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# Pride and prejudice

Dutch and German drug policy in  
historical comparative perspective

# (In)famous Dutch approach to drug policy

- Sale of cannabis ('soft drugs') tolerated



- Public health oriented approach to drug use

# This presentation

- 'Dutch approach': history and backgrounds
- Conflicts Holland & Germany regarding drug policy in the 1970s and 1980s
- Lessons from history?

# 1950-1970: repression

- Opium Law 1953: possession of cannabis is a crime
- Between 1961 and 1969, the number of drug arrests in Amsterdam rose from 15 to 451







# Dutch Opium Law – 1976 Revision

- Soft drugs (cannabis) vs. hard drugs (heroin, speed, coke)
- Focus on prosecuting dealers, not users
- Public health = focus of policy







Criminalizing  
drug use  
leads to  
violence &  
corruption

Irene Vorrink, Minister of Health  
(Dutch Socialist Party, PvdA)



Do we really want  
to clip the wings  
of youngsters  
who smoke a  
spliff? No!!

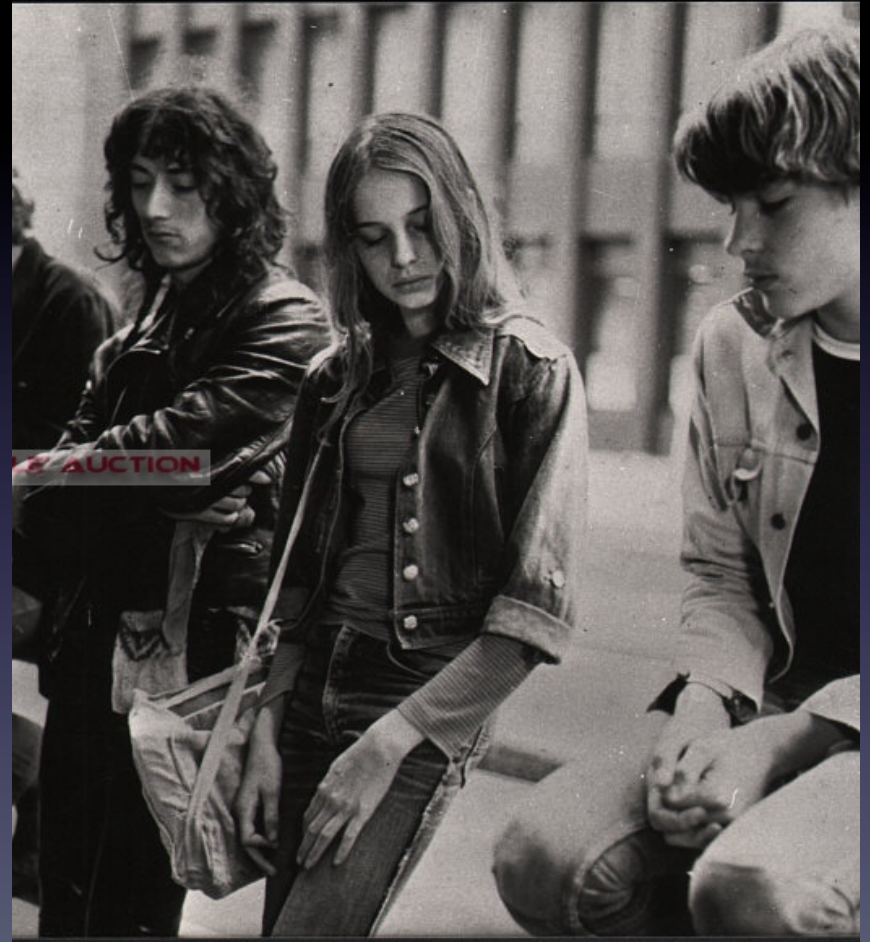


Minister of Justice Dries van Agt  
(Dutch Catholic Party, KVP)



# Germany: our strict neighbour

- Opium Law Revision 1971: repressive
- Forced treatment for heroin addicts
- Cannabis not tolerated
- Methadone maintenance banned until 1992



1976

# HARM DOST MOET VRIJ!



OPROEP AAN IEDEREEN!!!  
"GROTE AKTIE"  
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# HARM DOST MOET VRIJ!



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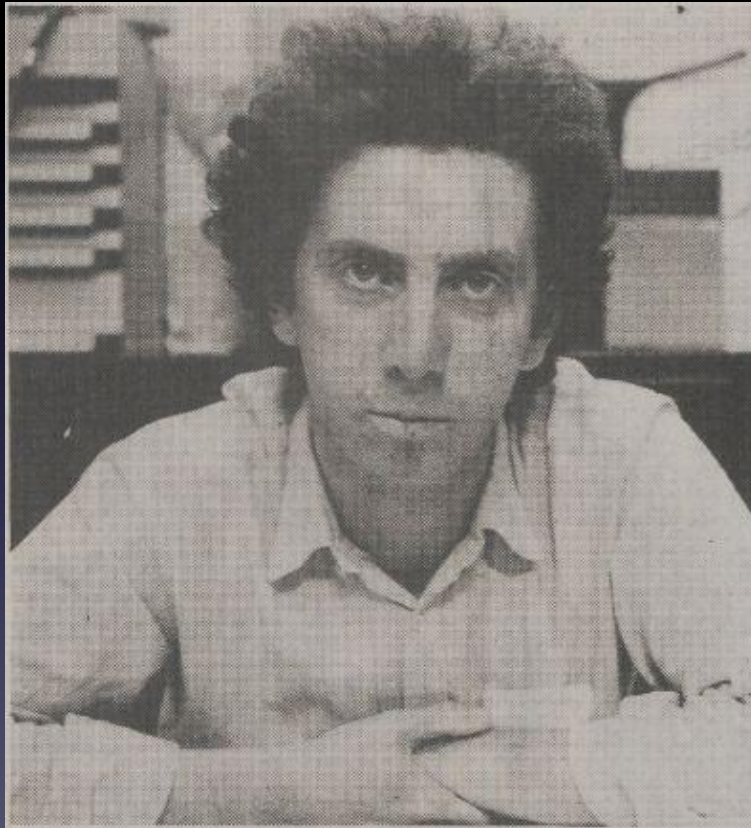
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1977: committee for the 'Release of Harm Dost!'

1980s:

2000-3000 German heroin 'tourists' in Holland





Sweden and West-Germany address the heroin problem in an almost fascist manner

Giel van Brussel:

**Head of the Amsterdam Methadone Maintenance Program 1980s/1990s**



# 1990s: our national pride

- “The Dutch, being sober and pragmatic, opt rather for a realistic and practical approach to the drug problem than for a moralistic or overdramatized one.”
- (Eddy Engelsman, *British Journal of Addiction* 1989)





# Since 2000: conservative turn

- 900 coffeeshops closed (600 remaining)
- XTC testing at dancefloor = stopped
- 2001: treatment under coercion





Once again,  
Holland should  
become a  
country at the  
vanguard of  
drug policy

Vera Bergkamp, liberal Dutch politician (D'66)

22-09-1016

# Lessons from history?

- Postwar Dutch & German drug policies: infused with nationalist sentiments
- National drug policies: an uneasy match with reality
- Drug use (and traffic) = transnational affair
- 21st century: **international turn** in drug policy?