is primarily an enabling Act - essentially a framework which provides the basis for supplementary decrees. (Bayens and Prins (1990, p. 15) give the example of the minister having the power to issue decrees on, say, asbestos).

A second important aspect of the WEA is that it defines the roles of the minister, labour inspectors, employers, workers, works councils, safety and health specialists and the Working Environment Council (a committee of the works council with specific legal rights to deal with matters of safety, health and well being). Each are given responsibilities, rights and duties concerning the working environment. The WEA also regulates the structure of the occupational health and safety system within companies and the organisation of public supervision and monitoring.

The WEA sets basic standards on both the physical and psychological aspects of the working environment. The aim of the Act is not only to ensure suitable standards of health, safety and wellbeing (the latter being seen as an effect of "the quality of working life" and related to job structuring, elimination of repetitive tasks, inter-colleague contacts and the prevention of alienation). It also places duties on the employer to organise work in such a way that the health, safety and wellbeing of the workers are assured

to the highest possible level. Although the employer is responsible for the working environment, workers have certain responsibilities for their own safety and health and are obliged to cooperate with the management on health and safety matters.

Some of the WEA's provisions relevant in this context are the following:

- Employers with more than 100 employees are required to prepare an annual written plan of their safety, health and wellbeing policy;
- The policy on health, safety and wellbeing as well as the annual plan must be presented to and discussed with the works council;
- Certain factories, particularly in the chemical industry, are required to prepare safety assessment reports;
- Industrial enterprises with more than 500 employees are required to have a safety service attached to them. (According to Bayens and Prins (1990, p. 43), smaller firms often have a part-time safety technician, while firms with fewer than 100 employees as a rule have no safety specialist at all.) The safety service or the safety expert makes recommendations to both the employer and the works council.

The WEA provides the means to issue decrees applying to company, branch or national level but does not itself contain detailed requirements. The WEA, "taking notice of the best available technical practices, the state of the art of company health care and scientific knowledge in the sphere of ergonomics as well as labour and management science", aims to obtain "maximum possible safety and maximum possible protection of health, as well as the furtherance of and

maximum possible care for the wellbeing of the worker, unless such cannot be required in reason" (WEA, article 3, sub 1a).

Given this field of action the question arises as to whether and to what extent the WEA can also offer a framework for dealing with environmental issues. It seems that the answer to this question depends on the nature of the environmental issue at stake and is ultimately left open to discussion and interpretation. Special attention should be paid here to article 11 of the WEA which deals with the prevention of danger to a third party: "When by, or as a result of, labour conducted by workers on instruction of the employer, in a company or an institution or in its immediate surroundings any dangers can arise for the safety or the health of people other than the workers involved, the employer is to take effective measures to prevent such dangers". This article clearly offers a point of application for introducing environmental issues that are not directly concerned with workers' health, safety or wellbeing.

## 2.5 Legal means for co-determination on environmental issues

Since the applicability of legislation in the field of industrial relations to environmental issues is open to question, it is interesting to note that most of the parties concerned at national level consider the legal means available for co-determination on environmental issues to be sufficient in principle.

In this context reference is made to article 2 of the Works Councils Act, which states that the works council exists in the interest of the company in all its objectives. This means that the works council has a legitimate right on paper at least to deal with environmental objectives.<sup>1</sup> According to the government the Act offers sufficient scope for "active thinking along" (Tweede Kamer, 1988-89, 20633, 2-3, p. 34). Ket (1989, p. 11) also argues that environmental objectives can be achieved through the Works Councils Act and the Working Environment Act. So too does Klatten (1989), in an address to a trade-union conference on works councils and the environment.

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<sup>1</sup>Recent research (Mulder and Benders, 1991) has shown that this also applies for co-determination organs in non-private organizations, if to a slightly lesser degree.

The Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) (FNV 1990, p. 1) has declared itself in full agreement with the government that the two acts offer "sufficient points of departure". The Manufacturing and Food Industry Union of the Christian National Federation of Trade Unions (CNV) (Industrie- en Voedingsbond CNV, 1989, p. 39f.) also agrees, and has provided an overview of the possibilities offered by the existing legislation.

Most of the above protagonists will admit that at times a fairly broad interpretation of the legal texts is necessary. For instance, in article 25, sub 1h of the Works Councils Act, which deals with the mandatory consultation request on investments, the council has to take it upon itself to assess investments on environmental criteria. And while the Working Environment Act offers several options for co-determination in explicitly mentioned spheres such as safety, health and wellbeing, in the sphere of environmental protection this remains at least at present implicit.

Currently two points are still under debate:

- (1) Regarding the description of aspects which the works council is entitled to supervise, the FNV calls for the inclusion of "environment" in article 28 of the Works Councils Act. "The addition of responsibility in the sphere of the environment will give the works council an additional legitimation to put environmental issues on the agenda at any time" (FNV, 1990 p. 7).
- (2) The workers' organisations call for the institution of the employee's explicit duty to report environmental transgressions as well as the right to suspend work in case of acute environmental danger. The government's "Company Environmental Protection" says the following on this issue: "With regard to reporting as such and the accompanying legal protection, the government proposes to request the advice of the Social Economic Council (SER) before formulating a view. The same applies to the right to suspension of work at times of environmental risks with immediate danger for the vicinity of the company".

This request for "advice on the involvement of workers in company environmental protection" was put to the SER, the tripartite body which advises the government on economic issues, on 5 April 1990.

## 2.6. Discussion

The above observations give the impression of a field on the move, in which on the one hand public awareness of and government interest and intervention in what is happening in companies are growing, while on the other hand the workers' right to co-determine company policy is steadily being extended into the environmental sphere. However, some qualifying remarks are necessary.

Although public interest and intervention in what is happening in companies are definitely growing, the consequences for workers' involvement are not yet certain. Public attention breeds formalisation and centralisation (compare Mintzberg, 1979, 288f.), as is the case in the emergence of the Company Environmental Protection System, which in fact *is* a formalised management system. Because of this formalised and centralised nature, workers' involvement with the system is not self-evident.

And the extension of the workers' rights to co-determine company policy into the environmental sphere is one thing; a co-determination practice on environmental issues is another. As far as the instruments for co-determination are concerned, some inadequacies have been shown in practice. Although almost everyone in the field states that the legal instruments are in place, there are still deficiencies that should be pointed out. Firstly, the legal instruments are only available to companies where a works council is in existence. This means that a number of options are not available to workers employed in smaller companies with fewer than 100 staff, and that none are available to those in companies with fewer than 35 staff. It should also be noted that works councils have not been set up in a considerable number of companies which are legally required to have them.



Secondly, the usefulness and effectiveness of the legal instruments is restricted. For instance, the powers at the disposal of a works council to enforce the various provisions of the law vary enormously. Means of appeal are often difficult to pursue, especially in the light of fact that rights concerning environmental issues are mostly left implicit. Severe problems can arise here for works councils in conflict with the employer.

For example, the right to information (guaranteed under article 31 of the Works Councils Act) can easily become a hollow shell where environmental issues are concerned, since the Supreme Court has ruled that works councils cannot simply demand information by invoking their general right to monitor developments within their company, and that they will have to refer to explicitly granted rights under the Act or other regulations (SoZaWe, 1987, pp. 153f.). It seems likely, therefore, that the use of, or readiness to resort to, non-judicial pressure determines the effectiveness of workers' input at least as much (see Teulings, 1981).

In short, the right to co-determination with regard to the company's environmental policy has its restrictions. But an overly detailed review of the legal provisions and imperfections of environmental co-determination carries the danger of ignoring the fact it is not only the comprehensiveness of legislation which determines workers' involvement and co-determination.

Consciousness and readiness of both workers and their representatives and employers are required in order to set off a dialogue, in which many problems and obstacles may still arise. Earlier experiences with attempts to realise involvement and co-determination on the introduction of new technologies indicate it might well be prudent to temper somewhat the exaggerated expectations about workers' influence on environmental policy, certainly in the short term.

The same goes for the still limited degree to which the Working Environment Act is applied today and the recent somber assessment by Bert de Vries, the minister for social affairs and employment.<sup>2</sup> Since at this stage one can hardly claim that such established forms of the right to co-determination are institutionalised, the introduction of new forms might require a veritable tour the force.

The next chapter will deal with voluntary agreements on the environment between the industrial actors at national, branch and company level. Also attention will be given to the actual measure of involvement and co-determination at company level concerning environmental affairs.

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<sup>2</sup>"The legal measures introduced so far are insufficient, as has been shown in practice. Works councils do not get involved in working conditions, the workers know nothing about it and even middle management is hardly involved in changes" (Bert de Vries, quoted in De Volkskrant, 4 May 1990).

### 3. VOLUNTARY AGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE INDUSTRIAL ACTORS

#### 3.1 Introduction

Social partners can agree more or less extensive procedural or substantial arrangements to reduce environmental pollution and increase the environmental awareness of their members and affiliated organisations. This chapter provides an overview of voluntary agreements in the sphere of industrial relations concerning the environment, at national, branch and company level.

#### 3.2 Agreements at national level

At national level one form of consultation between employers' and workers' organisations has become institutionalised in the aforementioned tripartite Social Economic Council (SER). This body advises the government on economic issues, and in recent times has also become increasingly involved with environmental questions. Advice has been given, for example, on the Brundtland report, the National Environmental Policy Plans (NEPP and NEPP<sup>3</sup>) and on topics such as "an environmental hallmark" and "domestic waste disposal". The SER-committee on company research (COB) published a manual on commuter traffic (COB-SER, 1991).

Recently the SER published a report by its "committee of economic experts" (CED) on Environment and Economy (SER, 1991), in which an extended use of market-conform instruments like regulating levies and marketable emitting rights is recommended<sup>3</sup>.

But also specific negotiations on the environment have taken place.

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<sup>3</sup>This refers to a system in which a sector of industry obtains the right to cause a certain amount of pollution. Individual companies receive a part of this right which may be traded between companies. A company which reduces its emissions can therefore sell part of its right to other companies that want to pollute. In this way the environment has a price and pollution prevention pays.

In January 1989 the FNV, the largest Dutch trade union and the VNO, the largest employers' organisation, reached an agreement on a common approach to environmental problems.

In their joint statement the FNV and VNO declared that an environmental policy is necessary even at times of slow economic growth. This declaration, made against the background of growing concern for, and awareness of, environmental problems started a process of negotiations on the environment between all employers' and workers' organisations (including the Christian employers' and workers' organisations (NCW and CNV) and others).

The starting points of these negotiations were that economic growth should be sustainable, that government should play a key role in environmental policy, and that potential disadvantages in terms of reduced international competitiveness should not be an excuse for reticence or inaction. Another starting point, also mentioned in the declaration, was the recognition of the role of trade unions in environmental matters at all levels, including the company level.

As a result of the agreement different working groups have been established. One such group is studying the government's NEPP, another is investigating the problems of commuter traffic, a third is formulating recommendations for the improvement of public transport to and from work, and so on. Another result of the cooperation was the initiative to launch a campaign on "environmental protection within companies". This initiative was based on a memorandum on environmental protection which dealt with the opportunities for joint approaches (Milieuoverleg RCO / Vakcentrales, 1989). According to the memorandum, the important thing is to try to ensure as quickly as possible, as systematically as possible and in as many companies as possible that environmental aspects are taken into account in all facets of the production process.

The paper presents an action programme, which distinguishes three levels:

**(a) National level**

Employers' and workers' organisations are able to play an important role in raising the level of awareness of environmental problems within industry. They can also focus the attention of their members and affiliated organisations on aspects that require further agreements between the participants on the development and implementation of company environmental protection systems.

**(b) Branch level**

This level is given a pivotal role both with regard to increasing environmental awareness and in taking the initiative for the development of a branch-specific company environmental protection system. Furthermore, the employers' organisations at branch level are

considered to be the appropriate bodies for providing information and instruction on the system that has been developed and for persuading individual companies to adopt it. Workers' organisations should play a part in designing and setting up the system and framing instruction programmes. The practical detail of the system should be left to the parties involved at branch level.

**(c) Company level**

The ultimate aim of the action programme is the introduction of environmental protection systems in as many individual companies as possible. To be successful the system will have to be supported wholeheartedly throughout the company. Government regulation in this context is rejected. Moreover, the successful introduction of the system requires the involvement of the whole staff. Consultation with the works council on the procedures and opportunities for introduction is desirable, as is the use of existing communication channels within the company.

Two specific activities were announced to initiate the actions outlined above. One was the launch of the national campaign on environmental protection, aimed at affiliated organisations and provincial and local authorities. The idea was that after this event, organisations at branch level would take over the torch and start to unfold activities within their own domain. The second activity consisted of further deliberation with government on the formulation of an appropriate programme to promote the introduction of environmental protection.

Continuing the programme outlined above, the environmental protection campaign took place in September 1989. The joint consultations on environmental issues at national level took place as announced, but did not exactly bloom. A communique issued in January 1990 referred to criticism from the workers' organisations regarding the functioning of the environmental consultation (milieu-overleg).

This makes mention of an exchange of views, after which it was agreed to continue the consultations, on the basis of two new objectives:

- (i) to discuss each other's views on environmental issues in order to reach a better mutual understanding; and
- (ii) to investigate specific environmental matters on which joint activities could be undertaken.

Since the issuing of the communique no official public statements have been made. Informal comments are, however, to the effect that the consultation process is not functioning as intended. The question is whether these consultation practices will last without some tangible results in the short term. It is understood that an evaluation will take place in the near future.

### 3.3 Collective agreements at branch and company level

At branch level trade unions are involved in two kinds of consultation on environmental issues. Firstly, within the framework of consultation between the government and so-called target groups. The main parties involved in this consultation are the environmental authorities on the one hand and representatives of industrial branches on the other. In the construction industry and manufacturing industry unions also take part in these discussions, the aim of which is to establish "covenants". These are special agreements between the government and groups of companies in which unions are not supposed to be a contracting party.

Secondly, there is the process of collective bargaining, both at branch and at company level, in which the environment has become a topic of discussion, negotiation and agreement in recent years. In fact, collective agreements are among the principal areas in which union policies on the environment are realised.

The smaller Christian trade unions in particular stress the use of collective bargaining in dealing with environmental issues in the context of industrial relations (Industrie- en Voedingsbond CNV, 1989). In a memorandum on the state of its environment policy as of May 1990, the CNV Manufacturing and Food Industry Union drew up a balance sheet on the introduction of the environment in recent collective bargaining (Industrie- en Voedingsbond CNV, 1990). The main aim of the union's collective bargaining policy on the environment is to reach agreements on the participation of workers in corporate environmental decision making.

The memorandum reported that 45 out of a sample of 65 collective agreements in the manufacturing and food industries in place in May 1990 addressed the question of the environment in some form or another. In almost all cases this was the first time that an environmental clause had been included. The clauses differed widely, however.

The report classifies the agreements as follows:

- (a) Four agreements made mention of "the development of environmental policy in cooperation with works councils and trade unions".
- (b) Twenty-four agreements contained arrangements acknowledging the role of the union, in the form of obtaining information or discussing environmental issues in the so-called "periodic consultation" (between unions and management).
- (c) Six agreements made mention of management's intention to inform the works council.
- (d) Branch agreements in the engineering industry as well as three agreements at company level provided for the setting up of company environmental protection systems.
- (e) The remainder was a diversity of agreements concerning, among other things, training programmes, the appointment of environmental experts or "strengthening workers' rights".

In 1991 the Collective Bargaining Service, an official body which registers the results of collective bargaining and assists in the task of making agreements binding for all parties concerned, published a report on agreements concluded up to April 1991 which included an analysis of clauses concerning the environment (Dienst Collectieve Arbeidsvoorwaarden, 1991).

It defined "environmental clauses" as "agreements concerning the external environment" and did not take into account agreements presented exclusively in the context of working conditions (p. 21). Environmental clauses were included in 53 of the 161 collective agreements studied.<sup>4</sup> In most cases the environmental clauses were agreed after 1989. Before that year only seven agreements contained such clauses. The report divides the environmental clauses into four categories:

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<sup>4</sup>Here it should be noted that this survey extended beyond the manufacturing and food industries.



(a) Agreements providing for consultation with workers' organisations and/or research and orientation on environmental issues (22 in total). This group also contains the agreements outlining statements of intent. As an illustration, the report mentions the collective agreement for the engineering industry, which contained an undertaking that job structuring would be carried out in such a way as to minimise the burden on the environment. In agreements for cleaning companies the employers undertook to explore substitution with less-polluting materials.

(b) More wide-ranging agreements (12 in total). Agreements in this category went one step further providing, for instance, for the introduction of company environmental protection systems, or a system of environmental reporting or discussion of environmental data.

(c) Agreements containing concrete measures (14 in total). This category includes two detailed agreements from the Philips company, in connection with agreements it made with the Ministry of the Environment in 1986. Several agreements in the construction industry provided for the banning or using up of a range of hazardous materials, such as asbestos. The agreement for the building trade contained an updated clause providing for the recycling of tar. Clauses on the banning of asbestos are also found in agreements covering car and tyre manufacturers. The Shell Oil company agreed to improve the means for individuals to raise environmental issues and to consult workers' representatives, works councils and/or trade unions on environmental policy and annual plans where appropriate, and if necessary to take action. Information, training and the availability of experts were also mentioned.

Haulage firms undertook to set up a bipartite committee to make recommendations on the issue of drivers' liability for toxic waste and work which damage the environment. The agreement for Paktank referred to workers' obligations to cooperate fully with the employers' efforts to reduce pollution to a minimum and to follow rules and procedures to the letter.

And the biochemical company Gist-Brocades agreed not to bring into commercial exploitation any new processes whose safety aspect and environmental impact had not been sufficiently studied and controlled to reduce the risks to the workers involved and reduce their damaging effect on the environment to a minimum.

(d) Agreements dealing with commuter traffic (6 in total). These agreements provided for an employer's obligation to employ workers within a 30-kilometer radius of their home (in the case of private security firms), to pay the transport costs for workers that need to travel frequently (cement and cement-transport companies), and to take into consideration the union's proposals for reducing environmental pollution as a result of commuter traffic (the chemical company AKZO).

### 3.4 Involvement and co-determination at company level

As discussed earlier, in recent years there has been a growing emphasis on company self-regulation and the introduction of company environmental protection systems. This has in turn caused more attention to be focussed on what is actually happening inside companies concerning workers' involvement in environmental protection. Until recently only general impressions and incidental practices in this area have been available.

Some of these can be found in a report by the Commission on Company Environmental Protection Systems (1988). It made an inventory of the consultative structures in which environmental issues are discussed and found that in half the companies studied (9 in total) consultation took place at the lowest level, "on the shopfloor". The commission also noted that "in several companies consultation occurs in special committees, the works council and other bodies, which must remain outside the scope of this report" (Commissie Bedrijfsinterne Milieuzorgsystemen, 1988, p. 24f.).

The government has also outlined its general impression on this in "Company Environmental Protection": "The government notes with approval that at a practical level a tendency can be observed that, depending on their nature, agreements are concluded at the level of the works council, within the collective bargaining process and in the regular consultation between employers and employees" (Tweede Kamer, 1988-89, 20633, 2-3, p. 34).

Much of the information on case studies and other publications in this field originate from educational institutions, which are usually designed with aims other than painting a reliable picture of current practice. A study of the Environmental Education Foundation, a private commercial organisation, (Hengelaar, 1989) concludes that "most works councils have no doubt that monitoring the company's environmental policy is part of their brief" (Teijlingen, 1989).

But since only 22 of the 98 works councils approached in the context of this study replied, it is difficult to draw more general conclusions from these findings. Of the 22 works councils that responded, 12 pursued an environmental policy. They did so by means of raising environmentally damaging situations with the management (all 12), supervising the company's environmental policy (10), assessing investments (8), proposing improvements in management (5) and preparing an environmental memorandum (1).

Only recently has more reliable material on this issue become available. The first in line was a representative study by the Manufacturing Union FNV (1989), in which a considerable number of workers employed in the chemical industry in the Rotterdam area were asked about environmental and other issues. Asked which measures should be taken in the environmental sphere, 40% said that the dissemination of information to staff should be improved.

A majority of those questioned were of the view that workers and unions had an important role to play concerning the environment. The report notes that it was remarkable that in open questions on the environment 12.4% of the respondents suggested ideas for improving its quality.

In 1990 the same FNV Manufacturing Union conducted research on the activities of works council sub-committees on working conditions (provided for under the Working Environment Act). The activities of these committees were ranked according to prevalence. Out of 22 issues identified, concrete environmental issues ranked relatively high:

- Second: noise (82% of committees had dealt with noise problems);
- Third: hazardous materials (79%);
- Twelfth: effluent, waste disposal and emissions (47%; and
- Thirteenth: leaks and spillages (47%).

Four out of the ten committees claimed they had been successful and achieved results on these issues. However, one of the people conducting the research noted that "in practice many environmental issues are intertwined with health and safety issues. A leaking container of toxic chemicals is harmful to both the environment and the health of workers. Moreover, often conflicting interests are involved. For workers it is better to have a noisy compressor situated outside on the roof; but that is unpleasant for people in the vicinity" (Praktijkblad Medezeggenschap, 1990, p. 22f.).

Particularly interesting is the research commissioned by the Ministry of the Environment to evaluate the introduction of company environmental protection systems (Calkoen and ten Have, 1991). In addition to a number of environmental protection characteristics, this report deals also with the declared involvement of staff in environmental protection. Some 46% of companies claimed that their workers had specific environmental tasks, and 18% claimed that staff were involved in setting up an environmental programme. No less than 40% of the companies interviewed claimed that environmental issues were an important element in discussions with the works council, and 46% said that these issues were discussed at shopfloor meetings.

A problem that arises here is that data on the involvement of workers and works councils are based on interviews with managers and environmental coordinators and are therefore of limited validity. An even more serious problem is that it is not clear what involvement of works councils actually means in practice. Does it reflect an active environmental discussion throughout the company? Or do works councils take initiatives when managements fail to do so?

Some light is shed on these questions in a forthcoming report on an exploratory research project on workers' involvement in environmental issues (Le Blansch, 1991b). This distinguishes between "functional" co-determination on the one hand and "strategic" co-determination on the other.

Functional co-determination on environmental issues, which remains within the boundaries of the chosen company policy, can occur under conditions of adequate rights, adequate industrial relations structures and access to information. Strategic co-determination, which questions the company's environmental policy, occurs under conditions of sufficient power and environmental awareness among the workforce. The report concludes that in the current Dutch legislative context, strategic co-determination on environmental issues asks a lot of the workers, perhaps even too much.

### 3.5 Discussion

The above shows that the interest of employers and unions in the environment has led, especially since 1989, to a growing number of agreements on, and stronger involvement with environmental issues at both national, branch and company level. Some qualifying remarks may put this finding in perspective.

In principle there need not be any conflict between employers and workers concerning environmental protection. In fact, joint approaches help matters considerably. Nevertheless, there is only a limited willingness on the part of the employers to make common cause on this issue. This reluctance appears to arise from the general tendency with social partners to analyse the behaviour of the other side (i.c. the unions) in terms of power only.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>One more demonstration of the tendency to see things from a power perspective rather than from a functional perspective, can be found in a VNO memorandum on collective bargaining. Here the union's environmental activities within companies are placed in a territorial perspective and are therefore rejected. It states: 'When in collective bargaining ... demands are made within the framework of the FNV's environmental policy, the following should be considered. The FNV's policy is a clear attempt to provide a role for union work within companies. Companies and their organizations have always maintained that no consultation should take place between management and union member groups. Consultation on any subject is to be exclusively with either the works council or the paid union representative. This principle should be upheld, especially since the union is trying to extend its activities within companies in other fields as well. In maintaining this position it is neither necessary nor desirable to agree on behalf of union members to protect their position within the company or to hand over information.' (VNO, 1989, p. 42).

In relation to this it is interesting to note that Windmuller et al. make mention of a traditional hostility of Dutch employers to snoopers of all kinds, in particular trade unions (see Windmuller, de Galan and van Zweeden, 1983). This may also be the reason, despite all the ringing declarations, behind the deadlock in the consultations at national level. Another reason for this deadlock may be the difference in style between the employers' environmental bureau (used to lobbying) and the trade unions at the national level (used to negotiating).

In addition, some remarks can be made on the contents of the agreements. It is noticeable that collective agreements containing concrete environmental provisions often deal with environmental issues in relation to working conditions. A good illustration of this is the frequent occurrence of agreements on asbestos, even though the government has also taken measures in this area (see the aforementioned example in 2.4). This also seems to indicate that, perhaps to begin with, particularly those clauses which are already widely accepted are included in a collective agreement.

Recent Dutch research suggests that the environment and working conditions are very often treated as interlinked, and not just at the level of collective agreements. Moreover, it is also suggested that procedural arrangements only appear to be "effective" if they are firmly based in a company's everyday practice (Le Blansch, 1991b). These findings suggest that collective agreements as such only play a small part in bringing about changes in environmental practices.

In short it can be said that in the Netherlands the number of agreements on the environment and the intensity of workers' involvement in this sphere is steadily growing. The starting points are the working conditions and everyday practice. As the agreements seem to so far present more a codification of practices than a modification, expectations of the impact of collective environmental agreements should not run too high in the immediate future. However, it is far too early for a comprehensive evaluation.

## 4. POLICY STATEMENTS, DEMANDS AND CAMPAIGNS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the attitudes of both employers' organisations and trade unions on environmental protection measures, analyses them and places them in their historical context. Statements on workers' involvement at company level are discussed separately, as they reveal many of the assumptions behind the role which workers, unions and co-determination practices can play on behalf of environmental and workers' interests. Again, the chapter is concluded with a discussion.

### 4.2. Management and employers' organisations

As described in section 2.3 of this report, employers' organisations have played an important role in the development of company environmental protection systems. In this respect 1986 can be seen as a watershed. Before that time, the activities of the VNO, NCW and their joint environmental agency, the Bureau for Environment and Physical Planning (BMRO) were somewhat defensive towards environmental protection, mainly stressing the negative consequences for profits and international competitiveness. These arguments were put forward in two specific publications on the issues of environmental policy and planning (VNO/NCW 1982, 1985).

A shift occurred in 1986 when the employers' organisations adopted a more proactive stance, developed the concept of systematic company environmental protection and started to promote this concept to their members. The result was publications such as "Environmental Protection in Companies" (VNO/NCW, 1986), "Company and Environment" (VNO/NCW, 1988) and "Environmental Reporting by Companies" (VNO/NCW, 1990 and 1991). It is for this reason that the government's "Company Environmental Protection" declared that it is "thanks to the Bureau of Environment and Physical Planning (BMRO) of the VNO and NCW that in the Netherlands

attention is focused primarily on the *systematic approach* [italics KLB] of environmental protection as a question of control, on behalf of which instruments like environmental auditing can be developed and applied. Moreover, the cooperation and interaction between government and industry in developing means for protecting the environment can be considered characteristic for the Netherlands" (Tweede Kamer, 1988-89, 20633, 3, p. 18).

It can be observed that BMRO was very successful in convincing the government of industry's definition of the environmental problem and its possible solutions. In a recently published dissertation, Doorewaard (1990) asserts that the role fulfilled by the BMRO in providing assistance to government and industry has been very successful. She describes the task of an intermediary organisation like the BMRO as "controlling contextual changes in such a manner that enterprises can adapt themselves (without the need for major changes of policy)". If it is to function properly, that is, to provide optimum assistance to government and industry concerning long-term solutions to environmental problems, it must adopt a change-oriented attitude in which initiatives are, at the very least, focused on the opportunities presented by profound problems. The BMRO has succeeded in this, which according to Doorewaard can be explained by key characteristics such as close relations with members and the government, taking and pursuing initiatives, and knowledge and expertise (Doorewaard, 1990, p. 197).

As public and corporate awareness concerning the environment continues to grow, a number of studies, from various sources, have been published on the state of environmental protection in companies and the attitude of management. Most studies use their own theoretical and operational definitions of environmental protection. The result is that, for instance, one study published in 1990 concludes that 10% of (smaller) companies are planning environmental investments in the near future (KNOV/AMRO, 1990, p. 18), while another claims that 63% of Dutch companies made "environmental investments", including "indirectly contributory investments", in 1990 (Nationale Investeringsbank, 1991, p. 5). The wide difference between the two figures gives an indication of the problems associated with assessing data on this issue.



Equally questionable from a methodological point of view but interesting because of its international comparisons is a Touche Ross study, "European Management Attitudes to Environmental Issues" (Touche Ross Europe Services, 1990). Dutch companies are remarkable for being the only ones among those interviewed with a board member responsible for environmental management.

Half of them have written environmental policies and employ environmental managers, often with teams of two or three experts. The study notes with interest that most Dutch companies do not expect any major impact from future legislation and none expect the European Community and 1992 to have any impact. This may be, according to Touche Ross, because they believe that the Dutch level of environmental protection is already ahead of the rest of Europe. This would appear to be supported by the fact that only one of the companies interviewed claimed to having changed its production processes, and two their products, as a result of new legislation. The others declared that they always made changes ahead of legislation being passed. In the long term, most companies planned to improve their environmental performance regardless of legislation, the study concludes.

Two recent publications deal with the degree of penetration of company environmental protection systems in relation to the government intentions in this regard. One is yet another BMRO study, an assessment of company environmental protection systems in several branches of the economy (VNO/NCW, 1991). This contains qualitative information on fairly diverse activities, and therefore hardly serves the purpose of providing a comprehensive overview.

The other study is the aforementioned representative survey on company environmental protection systems commissioned by the Ministry for the Environment (Calkoen and ten Have, 1991). According to this report, 4% of Dutch companies said they had such a system in operation, while another 26% claimed to be developing one. The highest degree of penetration is in the chemical industry (70%), followed by the food-processing industry (47%). The construction industry has been the least active, with only 20% of companies setting up a system. Company size appears to be a determining factor with larger companies in particular working on an environmental protection system.

It is very interesting to note that in trying to correlate company characteristics, the authors found a significant link between the number of elements of the system<sup>6</sup> on the one hand (more or less representing the quality and degree of formalisation of environmental protection) and the presence of a works council or a plan for improving working conditions. They note that even when the data are corrected for company size and branch of industry, the linkage remains statistically highly significant.

#### 4.3 Workers' organisations and representatives

A 1990 issue of the journal *Tijdschrift voor Arbeid en Bewustzijn* (an independent part-University staffed journal) devoted to trade unions and the environment provides an historical overview of the position of the FNV on the environment (Leenders and Boog, 1990). It identifies three stages of development, coinciding more or less with those identified by Winsemius with regard to national policy. Until 1970 the traditional workers' movement (as Leenders and Boog call it) definitely considered nature secondary to economic development. Nature was considered to play an important role in the development of the working class, and so any environmental concern originated from the point of view of preserving nature.

The second phase, typified by the report by the Club of Rome and the first oil crisis of 1973, reached its climax around 1974. Environmental pollution and the negative aspects of economic growth came into view for the first time, but they were considered to be primarily the responsibility of government and employers. The prevailing view was that environment and employment were contradictory. In general the unions did not adopt a very strong position on the environment and their concern was weakened considerably with the arrival of recession and a sharp rise in

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<sup>6</sup>This refers to the eight elements composing the 'standard environmental protection system' (see also paragraph 2.3 of this report): a written environmental policy statement; the integration of environmental protection into the operation of the company; an environmental programme; a measurement and recording programme; an internal control system; internal and external reporting; internal information and training; and a regular audit of the company's environmental protection system.

unemployment (in the early 1980s). The demands of the economy were once again considered to be primary, well above those of the environment.

The third phase began in 1987. Leenders and Boog note the publication of a highly critical article by van de Biggelaar, then the FNV official responsible for environmental issues and now the director of the Nature and Environment Foundation, one of the most influential environmental organisations, operating independently of government and the social partners but occupying many important formal and informal positions (Van de Biggelaar, 1987). Later that year the FNV published, in cooperation with the most important environmental organisations, the memorandum "Investing in the Environment" (LMO/FNV, 1987).

In June 1988 it published "Trade-union Basis for Environmental Policy", which took a very serious look at environmental problems. It proposed a two-track strategy: on the one hand to continue to work on specific campaigns such as developing cleaner products and production processes (at company level) and on campaigns on traffic management, transport and energy (at branch and national level); and on the other hand to unfold new activities in extending the old emancipatory endeavours, since the debate on environmental issues can affect key social values like democracy, solidarity and individual freedom.

The FNV's executive council accepted the proposals contained in the memorandum. A number of recommendations and commitments were made, which according to Leenders and Boog give a clear insight into the FNV's environmental policy. They are summarised as follows (Leenders and Boog, 1990, p. 88):

- A more stringent environmental policy will be adopted, and in principle all policy instruments should be used to this effect, even measures to reduce the size of production;
- The unions should become involved in an advisory capacity in the development of national environmental policy;
- Affiliated unions should engage in regular environmental consultation with FNV headquarters and with environmental experts from outside the union movement;
- The FNV will join the Centre of Energy Conservation and the Nature and Environment Foundation;

- A think-tank should be set up between the unions, environmental organisations and the universities;
- Every trade union should appoint someone with responsibility for environmental issues;
- The FNV will explore the possibilities of an agreement with employers' organisations on the environment;
- The FNV will organise a consciousness-raising campaign among its members;
- The union's Institute for Technology Advice will be geared to organising environmental activities;
- Consideration will be given to topics which should be brought into collective bargaining (such as refusal to working with pollutants);
- Activities should be coordinated and fine-tuned at regional and local level;
- The FNV will have consultations with the Ministry for the Environment and the Ministry of Economic Affairs with regard to financing activities;
- Results will be communicated to European partners and
- Special attention will be paid to a clear presentation to members.

In another memorandum published in 1989 the FNV called for "a stricter environmental policy" and dealt with its implications for the union (FNV, 1989a). These papers were followed by a discussion project with the members, entitled "the signal on green" (FNV, 1989b). Contacts with the two employers' organisations resulted in the agreement between the FNV and VNO mentioned earlier. Further development of the planned activities are slowly bearing fruit, although some activities are stagnating.

Some FNV member unions have launched their own initiatives. The FNV Graphical Union published a booklet entitled "Clean: your job too" (Druk en Papier FNV, 1989). The FNV Manufacturing Union produced a publication on the union and the environment and on company environmental protection systems (Industriebond FNV, 1991a, 1991b). And the FNV Centre for Works Councils published a booklet on environmental protection in offices (Van de Schaft and van den Nieuwenhof, 1990).

In 1989 the CNV Manufacturing and Food Industry Union published an environmental policy plan (Industrie- en Voedingsbond CNV, 1989). As mentioned earlier, this lays great emphasis on the

instrument of collective bargaining and raising the environmental awareness of union members. It also gives special attention to polluting industries which will be forced into closure in order to protect the environment. It proposes the creation of a support fund for those who lose their jobs in the process.

Several union and commercial institutes have developed courses on the environment. The CNV's educational institute provides a course on co-determination and the environment (Slotemaker - de Bruïne Instituut, 1989; de Kam, 1991). One of the activities financed within the framework of the promotional programme "Environmental Protection in Companies" is the development of further courses and training activities for workers involved in co-determination on environmental issues. Further material from the educational institutes of both the FNV and the CNV will therefore become available in the near future.

The unions, in particular the FNV, also took part in the discussions on company environmental protection systems. It is noticeable that increasingly common cause is made with environmental organisations, and that continuing differences are merely a matter of emphasis rather than principle. When the employers' organisations unveiled their concept of company environmental protection systems, the reaction from the environmental organisations was on the whole positive (Berends and Mol, 1988; Sprengers, 1989), although they criticised the employers' emphasis on a reduction of government inspection and their reluctance to make data on company environmental performance available to the public.

In their response the environmental organisations made three proposals. They called for compulsory public environmental reporting, whereby companies would be obliged to issue an environmental report in accordance with legally defined standards, auditing of reports by an environmental accountant, and the possibility of compulsory external environmental auditing. The unions reacted equally positively to the concept developed by the employers' organisations, although they tended to lay greater stress on the issue of workers' involvement in environmental protection.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>In an environmental organizations publication at this time, Berends and Mol (1988, p. 17) noted a tendency, especially within the FNV Manufacturing Union, to accept the employers' position, although at the same time they observed a more active attitude on the environment arising from their concern with

Both unions and environmental organisations on the whole reacted positively to the government's "Company Environmental Protection". The FNV called it "an important contribution" (FNV, 1990, p. 1). The Nature and Environment Foundation commented "better late than never" (Stichting Natuur en Milieu, 1989, p. 2). Both sides reiterated their calls for compulsory reporting and stressed the need for a compulsory external environmental audit. The environmental organisations also stressed the importance of government inspection. The FNV argued that insufficient attention was being paid to the relationship between environment and working conditions. It suspected that the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment had not been properly involved in the preparation of the memorandum.

In conclusion it can be said that the government and workers' and environmental organisations responded positively to the willingness expressed by employers to behave more responsibly towards the environment by means of the introduction of company environmental protection systems. The issues of whether company data on environmental performance should be made public and whether government inspection is required are still under discussion. Yet another question concerns the involvement of workers. This is a matter which deserves more detailed analysis (see Le Blansch 1990, 1991a).

#### 4.4 Policy statements at company level

##### 4.4.1 The advocates

Most policy papers on company environmental protection touch on the desirability, if not the necessity, of involvement from the side of employees.<sup>8</sup> The government has never let any doubt arise over the importance it attaches to this. In the NEPP it declared, "In the development and implementation of environmental protection systems the involvement of employees is an important factor, both at national, branch and company level" (Tweede Kamer, 1988-89, 21137, 1-2, p. 161.). Why this should be important is not explained. In "Company Environmental Protection" the government also expressed the view that it is self-evident "that employees or their representatives ... are involved in the creation and implementation of environmental protection systems" (Tweede Kamer, 1988-89, 206333, 2-3, p. 33f.). Yet again, there is no explanation why this is considered desirable.

The CNV Manufacturing and Food Industry Union is on record as saying, "The works council should play a role in the creation, organisation, implementation and control of the various aspects of company environmental protection" (Industrie- en Voedingsbond CNV, 1989, p. 22). The FNV also attaches importance to workers' involvement. In its response to the government's memorandum it declared that the involvement of workers is such an essential condition for the success of environmental protection systems that this should be made a criterion in the interim evaluation process to be undertaken in 1992 (FNV, 1990, p. 1). Here again no reason is given for this view.

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<sup>8</sup>The concepts of 'involvement' and 'co-determination' are closely linked. 'Involvement' is used in this context in the sense of 'participation'; co-determination is one of its possible manifestations. For an elaboration of these concepts this report will rely on the literature on co-determination. No further definitions of terms will be attempted here.

Why this involvement is desirable has been dealt with in a range of other publications and from a range of different standpoints. A comparison of the various arguments yields a rough division into two main types:<sup>9</sup>

- Workers and their representatives must be involved in company environmental protection because this is in their interest; this may be called the "worker's perspective"; and
- Workers and their representatives must be involved in company environmental protection because this is in the interest of a clean environment; this may be called the "environmental perspective".

A third type of argument is used considerably less frequently, and less publicly, but is of great influence especially at company level. This type of argument concerns the interest of the organisation's operation, and can be called "the functional perspective".

The different arguments will be analysed on the basis of this division.

#### 4.4.2 Arguments from the workers' perspective

From the workers' perspective, the following arguments have been put forward to justify the involvement of workers in company environmental protection.

*(1) Because environmental protection touches fundamentally on their safety and health, workers should be able to co-determine it.*

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<sup>9</sup>Compare Gevers, 1982. With regard to health and safety he distinguishes between practical and normative motives for regulating workers' control. Within the context of co-determination on environmental policy, 'practical motives' (such as for environmentally friendly behaviour, maintenance and development of environmental measures) would be better described as 'motivation from an environmental perspective'. 'Normative grounds' in turn correspond to 'motivation from a workers' perspective'.



It was noted earlier that the internal and external environment can be closely interrelated. Zwetsloot (1989), for instance, describes working conditions and environment as "twins" and distinguishes six possible types of relationship, both positive and negative and direct and indirect.<sup>10</sup> Several advocates argue that wherever protection of the environment and protection of working conditions overlap, workers should have a say. The National Environmental Forum (LMO), an informal grouping which brings together environmental and consumer organisations and trade unions, follows this line when it justifies involvement of workers in environmental protection on the grounds that "they after all experience on a daily basis the problems and dangers of the internal environment" (Sprengers, 1989a, p. 16).

So too Sprengers, when he draws the attention of works councils to the fact that environmental protection measures may lead to an improvement or a deterioration in working conditions (Sprengers, 1989b). According to Gevers (1982, p. 58) normative grounds can be sited to substantiate this argument, which follow on from the right of involvement in the protection of physical integrity and in the protection of health at work. These are the same normative grounds which in all member states of the European Community have led to the regulation of powers on health and safety (such as in the Working Environment Act in the Netherlands).

*(2) Because the workers are co-responsible for the pollution caused by the company, they should have co-determination on its environmental policy.*

This line of argument has been used, for instance, in the environmental policy plan of the CNV Manufacturing and Food Industry Union: "In the end what matters is that we are conscious of the fact that the jointly shared responsibility of employers and employees for cleaning the general environment and keeping it clean will occupy us for a very long time to come" (Industrie- en Voedingsbond CNV, 1989, p. 5). In the same text reference is also made to the Christian mission to "dress and keep" the earth as mentioned in Genesis 2:15 (p. 15).

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<sup>10</sup>He names the following 'twin' relationships: (a) environmental and working-environment problems which can be traced to the same roots, (b) environmental problems which may cause a working-environment problem and (c) vice versa, (d) environmental and working-environment problems which reinforce each other, (e) parallel working-environment and environmental problems, and (f) indirectly related working-environment and environmental problems (Zwetsloot, 1989, p. 308).

Sprengers (1989b) gives the fact that employees are also held co-responsible outside the company as a justification for co-determination. The FNV (1990, p.8) points out both the employer and employees are liable for violations specified in a number of environmental laws. This is perhaps a reference to the Environmentally Hazardous Substances Act and Soil Protection Act. For this reason the FNV argues for "identification of and information on these laws and other regulations" and for "education, instruction and so on".

*(3) Because decisions related to environmental protection affect workers directly, they should co-determine them.*

Gevers (1988) places this principle within the context of the striving for a humanisation of labour.<sup>11</sup> He quotes the government memorandum at the adoption of the Working Environment Act, in which the wellbeing of the workers is directly linked to the degree to which they control their own work situation, "Wellbeing in connection with labour is concerned with the scope offered by the conditions, organisation and content of work for taking responsibility, input and creativity by the workers" (Tweede Kamer, 1978-79, 14497, 5, p. 7).

Decisions on environmental policy affect workers if for no other reason than the issue of continuity of employment. A report by the Environmental Education Foundation (SME) and the Centre for Energy Conservation and Clean Technology (CE) follows this argument and gives as a reason for workers' involvement the fact that "a company which pursues bad environmental management risks a government decision at some point to suspend its operations or close down it down altogether. This puts the issue of employment centre stage. For the workers and the works council it is therefore imperative to ensure that the management takes appropriate environmental measures" (SME/CE, 1988, p. 13). As another reason for the involvement of the works council in environmental protection, Sprengers (1989b) mentions the possible changes in tasks and responsibilities which could result from it.

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<sup>11</sup>For Geers (1988, p. 11f.), the concept of the 'humanization of labour' has three components: (a) safety, health and hygiene; (b) a voice in the management of the company; and (c) responsibility, development and creativity.

#### 4.4.3 Arguments from the environmental perspective

From the environmental perspective, the following arguments have been put forward to justify the involvement of workers in company environmental protection.

*(1) The workers should be involved in environmental protection because this motivates them to improve their environmental behaviour.*

Gevers concludes that "if the freedom and individual responsibility are taken away by excessive regimentation, then an important incentive for an active commitment to the safety of oneself and of others disappears. Conversely, an extension of responsibility leads to a greater commitment" (Gevers, 1982, p. 52). In this line a recent VNO/NCW publication, "Environmental Reporting by Companies" argues for the provision of information to employees: "The cooperation of the individual employee is essential to the success of the environmental protection system. By increasing understanding [of environmental pollution and protection] individual awareness and the incentive to behave in an environmentally responsible way will increase" (VNO/NCW, 1990, p. 3f.).

Environmental behaviour outside the workplace can also improve through involvement in environmental protection within the company. In its policy plan the CNV Manufacturing and Food Industry Union identified a number of roles in which CNV members deal with the environment: as union members, as citizens, as car users, consumers and tourist. The CNV sets itself the task of initiating a process of consciousness-raising (CNV, 1989, p. 17). One of the arguments in favour of workers' involvement put forward by Ket (1989, p. 1) is that employees are also consumers and therefore an important factor in environmental policy.

*(2) Workers should have co-determination on environmental protection because they can fulfil a useful role in enforcing environmental legislation or where appropriate remind employers of their responsibilities concerning the environment.*

This line of argument can be found in many quarters. An employee at the Hoogovens steelmill is quoted in the *Praktijkblad voor Medezeggenschap* as saying that the management "is far more

sensitive to criticism from within than from outside, from environmental action groups, for instance" (Anon., 1988). In an interview with OR-Informatie, a magazine on co-determination (Verbakel, 1989), Ed Nijpels, then Minister for the Environment, showed himself a strong supporter of corporate "environmental accountancy" monitored by the works council.

At a congress of the CNV Wood and Building Union he expressed himself in similar terms, and did not exclude statutory measures if it emerged that the council did not have sufficient monitoring powers (Ket, 1989, p. 6). And in a preface to a publication by the environmentalist movement, "Environmental Protection in Companies, Why It Matters" the environmental science lecturer Hommes, commenting on the call by the authors for a mandatory external public audit, argues that they underestimate the internal monitoring within a company (Berends and Mol, 1988, p. 5).

*(3) Workers should be involved in environmental protection because they have expertise and experience which may be useful in the development and application of environmental measures.*

Although this argument cuts more ice in the debate on worker involvement in measures concerned with increasing subjective wellbeing, it is also used in the context of environmental protection. Thus the FNV gives as another reason for the involvement of workers that "experiences in the sphere of traditional working conditions can be very relevant" (FNV, 1988, p. 5). The SME/CE paper also adopts this position, "Workers constantly come into direct contact with environmental problems: leaking pipes, saturated filters, used oil which gets into sewers, and so on. Therefore most decisions on intervention will have to be taken on the shopfloor" (SME/CE, 1988, p. 13).

The Research Council on the Environment and Nature (RMNO) recommends that environmental protection should be given shape not only in a top-down but also and in particular in a bottom-up approach, "In addition, the actual implementation of environmental protection systems and their incorporation into general corporate policy are of great importance. This is a task for line management and employees. That is why it is important that the development of policy takes account of implementation problems which may occur at the lower levels of an organisation, the so-called "bottom-up" approach" (RMNO, 1989, p.14). Gevers puts the potential contribution of workers also in the light of selective perception, applying to both management and workforce, and

links to this the condition that for an optimum input from this self-perception of workers, possibly inadequate knowledge should be supplemented with the help of training or external expertise (Gevers, 1982, pp. 56f.)

#### 4.4.4 Arguments from the functional perspective

Employers and their organisations tend to approach workers' involvement primarily from a functional perspective. As this concerns in the first place a specific company interest and less a collective public interest, the arguments from this perspective are less often stressed in public as well.

Still some of the arguments sited in the sections above clearly originate from a functional perspective, like those concerning involvement in order to motivate personnel to behave in accordance with company environmental policy. The same goes for arguments stressing the importance of expertise and knowledge on the shopfloor to become available for management (the so-called "bottom-up" approach).

VNO/NCW further elaborate these arguments, also concerning the workforces' commitment to the company environmental protection policy. They emphasise the importance of "close involvement of all personnel (as) a precondition for the environmental protection system to function properly" (VNO/NCW, 1986, 21). And the supply of information to employees is (also) argued as follows, "A greater understanding will lead to a motivated staff and a work force that is motivated to take the responsibility of environmental hygiene seriously. Furthermore, it is of the utmost importance that employees are well informed to enable them to react correctly when remarks concerning the company environmental policy are made by the general public" (VNO/NCW, 1991, 5).

Sometimes arguments from this perspective are stated in an indirect manner. This concerns for instance a derivative of the "quality of working life" argument. Thus, the government's "Company Environmental Protection" mentions "contributing to the quality of the production process and products" and "positive influence on staff motivation", among others, as interests of industry in

environmental protection (Tweede Kamer, 1988-89, 20633, 2-3, p. 11). Also the report by the Research Council on the Environment and Nature (RMNO) (RMNO, 1989, p. 14), mentions the view of the quality of labour and safety and environment as primary production factors rather than residual matters, as environmentally relevant developments.

If not so very often used in public, these arguments are often encountered in case studies concerning workers' involvement in company environmental practices. For example in one Dutch case study (Le Blansch, 1991b) an environmental coordinator is cited, "It is the task of management to provide for policy, means and opportunities. If these fall short then management is pleased to be informed of this. Problems may arise in implementation and in this management an works council may well cooperate".

This quotation demonstrates the limits of the functional arguments as does, even more so, a statement on workers involvement by an environmental coordinator from another company: "It helps integrating the protection of the environment in the company's activities. Co-determination however must remain functional, 13,500 small decision-makers are of no use".

In short, three kinds of functional arguments can be distinguished:

- 1) *Workers should be involved with company environmental protection because this motivates them to behave in accordance with company environmental policy (and the interest of the company in general).*
- 2) *Workers should be involved in the formulation of company environmental policy because they have expertise and experience which may be useful in the development and application of environmental measures.*
- 3) *Workers should be involved with company environmental protection because they contribute to the organisation's outward image.*

#### 4.5 Discussion

The various arguments for workers' involvement have been outlined above. They suggest, more or less, that the workers', company's and environmental interests are closely connected and interrelated. Again, some qualifying remarks need to be made at this point. It has already been pointed out that involvement and co-determination may be quite difficult to realise, both from a legal and political power point of view. Therefore it is by no means certain that all workers are in a position to exercise influence.

Even when workers have the opportunity of exercising influence over company policy, it is by no means certain that they will use it to protect the environment. A prerequisite is that they are concerned about the environment, that they are aware of the environmental pollution caused by the company, that they feel partly responsible for it, and that they have a degree of idealism about environmental issues. In short, a particular attitude is required.

Nelissen (1988) has made a study of the internalisation of environmental norms from a socialisation angle. As environmental standards become a more elementary part of the dominant cultural pattern, environmentally friendly behaviour becomes a question of conforming to normal patterns of behaviour. He therefore adopts a "socialisation" approach to the environmental question. He identifies a number of barriers to effective socialisation. Although he focuses primarily on those mainly responsible, the employers, most of the barriers he mentions can also be an obstacle to workers' involvement in environmental protection. What springs to mind here is the influence of the social environment, the absence of alternatives, or relative ignorance of environmental issues. An important threshold identified by Nelissen is the so-called "cost-benefit barrier". This arises when a positive attitude to the environment costs the workers more than they gain from it. The existence of this barrier presupposes a difference between the workers' interests and environmental interests.

Possible differences between the workers' interests and environmental interests can be discussed either from a macro (or collective) point of view, or from a micro (or particular point) of view. Viewed at the macroeconomic level, it is open to question as to whether any such difference

exists. For the quality of the life of the workers will be directly linked to the overall quality of the environment in which they find themselves. And a company which consistently neglects its critical dependence on the environment will eventually go under. But it is certainly true that at the microeconomic level, within the individual company, tensions between the interests of workers and the environment can be observed, quite apart from the question as to whether these interests are correctly perceived. This is why involvement of workers does not always lead to the protection of environmental interests.

A publication by the FNV, "Trade Union Basis for Environmental Policy" (1988) identifies four types of friction between workers' and environmental interests which may be the cause of this:

- (a) term effects: effects on employment tend to reveal themselves in the short term, while environmental effects emerge in the long term;
- (b) cost allocation: employment arguments can sometimes overcome the "polluter pays" principle;
- (c) cumulative effects: it is often difficult to identify individual transgressors, since the damage done is the sum total of many forms of relatively "harmless" environmental pollution and
- (d) interest allocation: it is difficult to demarcate the general interest from the interests of those directly involved.

The upshot of all this is that at the micro level and in the short term conflicts of interest between workers' and the environment can occur in specific cases. Reijnders (1990) and Leisink (1989) provide a short survey of cases in the past where these conflicts have come to the fore in the form of contradictory statements by proponents of workers' and environmental interests at macro and micro level. These are summarised below:

- Coal-fired power station in Amsterdam: FNV-Amsterdam in favour, the environmentalist movement and FNV headquarters against;
- Phosphate-free washing powders: the environmental movement and FNV headquarters in favour, the union at Hoechst against;
- Banning of Dinoseb (a chemical company): environmental movement in favour, trade union against;



- Reclamation of Markerwaard: several unions in favour, environmental organisations against and
- Abolition of travel costs subsidies: environmental movement in favour, union against.

Of course the changing times have not passed either the workers' organisations or the environmentalist movement by. Workers' organisations have recognised the contradictions mentioned above and have tried to resolve them. Partly in the light of its current "success" the environmental movement has come to better understand the interests of workers' organisations, and there have been growing calls for joint action.

Nevertheless, in specific cases some painful choices will still have to be made. Under certain circumstances it will be unrealistic to expect workers and their representatives and environmental organisations to take an overly balanced view of the primary interests which they seek to represent.

## 5. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the previous chapters an overview is given of the different ways in which industrial relations and the environment are interconnected in the Netherlands. Firstly, Dutch legal conditions under which industrial relations affect or may affect environmental issues and vice versa have been presented. On the one hand this concerns environmental legislation in general and in particular the development towards (government sponsored) self-regulation by means of company environmental protection systems. On the other hand it concerns Dutch legislation on the working environment, particularly the Working Environment Act (WEA). This is primarily an enabling act, defining the role of the parties involved and their respective rights and duties. It can be noted that the legal means for co-determination are slowly being extended towards the environmental realm. However some qualifying remarks have been made about both the uncertainty of actual workers' involvement in environmental protection at company level, and the still limited extent to which co-determination rights can be applied to environmental issues.

Next, voluntary agreements at the national, branch and company level have been reviewed. At national level existing structures like the Social Economic Council have been used for consultation on environmental issues. As a result of a national agreement between social partners, special structures have been created, in which, however, negotiations seem to have come to a deadlock. A dominant power perspective on assessing one another's motives and differences in style concerning the approach of environmental issues, appear to present obstacles for the further development of a common approach on environmental problems by social partners.

At branch and company level collective bargaining, which is among the principle areas in which union policies on the environment are being developed, has led to a growing amount of collective agreements on the environment. At company level workers' involvement is definitely increasing, although valid data on the exact contents and intensity of involvement are difficult to find.

The starting points of involvement and co-determination practices appear to be working conditions and everyday practice, whereas the agreements seem to so far present more a codification of practices than a modification. However it is far too early for a comprehensive evaluation.

Finally, the programmatic statements, demands and campaigns, both from employers' and workers' side, have been described. From employers' side, the most important issue at stake has been the introduction of Company Environmental Protection Systems and its acceptance by government as an alternative to direct regulation (from 1986). Here the employers' environmental bureau, the BMRO, played a proactive and successful role. The result so far can however be considered to be rather paradoxical, as the postponement of direct regulation legitimates stronger public attention to what is actually happening inside companies.

The unions also show a "greening" tendency, with the major environmental policy push dating from 1987. It is noticeable that in taking position in public increasingly common cause is made with environmental organisations. A special point of interest from the union side (and in part from the side of the employers' organisations, government and environmental organisations too) concerns the involvement and co-determination of workers in company environmental policy. The FNV is even arguing that this should be made a criterion for the evaluation of the state of corporate environmental policies in 1992.

In part these cases are argued from a workers' perspective. What matters from this perspective is the influence of environmental protection on health and safety, the general work situation of the worker, or the aspects for which the worker is partly responsible. From an environmental perspective involvement of workers is advocated because it would have a motivating effect on their environmental behaviour, would enable them to play a useful role in supervising the environmental behaviour of the employer and because they have valuable knowledge and experience. From a functional perspective workers' involvement is advocated because it motivates them to behave in accordance with company environmental policy, because it enables knowledge and expertise at the shopfloor to become available for management and because workers contribute to the organisation's outward image.

Practical co-determination based on the coincidence of the workers', the company's and environmental interests applies above all at the macroeconomic level. At the micro level, frictions can occur. Those mentioned here are term effects, cost allocations, cumulative effects and interest allocation. In cases where these conflicts arise the involvement of workers may have a counterproductive effect in environmental terms.

Problematic co-determination, possibly insufficient socialisation and conflict between workers' and environmental interests may stand in the way of a meaningful workers' involvement in the development of company environmental policy. So far too little is known about the extent and form of this involvement and more research in this area is needed.

On the one hand the question arises: under which conditions may treatment of environmental issues within industrial relations serve the interests of the environment? When the implementation of company environmental policy becomes the aim and result of consultation and negotiation between employers and employees at all levels, then factors such as the overall economic situation and balance of power in companies and branches may start playing an overriding and improper role in the decisions on the collective environment. It is by no means certain that workers' influence will be strongest in the branches which generate the most pollution. Indeed, in the older branches of industry, the heaviest polluters, it may be asking rather a lot of workers to protect the interests of the environment when this may mean a real threat to their own jobs. More research is also needed here, particularly in relation to the possible need for a branch-wide intensification of union and training activities, if not retraining activities.

But the question also arises: under which circumstances may workers' interests be served by a general argument for involvement of workers and their representatives in environmental issues? Apart from the possible occurrence of friction between workers' and environmental interests discussed earlier, there is also the question of how this argument relates to earlier and other calls and claims in the areas of disarmament, apartheid, women's rights or the four-day working-week.

Seen in this light, an inability to give shape to an effective involvement of workers may quickly lead to an erosion of the credibility of co-determination as an (ideological) institution.

Related to this is the question as to whether and how the activities of the works council can be structured in such a way that attention to environmental protection is not just the umpteenth task put on the shoulders of a handful of committed employees in the company, but which cannot be realised. Here too more research is in order. In the worst possible case the argument for worker involvement can be turned into its opposite and lead to the workers being assigned co-responsibility for a situation only partly, if at all, of their own making which may lead to an exceedingly messy entanglement of interests. This would neither be in the interest of the workers nor of the environment.

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