

## IMMIGRANT CANDIDATES IN THE NETHERLANDS

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Since the Second World War many people have migrated to the Netherlands, in particular from Indonesia (including Moluccans), from Surinam, from the Netherlands Antilles, and from countries in the Mediterranean area. It has become clear by now that the vast majority of them have settled permanently. They have become immigrants, a fact that has been admitted by the Dutch government. They pass under the name of 'ethnic minorities', and the policy elaborated for them bears this name as well. In the *Draft Minorities Report*<sup>1</sup> and later in the *Minorities Report*<sup>2</sup> too, the government expresses its wish to elaborate the minorities policy with the participation of the immigrants involved. Besides, it proposes explicitly to strengthen the general political influence of ethnic groups. The most far-reaching measure on that head is the enfranchisement of non-Netherlands immigrants.

Government and parliament are apparently willing to allow the ethnic minorities to have a say in the matter. As a matter of fact the enfranchisement of non-Netherlands is not the outcome of a ambitious campaign of immigrants themselves. Do ethnic minorities want to have political influence after all? Judging from the reactions to the *Draft Minorities Report* they do, but these reactions came from individuals and organizations that take lines in advocating ethnic interest (in politics)<sup>3</sup>.

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\* I am indebted to Han Entzinger, Andre Köbben and Susanna Ravestein-Willis for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> *Draft Minorities Report* (Ontwerp-Minderhedennota), The Hague : Government Publishers, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> *Minorities Report* (Minderhedennota), Second Chamber 1982-1983, 16102, n° 20-21, The Hague, Government Publishers, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> R. Urbanus, *Reacties op de ontwerp-Minderhedennota. Een analyse van de commentaren op de ontwerp-Minderhedennota* (Reactions to the Draft Minorities Report. An analysis of the

How the ethnic rank and file stands on this, is harder to determine. A chief point that emerges from a recent research project is that an overwhelming majority of the immigrants is favorable to suffrage<sup>4</sup>. Nearly all Turkish respondents (94%) state that they will go to the poll if they get the opportunity! I have my doubts whether these findings are valid indications for the actual turn-out of immigrants in 1986, but they do indicate a trend of interest.

All in all it seems inevitable that the Dutch political arena will change, not in the least because new actors will play a part. Apart from participation in elections, immigrants can exercise political influence in many other ways. Many native Dutch (and also many immigrants) consider ethnic minorities as oppressed groups all the same. Ethnic minorities are often portrayed as utterly powerless and even politically quiescent. Their political significance would be slight. At most they would fulfil a passive political role for anti-migrant parties to seek votes of indigenous electors opposing to the presence of immigrants in their country.

However, the forementioned pessimists overlook the political influence of immigrants via trade unions, pressure groups, ethnic and other organizations. As several authors<sup>5</sup> prove, the one-sided emphasis on immigrants' 'apathy' and 'patience' is incorrect : ethnic minorities do play an active political role, albeit a modest one. This paper confines itself to one of the aspects of this political role, namely participation in elections.

In March 1986 for the first time non-Netherlands residents will be granted the right to vote and to run for office on a local level. What will be the implications of this in actual practice? In an effort to answer this question, we might turn to other groups of immigrants who already have the right to participate in local and even national elections. These concern Surinamers, Antilleans and a majority of the Moluccans in the Netherlands, who are Netherlands citizens because they come from former Netherlands colonies. We have a certain amount of experience concerning their participation.

Furthermore, for some time non-Netherlands residents have had the right to participate in elections for municipal district councils. We can learn from the experiences in Rotterdam and Amsterdam how things work out in practice.

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commentaries on the Draft Minorities Report), Leiden : Centre for the Study of Social Conflicts (C.O.M.T.), 1983.

<sup>4</sup> *Minderheden meer toekomst* (Minorities more future), Amsterdam / The Hague, Veldkamp Marktonderzoek / Netherlands Union of Local Authorities, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> M.J. Miller, *Foreign workers in Western Europe. An emerging political force*, New York, Praeger, 1981; J. Rath, Political participation of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, in *International Migration Review*, 17 (3), 1983, pp. 445-469.

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This paper deals with the experiences of the immigrant candidates. But for a better understanding of these, this paper first deals briefly with the immigrant's voting pattern

Some knowledge of the Netherlands electoral system is essential. In the Netherlands an electoral system of proportional representation prevails. The parties put forward large tickets, and the nomination of these tickets takes place at caucuses. Starting from the front-runner, the running candidates on top of the ticket will become a representative according to the number of party seats in the council. Consequently, there are only a few safe seats. The lower position one has, the poorer the chances of getting elected. The majority of the candidates appears to fill in these marginal positions. Only a few of them may have long term hopes of winning a seat, since they have a so-called 'successor-position'. If one of the sitting members resigns, the first successor can take his place and so on. Otherwise the marginal candidates have not much of a chance of getting elected, unless by a quorum of preference-votes. This, however, is rather exceptional, because the Netherlands electoral contest is in principle a contest between political parties, not between individual candidates.

Under certain conditions, any person entitled to vote has the right to found an independent political party and to run for office. In this way candidates-to-be can get round difficult nomination procedures within regular parties. The voters, however, have the final say in the matter.

### **Turn-out**

How is the participation of immigrants with Netherlands nationality? The participation rate of Surinamers, Antilleans and Moluccans at the municipal elections in 1982 lagged by and large behind the turnout of indigenous Dutch<sup>6</sup>. Still, the turn-out of these immigrants differed appreciably from one town to another. For instance, in a number of small towns a good 30% of the eligible Moluccans polled, while the total rate of participation for the electorate as a whole was circa 60%.

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<sup>6</sup> F. Bovenkerk, L. Ruland and J. Rath, De opkomst van een vergeten electoraat : etnische groepen en de gemeenteraadsverkiezingen van 2 juni 1982 (The turn-out of a forgotten electorate : ethnic groups and the municipal elections of June 2nd 1982), in: *Intermediair*, 18 (35), 1982, pp. 1-7.

The Surinamers and Antilleans living in the inner city areas of Amsterdam and Rotterdam went relatively less frequent to the polling booth. Especially the youngsters among them turned up less often. An interesting exception was the immigrants' turnout in The Hague, where Surinamese and Antilleans voters were overrepresented in the poll. This was to a high degree due to the electoral campaign of Surinamese and Antilleans themselves.

The cities of Rotterdam and Amsterdam have been setting up a system of district councils. These are elected neighborhood administration bodies with limited authority. In anticipation of amendments to the Ballot Act and the Municipal Act non-Netherlands residents of these municipal districts have been granted political rights<sup>7</sup>.

The average turnout percentage at the elections held in Rotterdam in 1980 was 38%. As far as non-Netherlands voters were concerned, the turnout was far lower: an average 12%, most of them men. The turnout of foreign voters differed from one municipal district to another, ranging from 9% to 16% by municipal district. An exception was the municipal district, of 'Hock of Holland', where 47% of the non-Netherlands voted. This was due to particular local circumstances.

The turnout percentage of non-Netherlands voters at the elections held in Amsterdam in 1981 was estimated between 10% and 20% versus an average turnout of 45% for the total electorate.

Unfortunately, more detailed data about the participation rate of immigrants by country of origin are not available.

The low percentage turnout of non-Netherlands voters was disappointing for most observers. They had expected more foreign voters to go to the ballot-box, but the novelty of 'opening up' municipal district councils to non-Netherlands residents clearly had not appealed to the majority of the latter. Contrary to the expectation, immigrants running for office failed to bring about *mass* participation of foreign voters, although at the same time their candidacies proved to be important for the poll. In view of the low turnout of the total electorate, however, one should keep in mind that the Dutch were not very enthusiastic about this election either, as they are held to be of no real political importance. Nevertheless, the participation rate of non-Netherlands was remarkably below average, and several explanations were put forward. Some antagonistic Dutchmen concluded that the non-Netherlands had no political awareness, no feeling for democracy; others suggested that they are too stupid and lazy. In my opinion these explanations

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<sup>7</sup> J. Rath, The enfranchisement of immigrants in practice: Turkish and Moroccan islands in the fairway of Dutch politics, in *Netherlands Journal of Sociology*, 19 (2), pp. 151-179, October, 1983.

should not be taken seriously. But more valid explanations were produced too. The principal explanation is sought in the fact that immigrants in general constitute a low-participation segment of the population. Many are still insufficiently oriented to Dutch society, and especially the phenomenon of district councils and its elections are relatively strange and very new to them.

The low turnout percentage is further due to the inefficient campaign of the political parties and the local government. Finally, some imputed the low participation rate to the election boycott which was organized by tenants' committees (in Rotterdam) and by a committee of Moroccans (in Amsterdam). The first considered district councils as an 'illigitimate' level of government; the latter considered the enfranchisement of non-Netherlands as a cunning ruse on the part of the Dutch government and political parties to 'Dutchify' the ethnic minorities. Both groupings urged to boycott the elections, and this only served to heighten the general confusion of the non-Netherlands voters with respect to the elections.

### **Party Preferences**

The social-democratic PvdA (Labor Party) got the overwhelming support of both Surinamese, Antillean and Moluccan voters. This was more true of the Surinamese and Antilleans than the Moluccans. Bovenkerk et al.<sup>8</sup> found that an average 60% of Surinamese and Antillean voters supported Labor, while the Moluccan support ranged between 20% and 65% depending on the municipality concerned. The second most popular choice was the Christian-democratic CDA. Bovenkerk *et al.*<sup>9</sup> found that between 5 and 35% of the immigrant voters supported the Christian-democrats. To a lesser extent the immigrants polled for radical left-wing parties. The right wing liberal party VVD did not receive any votes of Surinamese and Antilleans. Some Moluccans on the other hand did poll for the right wing liberals, though on the whole their support was rather limited. In some municipalities, however, these liberals were supported by 25% of the Moluccan voters, but this is exceptional, and can be explained by the local climate of opinion and the local balance of power. The Surinamers and Antilleans concerned are largely living in working-class communities in the bigger cities, while the Moluccans are living in mixed areas. Therefore, the latter immigrant are less likely to support Labor. Next to differences to circumstances the success of non-Labor parties can also be explained by the actions of local Dutch spokesmen and by immigrant candidates on the tickets of other parties.

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<sup>8</sup> Bovenkerk et al., *op. cit.*, 1982.

<sup>9</sup> Bovenkerk et al., *op. cit.*, 1982.

Many Moluccans, moreover, are Christians who are more likely to vote the Christian-democratic CDA.

On the basis of a good forty interviews with non-Netherlands immigrants in Rotterdam, suppositions were made as to their preferences as regards political parties<sup>10</sup>. The findings of this survey showed that these immigrants tend to vote the social-democratic PvdA (Labor Party) more than other parties as well. The Amsterdam survey *Kiezersenquête Stadsdeelraden* (1981) confirmed this tentative conclusion.

The reasons for the PvdA preference included the opinions that the Labor Party is 'the party for the working man' which, moreover, promotes the immigrants' interests at the most<sup>11</sup>. The fact that the Labor Party often had immigrants on its ticket played a significant role. Also, the personal popularity of the national leader of the Labor Party, Joop den Uyl, contributed to the relative success of the party. And lastly, the opinion that the Labor Party is a large party with political power is another reason for the preference. The immigrants had little interest in other parties. As far as they knew other parties, they often did not consider them as real alternatives. For example, the second largest party, the Christian-democratic CDA, was more than once rejected because of its merging of (christian) religion and politics. Nevertheless, the CDA was sometimes preferred by others for this very reason.

A normal feature of the local political system is the appearance of independent parties. During the discussions in parliament about political rights for non-Netherlands residents some MP's pointed at this possibility. The communist MP Bakker feared the participation of the Turkish 'fascist' *Grey Wolves*, and the orthodox Christian MP Verburgh saw the inevitable rise of a muslim party.

Indeed several immigrants have founded their own political parties; sometimes the native Dutch have given them assistance. These parties are occasionally already existing organizations, but mostly these are local *ad hoc* groups existing only while the election period lasts.

I should like to draw a distinction between three types of immigrant parties.

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<sup>10</sup> J. Rath, *op. cit.*, 1983.

<sup>11</sup> Bovenkerk et al., *op. cit.*, 1982.; J. Rath, *op. cit.*, 1983.

The first type is the party whose political activities are predominantly related to native country politics. *The Moroccan Amicales* are an example of this type of party. This feared organization once tried to participate in the elections for district council in Rotterdam in 1980<sup>12</sup>. Their registration provoked furious protests as *Amicales* were thought to be as 'fascist' as the Turkish *Grey Wolves*. Besides, they put pressure on their compatriots: *Amicales* main political concern is loyalty of the Moroccans to the Moroccan regime. Eventually, the Central Polling Station of the Rotterdam district refused to accept their registration (on questionable grounds).

The second type is the immigrant party whose attitude towards native country politics is more or less 'neutral'. It focuses its activities on the promotion of very particular interests in the Netherlands politics. An example of this type would be a muslim party. Rotterdam is also the first city to have such a muslim party seeking voters. The Turkish muslims' grouping *Hakyol* has registered to participate in the coming district council elections on May 16th, 1984. Unless all muslims change religion, the possibility of absorption of this new party among the other (Netherlands) religious splinter parties should not be ruled out. However, at this moment it cannot be determined whether this type of party has come to stay in the Netherlands political arena.

Finally, the third type of immigrant party is very much like a protest party. The party leaders often claim that the foundation of their parties should be seen as a deed of protest against the 'ignorance' and 'passivity' of the regular parties towards the ethnic minorities. Parties of this type pretend to enter the election arena on behalf of the entire ethnic population. They bear names like the *Minorities Party*, the *Migrants Union Party* or the *Progressive Minorities Party* or the *Political Party solidarity* to indicate that all the ethnic minorities interests are promoted.

One would expect the independent immigrant parties to be particularly appealing for immigrant voters. It is significant that the independent immigrant parties have not polled sufficient votes to win one seat anywhere, yet. They probably misjudge the appeal of other parties to the ethnic minorities, and also the fact that the latter constitute a very heterogeneous population. When it comes to the acquisition of political influence in practice, it seems that this is limited to the ethnic community of the party-bosses.

It is clear that neither the independent immigrant parties, nor the regular parties other than Labor are able to challenge the overwhelming support for Labor among the immigrant voters.

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<sup>12</sup> J. Rath, *op. cit.*, 1983.

## Immigrant candidates

One of the most salient aspects of immigrant political participation is the appearance of immigrant ethnic candidates, who are members of ethnic minorities running for office particularly on the regular party tickets. Even before the Second World War the Netherlands was acquainted with this phenomenon.

The first immigrant in the Netherlands to stand for office was the revolutionist Ibrahim Tan Malakka in 1922. This Indonesian student was recognized as a Dutch subject having the right to vote and to be elected under the same conditions as Dutch nationale<sup>13</sup>. Tan Malakka ran for parliamentary representative of the Communist Party. His electoral campaign was rather spectacular. He introduced himself emphatically as ethnic candidate to promote the interest of the Indonesian people that suffered under the Dutch colonial oppression. At communist party-rallies he appeared to have a solid backing behind him. Tan Malakka was not elected as an MP, though he obtained an impressive number of preference votes<sup>14</sup>.

Electing the first immigrant to representative of the people took a few more years. In 1933, as a result of a turbulent election-contest the Indonesian communist Rustam Effendi was elected as an MP on a radical ticket: the Communist Party Holland advocated the independence of the Dutch colony Indonesia. Effendi and three other immigrant candidates were token expressions of support for the movement towards the independence: as an MP Effendi worked in the cause of the Indonesian liberation. In 1937 he was re-elected<sup>15</sup>.

How is the situation with immigrant candidates at the present day? In the first elections for municipal district councils in Rotterdam in 1980 there were already several immigrant candidates. Altogether there were 8 non-Netherlands candidates equaling 1,3% of all the candidates (610), whereas 3,1% of the voters were non-Netherlands. Only one Turk was elected to councillor; this was 0,7 % of all 138 representatives.

The municipal district elections in Amsterdam in 1981 showed a better ratio as far as the candidates are concerned. The number of immigrant candidates was 11 and they constituted a good 3% of the 330 candidates.

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<sup>13</sup> C.A. Groenendijk and A.H.J. Swart, Dutch Report, in *Studi Emurazione*, 15 (49), pp. 121-140, March 1978.

<sup>14</sup> H.A. Poeze, *Tan Malaka. Strijder voor Indonesië's vrijheid. Levensloop van 1897 tot 1945* (Tan Malakka. Fighter for the liberty of Indonesia. The course of life from 1897 to 1945), The Hague, Nederlandse Boek- en Steendrukkerij v/h H.L. Smits, 1976.

<sup>15</sup> J.C.H. Blom, *De mouterij op de Zeven Provinciën. Reacties en gevolgen in Nederland* (Muting in the 'Zeven Provinciën'. Reactions and consequence in the Netherlands), Bussum: Fibula - Van Dishoeck, 1975.

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This percentage equalled that of the immigrant voters. No fewer than 9 of these immigrant candidates, however, stood for an independent immigrant party. None of the 11 candidates were elected.

In the provincial and parliamentary elections in 1982, several Surinamers and Antilleans ran for office. In the municipal elections of 1982 there were 44 immigrant candidates. This was 0,07% of the total number of candidates (59 650). The Surinamers, Antilleans and Moluccans constitute 1,5% of the electorate. No more than 7 immigrants won seats on municipal councils. This minute number equalled 0,06% of all the municipal councillors in the Netherlands (11,364). From this overview we may conclude that immigrants are obviously under-represented on party tickets, and more so on municipal councils.

Does this apply proportionally to every ethnic group? The majority of the immigrant candidates are of Surinamese origin. As a matter of fact, up to 1978 all immigrant candidates were Surinamers, and immigrant parties are frequently led by Surinamers as well. As regards non-Netherlands candidates there are comparatively many Turks. This in itself seems self-evident as Surinamers and Turks account for the largest ethnic groups. The political influence of the Surinamers, however, seems bigger. As mentioned before, non-Netherlands residents like Turks only have voting right at the level of district municipal councils up until now, and these councils hardly possess any powers. Naturally, immigrants with Dutch passports, in particularly Surinamers, have been able to penetrate deeper into the political arena.

The question arises as to whether Surinamers will act as pioneers of immigrant political participation, and whether they will even become the leading promoters of ethnic minorities' interests. Although it is hard to forecast future developments, this seems quite possible. Other ethnic groups, for example the Moluccans, do not otherwise lack political influence, but their ways of political participation not seldom occur without interference of political parties. Of whatever ethnic group, Surinamers have come best through party politics. It is hard to determine which way of voicing immigrants' interests is most successful. It would be interesting to study this question of the relative power of ethnic groups.

Anyway, several dozens of immigrants ran for various political parties. More than half of them were candidates for immigrant parties. Seeing that immigrants hardly cast any vote for the independent parties, it looks as though there is a basic diversity of opinion as to the party preferences of immigrant voters and candidates.

As regards the candidates running for regular parties, their party memberships are more in line with the preferences of the immigrant voters.

Yet, as mentioned before, immigrants are under-represented on the tickets of These parties. What makes this under-representation?

A prerequisite for candidacy is party membership. Reliable statistics about party membership of immigrants are hardly available. The findings of a recent survey show that only 1% of the (180 000) Surinamers is a member of a political party, whereas 8% of the indigenous Dutch is a party member<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, from this survey it stands out that no more than half of the Surinamese party members have associated themselves with Dutch parties. Unfortunately, this report does not elicit which parties are concerned.

More precise data cannot be obtained from membership rolls, either, since none of the parties registers their members' ethnic background. Most of the local branches make no frequent contact with (representatives of) the ethnic communities. Not one party has ever canvassed for new members among the immigrants in a systematic and active way. Although more than ever before, the political parties have to decide on the minorities policy, and though the enfranchisement of non-Netherlands residents comes in view most parties have been rather passive on this point, so far. Nevertheless, this may change in the near future. It is significant, for example, that the Communist Party of the Netherlands terminated its peculiar prohibition of non-Netherlands residents to apply as a member in december 1982. And not until this year the Labor Party has tentatively started a canvassing campaign. So the Labor Party is organizing special meetings for ethnic minorities to reduce the latter's 'threshold-fear'.

What makes this so-called 'threshold-fear'? A fair part of the ethnic minorities is still in a position which is generally seen as 'problematic' and critical. These immigrants are coping with problems of participation in Dutch society. The language barrier, the 'myth of return', the lag between the Netherlands' and immigrants' cultures and religion, the sub-standard education, and many other factors hinder their orientation towards Dutch society. The ethnic minorities' vulnerable socio-economic position and the lack of (mutual) tolerance force them into a situation of social marginality, which is also illustrated in the low degree of participation in politics. One has to feel really at home in the Netherlands and one has to have knowledge of the way things are being done, before one can move into politics. So long as the ethnic minorities are generally insufficiently integrated into Dutch society, their activities in Dutch politics are likely to remain limited.

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<sup>16</sup> T.J.M. Reubsaet, J.A. Kropman and L.M. van Mulier, *Surinaamse migranten in Nederland. Deel 2. De positie van Surinamers in de Nederlandse samenleving* (Surinaamse migrants in the Netherlands. Part 2. the position of Surinamers in the Dutch society), Nijmegen : Instituut voor Toegepaste Sociologie, 1982.

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The political socialization of immigrants interferes with their participation in Dutch politics, too. For example, politics is sometimes associated with violence. Furthermore, in the countries of origin of many immigrants the political system is largely dominated by patron-client relations. On the one hand, many immigrants consider this politics to be a shady business, and they dislike its favouritism. On the other hand, others may expect that personalism will play as dominating a roll as it did in the native country. However, such a patronage system is not very common in the Netherlands, in particular not in the urbanized western part of the country. By and large, the Dutch politicians have little personal contact with the voters. Especially with immigrants, the political parties are very stand-offish. Besides, numerous immigrants expect to be discriminated on account of their ethnicity inside the political parties, and this fear raises another threshold.

All this may keep immigrants from joining a party. Nevertheless, few immigrants do join a political party after all, and we can sporadically observe immigrants to take part in party activities. It is significant that these few immigrants who play a role in politics are all reasonably integrated. They are the ones who have been in the Netherlands for a comparatively long time. Thanks to their good command of Dutch and also as a result of their spirit of enterprise as well, they have 'made good' here. They know their way around in Dutch society. This makes it possible for a situation to arise that these immigrants are often approached by their compatriote for the granting of (social) assistance. They are mostly held in high esteem within their communities for their mediation with Dutch institutions.

An outstanding feature of a lot of immigrant politicians is the fact that many of them work for social welfare agencies. Either as professional social worker, or as 'voluntary' leader of ethnic organizations, they work for the benefit of the ethnic groups themselves.

As party members, they push on this work, this time addressing themselves to their political associates. They often act as intermediaries between the immigrants and politics.

Some of them become a candidate. Mostly, they are nominated in low and ineligible positions on the party tickets. Only a few of them have a 'successor-position'. In fact, the majority of the immigrant candidates have not much of a chance of getting elected, unless by a quorum of preference-votes.

Numerous immigrant candidates hope for preference-votes, and the prospects of success are not bad at all. In 1978, for instance, a preference-votes campaign led to a Surinamer being elected to the municipal council of The Hague. The votes for this seemingly ineligible Surinamer Johan Chandoe even outnumbered the party quota.

### **Discrimination or affirmative action?**

The political parties hold the participation of immigrants in the political decision making process to be a prerequisite for Netherlands democracy. Once again we note, however, that there are practically no immigrants in representations and, moreover, immigrants are heavily underrepresented in the very tickets of the political parties. I have already discussed several considerations, which are important in this respect. Discussions revolving around this question, however, are generally of a more speculative nature. In particular the speculation that immigrants encounter more difficulties than native Dutch in making a political career, is widely accepted as a fact.

However, it remains to be seen whether the political parties systematically discriminate against immigrants on account of their ethnicity and consequently refuse to nominate immigrants as a candidate. It is conceivable that parties treat native and immigrant party members the same, or that parties perhaps opt for affirmative discrimination of immigrant candidates-to-be?

In an effort to gain an insight in the exercise of the passive suffrage by immigrants, I shall now discuss the experiences of immigrants running for office from this point of view.

The experience of the participating immigrants differ on many points, but some patterns are discernable, for all that. Two cases will be presented to illustrate this. Although these are solitary cases, they roughly cover the experiences of the majority of the immigrant candidates.

Both cases concern Netherlands Antilleans, who are member of the PvdA, the Labor Party. Both men are natives of the same Antillean island. About ten years ago they came to the Netherlands. Both are about 30 years old. They are well educated, and at the moment they are employed by public enterprises. Like many other immigrants, they find Dutch politics sober, formal, lacking in spirit, and even dull in comparison with politics of the native country.

#### *Case 1*

A. is living in one of the bigger cities in the urban agglomeration of Western Holland. Some years ago A. joined the Labor Party. He soon appeared to be a type of a stalwart. Now, he is on the committee of the local branche, and he also takes part in a national party-commission on minorities policy. He notices that the party associates lack special knowledge on ethnic minorities, and therefore he want to inform and to guide the party members on this subject. He aspires to the city councillorship. In spite of his lobbying

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his party members nominate him as an ineligible candidate. He thinks he deserves a better position. He has a shrewd suspicion that it is a question of discrimination. This suspicion is strengthened when he canvasses for ethnic votes. Party leaders forbid him to conduct a preference-votes campaign, and their ukase only serves as another indication for their supposed 'racialist' attitudes. A. maintains close relations with a number of radical ethnic organisations supporting his candidacy. He polls many preference-votes, but do not become elected. He determines upon creating a network of loyal immigrants to carry out future campaigns. A. do not expect much of the Labor Party anymore. According to him, the party still pays hardly any attention to ethnic minorities and, moreover, the native party members do not take him seriously when he promotes the ethnic minorities' interests. They consider his opinions radical and his actions precipitately. A. considers himself as a pioneer on behalf of the future black politicians. He is convinced that immigrants cope with discrimination and that they have to work twice as much to achieve prominent positions in the party.

### *Case 2*

B. is living in a province town in the heart of Holland. Only recently B. joins the Labor Party. The party members of the local branch are already acquainted with him since he has been pleading the ethnic minorities' case with the Labor Party at several occasions. B's appearance in the party proves to be an 'eye-opener'. It is not until he joins, that the party paid considerable attention to the immigrants living in the town. Like A., B. is busy to inform and to guide the party members on the subject of ethnic minorities. Once an active party member, he is immediately asked to take part in a special commission to support the party section. Within some months he gets a successor-position in the list of candidates.

The party leaders permit him to conduct a preference-votes campaign. B. asks the leaders of ethnic organizations in town to support his candidacy, but they refuse that. According to them, the political parties only put up B. as a candidate to attract more ethnic votes. A party taking serious account of the minorities would have nominated an immigrant in an eligible position. The ethnic leaders suspect the party to misuse ethnic voters as voting-robots. Yet, B. polls many preference-votes, which strengthens his position in the party. In consequence of his candidacy, the party regularly meets immigrants to discuss policy matters.

In all, thanks to the lightning career of B. the ethnic minorities have become more conscious of their political influence and, more than that, they have got involved in local politics.

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From case 1 we can conclude that it does occur that immigrants experience problems in their political careers. Unfortunately, it is hard to determine whether these problems are typical for ethnic minorities, for any party member from whatever origin finds troubles on the way to the top. This is the more true for the higher political positions and also for careers in bigger cities (where the number of candidates is smaller in proportion to the electorate than in smaller towns. Since most ethnic minorities have taken up residence in urban areas in the Western part of the Netherlands, it is likely that immigrant candidates-to-be experience keener competition with native Dutch here). It is quite possible that immigrants perceive these 'usual' troubles wrongly as discrimination. Nevertheless, there are evidences that immigrants are treated shabbily. One immigrant was once tackled upon her typical accent; she was pained by this incident.

Some immigrants propagate the 'ill-treatment' experienced within the party to illustrate the 'racialist' attitude of the party. This may interfere in the party campaign.

Other resign from the party. In one way or another all of them are full of rancour against the party that does not nominate them on the ticket. Besides, they often disagree on the party's stand in politics, particularly on the policy towards ethnic minorities. As a result of this, some try to gain political influence by founding an independent party.

From case 2 we learn that the distance between immigrants and political parties is bridged by the lightning career of an immigrant. The immigrants become aware of their political influence. Now they let their voices more often hear when ethnic minorities' interests are at stake. Thanks to the mediation of the immigrant candidate, they take part in politics.

Besides, the party becomes more aware of its responsibility towards the ethnic voters. Most party members are pleased to have an immigrant in the party. This climate advances the quick nomination of an immigrant candidate. Next to expectations of the political capacities of the immigrant concerned, the party has other reasons for his nomination. The party members hope to make contact with the ethnic communities via the immigrant candidate. Also, it hopes to obtain many ethnic votes. Finally, it considers the immigrant party members as a taken of the solidarity of the party with the ethnic minorities! This consideration appears to be very important. Not seldom, it is the ultimate reason for the immigrants candidacy, which in fact is a deed of *affirmative action*! When once immigrants have established themselves within the party, they certainly will get a higher position on the tickets. The political significance of the quick

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nomination of any immigrant (in whatever position) should not be underestimated.

As a matter of fact, lightning careers of immigrants within political parties consequent on acts of positive discrimination are most likely to appear. At the moment most political parties desire that immigrants will become active party member.

Of course, not every immigrant introduces himself as a member of the ethnic minorities. This is the more true for immigrants living in a small village with a small immigrant population. Usually, they are not treated in a special manner.

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From the foregoing we can conclude that it is not so much the nomination procedure as the very distance between the political parties and the ethnic minorities that hinders the exercise of the passive suffrage of the latter. Anyway, the under-representation of immigrants in politics forces the political parties to give special attention to the ethnic minorities, because the parties promote the (political) participation of the ethnic minorities

On the one hand, the political parties should be anxious to combat the problems that balk the participation of ethnic minorities in Dutch society. Offering equal opportunities to members of ethnic minorities means that their participation in politics is facilitated, too. However, the political parties face a dilemma : they seek the support of immigrants but they do not want to alienate the electorate of native voters. To some immigrants (of certain ethnic organisations) the political parties take much notice of native interests but only little notice of immigrants interests, and consequently, they do not feel inclined to join parties that (according to them) do not bother very much about immigrants.

Until recently, the political parties paid only little attention to the ethnic minorities. Now the question of 'ethnic minorities' has become an 'issue' in the country, among other things in consequence of the quick rise of a racist party, the political parties have been urged to adopt a critical attitude towards racist tendencies, since they do not want to be associated with these 'racists'. And more than ever before they endeavour to advocate the interests of ethnic minorities.

In my opinion, immigrants should be more aware of the current climate inside the parties, and seize the opportunities.