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Summary

In the eighteenth-century Dutch republic, the city of Gouda had voting rights at the Estates of Holland, and was therefore politically important. The regents wielded the political power in the city, holding seats in the *vroedschap* (town council), where decisions were made on how Gouda would vote in the Estates. A consultation mechanism was put in place to ensure that the deputation did not deviate from their instructions. As a result, decision-making could take a long time, but this was accepted as par for the course, even in times of crisis, because the city's autonomy was considered paramount. Like many other cities in Holland, Gouda almost could be called a city-state, though the sovereignty was with the Estates of Holland and though the stadtholder, by his right of appointment, could exert a lot of influence on the composition of the magistrature, i.e. the governing board made up of the sheriff, burgomasters and aldermen. The power to make decisions was not equally divided over the regents of Gouda, moreover, but was in the hands of the burgomasters and former burgomasters (the so-called consulars). It was they who decided which topics were put on the agenda of the city council (*vroedschap*). The deputation to the Estates was always headed by a burgomaster.

Within the city it was the (former) burgomasters who, supported by a professional "pensionaris", held all the actual power. The younger members of the *vroedschap*, who were not consulars, had very little influence. The seniority principle ensured that one day they too could be considered for the better paid offices, granting them power, influence and prestige, but this detracted nothing from the fact that the *vroedschap*, made up of the representatives of the citizens, was of little (or no) account. The municipal government, which was appointed each year, can be characterized as highly oligarchic with the non-consulars having no hold on political decision-making. In 1781 the younger regents in the *vroedschap* tried to bring about a change in this system. This power struggle within the *vroedschap* in Gouda turned out to coincide with the beginning of a larger movement, with an impassioned political fight that was to shake the Republic to its foundations. The immediate cause of this conflict was the outbreak of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784).

The political conflicts of the 1780s affected the entire nation. The negative outcome of the war made clear that the Republic was no longer an important naval power. There was also economic stagnation. Besides, the country had fallen into decay *as a Republic*. Although the stadtholder was theoretically an appointed official, he was in practice a monarch, which was

difficult to reconcile with the idea of a republic based on the primacy of the free citizen. In effect, political power had come into the hands of a few individuals, an elite of “aristocrats” (this word is of Greek origin, meaning “the best”). The members of the middle classes, constituting the “citizens” and the “best” part of the nation in the moral sense, were of no account in this system, which was maintained in Holland by the stadtholder and two hundred or so regent-families. It was becoming clear to many people that the Republic could not continue like this for much. Those who held this view called themselves Patriots. By a continuous appeal to the past, the Patriots stood up for a “constitutional restoration” of the Republic; in the process, they unchained a revolution.

Gouda can be recognized very well in this general outline of the Republic, and can serve in particular as a model of what happened in the Dutch cities, and what went wrong. The fabrication of pipes went into decline and, with it, the economy of the city. The stadtholder’s great influence on the composition of the government displeased the younger regents. The common citizens had no political role, not to mention Protestant dissenters and Catholics. But the system was beginning to shake at its foundations. There was a lot of interest in America, where since 1776 armed militias had been fighting a war of independence. This appealed to republicans.

In Gouda arming the citizens became a priority, with national mobilisation an essential part of the Patriotic programme. The participation of citizens stood for the moral restoration of republican values. This “moral rearmament” was accompanied by practical political actions – for example, petitions – on the part of citizens. In fact, the Free Corps founded in 1785 and, even more so, the Patriotic Society founded in 1785, can be called political institutions: citizens uniting around a common cause.

A further step in this development was taken when these organisations united on a national and provincial level, and drew up common programmes like the “Leyden Scheme” in Holland. This Dutch assembly of Free Corps gradually grew into a nascent parliament, an essential revolutionary organ which was concerned, among other things, with ensuring representation of the small towns and the countryside. Gouda, through its representative Simon van Paddenburg, did its utmost on this point. This subject was politically anathema to the voting cities in the Estates of Holland, for it would affect their power.

The Free Corps of Gouda was involved intensively in these new developments. One of its members, De Lange van Wijngaarden, can be connected closely with the framing of the

“Leyden Scheme”. At any rate, his thoughts and acts in the period 1785-1787 were perfectly in harmony with it. Although he did not himself hold pronounced democratic ideas, he did not stand in their way and seems to have considered them a logical consequence of the republican revival. As an officer of the *Burgerleger* (Civil Army) De Lange must have been informed about the plan to remove some regents in Gouda in August 1787, although no written evidence to that effect has been found. Of course, the lack of evidence could be accidental, but it could also be an indication that the plan was of no decisive importance for De Lange who regarded the increasing influence of the citizens, which was taking more and more the shape of a democratic revolution, as an accidental side-effect of his own policies.

On June 28, 1787, princess Wilhelmina of Prussia, the spouse of the stadtholder, made an attempt to set afloat the political relations that had run aground. She travelled to The Hague in order to address the Estates of Holland, but in Holland she was apprehended by De Lange van Wijngaarden’s Free Corps of Gouda, and detained some time in the headquarters at Goejanverwellesluis.

This apprehension at Goejanverwellesluis was De Lange’s “finest hour”, but at the same time it was the cause of his political downfall a good three months later. His adversaries seized upon the apprehension of the Princess as evidence of the Patriots’ anti-Orangism. Although the princess was never arrested, merely apprehended, and although her apprehension was not intended as a provocation to the Prussians, the incident gave Prussia a just cause for invasion, leading to the end of the Patriotic revolution.

Were the Patriots aiming for revolution? All conditions for it were present, especially in Holland. Militarily, they had the Free Corps at their disposal, and in 1787 two Civil Armies were also in action. The provincial assemblies of Free Corps had evolved into a nascent civil parliament, debating about a constitution. Various programmes were drafted and, with the help of the press, the nation was prepared for the storm. This political press was not only a part, but also an important originator of the revolution. There were some writers from Gouda, although no magazines or periodicals were printed or edited there. Above all, the Patriots had arms at their disposal, the manpower, the organisation and the ideas.

This was revolution. New institutions, which were formed and sustained by social groups demanding political power, were about to remove the old balance of power, if necessary, with violence. For this is the most fascinating feature of the period beginning around the end of April 1787 when Rotterdam and Amsterdam “turned”. In August Delft followed and the Civil

Army prepared itself to take similar action in Gouda if necessary. It seemed just a matter of time before the provincial assembly of Free Corps and Patriotic societies (in fact a state within the state already) would remove the Estates of Holland and seize power. What would be the outcome? A new constitution? Civil war? The scenario is reminiscent of the French Revolution. The Dutch “revolution of the eighteenth century” failed to be implemented in the end. The Prussian invasion prevented it. Nevertheless, the whole process was revolutionary indeed.

The historian C.H.E. de Wit has called the Patriots a “(temporary) monstrous alliance”. He noted only one common cause: the removal of the stadtholder. When this was achieved in 1785, he argued, “the (real) conflict between aristocracy and democracy” started. In my opinion, supported by the case of Gouda, this view is untenable.

First of all it is important to note that the Patriots formed a rather broad and loose coalition, composed of supporters of the state along with more democratically-oriented politicians, citizens with different religious convictions and different social backgrounds, and general malcontents.

Calling them a “political party” in the modern sense of the word is not correct. The composition of the coalition was dynamic and liable to change, and its composition also differed from place to place. Nevertheless, there was much more uniting the Patriots than dividing them.

In order to understand what united them it should never be forgotten why the Patriots appeared in the first place. They wanted to stop the imminent decline of the Republic, to restore its former glory and, if it was necessary to achieve this, to proceed in new and revolutionary ways. So, first of all, the Patriots were reform-minded republicans. Acting in new ways was only a means to an end. From about 1785 onwards, sharp disagreements arose about the path to follow, not about the need for movement itself. So indeed there appeared to be a subject that divided the Patriots, but it concerned the tactics (the means), not the ultimate goal.

In view of this, the concepts “Patriots” and “Orangists” remain very useful in describing the conflict. De Wit’s analysis was based on a dialectical model (i.e. the struggle between aristocracy and democracy) and it was perhaps for this reason that it proved intellectually stimulating. But from a historical-analytic point of view it is too one-sided to render accurately the complex period 1780-1787. Even so, De Wit has the merit of being the first historian to introduce the term “revolution” for this period. As far as my research is

concerned, that term remains valid: it is correct to speak about “the Dutch revolution of the eighteenth century” concerning 1787.

We can, in fact, summarize the year 1787 in *three* words: Radicalization – Revolution – Restoration. Here too Gouda can serve as an example. The third word was not merely suggested, at the expense of the word counter-revolution, by the attractive alliteration. From mid-September 1787 on the Orangist-society did attempt to carry out a counter-revolution. But in March 1788, the stadtholder and the Gouda regents attempted a return to the situation which existed before 1780; no more new-fangled things! As a result, the magistrature in Gouda engaged in a fierce struggle in the streets of the city, lasting until September 1788, with the Orangists who wanted their own revolution. Owing to the presence of the garrison (soldiers sent on request by the stadtholder) the magistrature had a decisive advantage, however, and won the struggle. This meant that a restoration took place in Gouda, not an Orange revolution or counter-revolution.

The Orangist movement in Gouda turned out to be an interesting phenomenon in this research. In the historiographical debates since the 1960s, the term “Dutch revolution of the eighteenth century” has generally been interpreted as the revolution of the Patriots (or, if you like, the democrats). As a result, the Orangist Movement was pushed aside more and more, and described generally in a condescending way: as the lower-classes, the rabble (*grauw*) of society, an unorganized crowd without any political awareness or driven by reactionary thought, manipulated by others to cause terror, and mostly members of the Dutch Reformed Church. In the case of Gouda, these characteristics did not apply for the most part. Citizens from the middle classes figured in large numbers on the membership lists of the Orangist Society. Organization was one of the qualities of the Orangists. Their political programme was not only purely reactionary, but also revolutionary even if it is more difficult to explain this programme, and to understand it in our present time, than the appealing programme of the Patriots. The aims of the Orangists were not merely negative. To be sure they worked militantly for the full destruction of patriotism in Gouda (purification, removal and punishment were key terms and the methods employed involved continuously creating disorder and spreading terror among the population). But there was also a second, more revolutionary element in their thinking, which can be summed up by the term “enlargement”. They aimed to enlarge the social basis of political life: a monarchical role for the Orange dynasty, national unity, a dominant place for the Dutch Reformed Church, the removal of all regents with an anti-stadtholder attitude from government, the silencing of dissidents. Surely

these aims can be characterized as revolutionary, for they stood for a type of society which had never actually existed in that form in the Republic either before or after 1780.

In September 1787 this society suddenly seemed within reach. The Patriots had been destroyed violently, and the Orangist Society appeared to be the new authority in the city, as keeper of the counter-revolution.

After the counter-revolutionary violence of September 1787 the magistrature earnestly desired to restore peace: restoration, not counter-revolution. In Gouda most inspiration came from Metelerkamp, supported by other prominent men like De Meij, Van der Does and Decker. Their adversaries were the convinced Orangists Van der Hoeve and Verrijst, supported by regents like Twent and Wobma. The key issue was the authority of the Orangist Society. Could it put its mark upon the events, or could it be removed as being merely an obstacle to the restoration of peace?

This was the central theme of the fierce political struggle into which Gouda was plunged between September 1787 and September 1788, and for this reason, much attention is paid to it in this book. Once again a revolution had to be put down, on the very place where every revolution has to be decided: in the streets. For the regents did not want those social changes, nor did they want to admit an independent and permanent power in the city, that is, the Orangist Society as a guardian (or watchdog) of the counter-revolution. So the war with the street was waged and won, with the violent suppression of the Orangist revolution. The Restoration triumphed, leaving the Orangist population greatly embittered.

There have been surprisingly few studies of the social background of the Patriots and Orangists and usually they end with some general remarks, for example to the effect that Remonstrants and Catholics can be found predominantly with the Patriots, or that lower-class members of the Dutch Reformed community took the Orangist side. From a scholarly point of view, such generalizations are very unsatisfactory. For this reason I decided to carry out a very thorough and more exact study of the case of Gouda. The facts and data are available now.

With respect to the Patriotic Society the results were not hugely surprising, but general statements can now at least be supported by figures. These show that the more Catholics and Protestant dissenters were represented in the society, the fewer the number of Calvinists. The social middle classes were indeed represented on a large scale. At first sight a large proportion

of less-affluent people could be discerned among the members, but this fact was mitigated by other data: almost every member had a trade or a job and lived in the better streets.

As for the Orangist Society two important elements came to light. Firstly there was their successful strategy of making an appeal to the “silent citizens” of the social middle classes, a large majority of whom could be found in the membership list as can be corroborated by an analysis of professions and addresses. This means that neither the rabble nor the elite of the city formed the mainstay of the society. Secondly: the fact that there must have been members who chose Orangism for purely political reasons; this aspect remains occluded if political choices are reduced to purely social or economic motives, or to statistics.

Gouda’s story from 1795 on is not a very positive one. The economy went into decline. The top layer of the regents left the city. The population decreased. Gouda became an insignificant provincial town, and would remain so far into the nineteenth century.

Seen from that point of view, the 1780s, with 1787 as focus, marked the last important period in Gouda’s history. In the old Republic, cities like Gouda had power. So power had to be conquered right there – in the cities. The theatre of war was “ancient”, and so were the arguments, which mostly had an historical foundation. The means employed however were “modern”, and the results simply revolutionary. That strange mixture of “ancient” and “modern” makes the period complex, but at the same time unique and fascinating.