

Conscript Unionism in the Dutch Army*

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In the course of the nineteen-sixties the traditional Dutch conscript attitude of apathy towards the army drastically changed for a number of reasons. In the first place I should like to mention the disappearance, or at least easing of the 'cold war complex'. Further we must consider the importance of a continually advancing 'fundamental democratization' in society. By this term I mean that in numerous social spheres those who are directly involved participate in decisions, that wider and wider strata of society become politically emancipated and better informed and that in many social fields leadership becomes less authoritarian. Acceptance of the authority of higher placed persons becomes less and less obvious, the explicit legitimation of their authority is increasingly demanded and the reasons for this legitimation are more and more exposed to strong criticism. Consequently, along and in continuous conflict with the Government's tendencies towards centralization, technocratization and planning, there is a tendency towards participation, towards demanding decentralization and towards interference with an inflexible long-term planning.

As interpersonal relations in society were gradually organized in the spirit of this 'democratization', the lagging behind of changes in some social enclaves was the more conspicuous.

The boredom, the feeling of having to perform senseless operations and the experience of being subjected to an authoritarian regime without motivation and legitimation, can not be met by giving the conscripts interesting and challenging tasks and jobs. In an over-technological army, those who are at the lower and lowest levels of the organisation are drained of interesting work, which then is placed into the hands of private soldiers and non-commissioned officers who are attached to the army for a longer time than the conscripts.

Finally, it is important that the military force in the course of years has become more and more open. It positively makes less demands on the con-

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script any more than in former times they are given an opportunity to keep in touch with civil life. And especially now, as the level of education and training of conscripts rises, as they have got time in the army to make comparisons with civil society and to assimilate ideas and trends from that society, it is more likely that the military force, as its scope is narrowing, will take over problems from society in addition to its own, rather than that it can channel its own problems to that society.

With the above some factors have been mentioned which in general, lines could explain why in Western armies – even outside the United States – difficulties arose in the course of the sixties. When in the following we shall go into the specific problems that have arisen in the Dutch army, the question to what extent and why the Dutch conflict is different from that in other West-European NATO-countries, is left out. An explanation of these differences would require a thorough knowledge of the military organisations in question, especially of the way in which they treat the conscript and further of all sorts of macro-social factors from trade-union activities up to and including such intangible variables as national character. In the framework of this article such an extensive study cannot be undertaken. Knowingly, I confine myself to the Dutch situation and although the problems that have arisen here, the conflicts and the forms of organisations are unique of course, it seems to me that they still may present a starting-point for the study of the tensions between conscripts and the military force in other West-European armies. Besides, the Dutch material gives us an opportunity to observe closely an intra-organizational conflict and as such, can present interesting material for a case-study.

The VVDM (Union for Conscripts) was founded in 1966, two years after a number of Dutch students had founded an organisation for the promotion of their material interests and intentionally had called it a trade-union.⁸ Like these, the conscript who were involved in the foundation of the VVDM pursued the promotion of material matters only, hoping to further this in the first place by the narrowing of the scope of the military force. First of all, they wanted to withdraw from the influence of the military organisation as a 'total institution' and just like the students mentioned above, they aimed at a closer integration of their own organisation in society. So, both conscripts and students alike refused an exceptional position in society. They wanted to be and to remain common citizens, without taking a relatively privileged position (the students) or a relatively deprived position (the conscripts) in relation to society. So they wanted to distinguish themselves as little as possible from their contemporaries outside the university or the military force, who had to occupy 'normal' posts and to perform 'normal' functions.

A further resemblance between the VVDM and the SVB (Trade Union of

Students) was that, from the start, they did *not* know a denominational segregation. In Holland most unions for the promotion of group interests traditionally are divided into four or even more units. Much of the activities of the average Dutchman take place in a socialist (social-democratic), a liberal, a Protestant (itself subdivided again) and a Roman-Catholic block and even the trade union movement is divided into three groups, which not always present a common front against employers and the Government. For a long time this denominational segregation has exposed the social structure in Holland to very few fundamental conflicts. In many social conflicts of a potentially serious nature, the parties were often bound together again by ties of philosophy or of religion and a fixed juxtaposition of the parties was prevented in this way.⁹ Adversaries in a certain conflict, as for instance Roman-Catholic employers and workers, stood shoulder to shoulder again in another conflict with a new opponent. The very great number of this sort of overlapping conflicts could just succeed in keeping Dutch society together. The higher the social setting in Holland, however, the less influential this segregation becomes and the less it matters. Nevertheless, the non-segregation in the SVB and the VVDM is indicative of a rather high degree of emancipation and independence and of a refusal by these youths of having themselves straight away incorporated in and absorbed by already existing organisations of established reputation.

As has been stated, the VVDM originally aimed exclusively at the promotion of material interests. It did not carry on an ideological discussion about the sense and the usefulness of the military force and of commitments to NATO and in respect to material interests the scope of the military organisation was thought of rather than its pervasiveness.¹⁰ The VVDM wanted to obtain more individual freedom and a little more comfort for the conscripts and, in the first instance, did not think of attacking and changing military rules (military discipline, military law). At this early stage an ideological discussion could not develop probably because the young men who wanted such a discussion and, moreover, could have carried it on at a sophisticated level, mostly had conscientiously objected to military service on pacifist(-religious) grounds and had to serve their term of service in separate units. So they did not come in touch with other conscripts and could not 'contaminate' them. As time went by, however, this situation was to change, implying important consequences for the VVDM and the conflict in the military force.

At first, the defence authorities reacted favourably to the originally very moderate demands of the recruits organised in the VVDM. When the VVDM appeared to be rapidly increasing in number, the top of the military hierarchy could not refuse them a discussion about the improvement on some material issues, since, at higher levels of the military force, it had

agreed to negotiations with interest groups. As an interest group the VVDM was recognized in 1968 and since then negotiations with the defence authorities were carried on monthly in discussions between the central committee and the Minister (a liberal in a Cabinet of the Right). These discussions often led only to an exchange of ideas, however, and it is quite understandable that the defence authorities raised no objections at all to this moderate VVDM. In their perception — and rightly so at the beginning — the VVDM was a group which was absolutely loyal to the defence machinery (the regulations dictated that in case of war all activities should be suspended), a group which wanted only some material demands to be admitted and which was led by conscripts from middle or upper classes, who not seldom had a university education, complete or incomplete. Consequently the defence top believed that it could consider the proposals of the VVDM without objections. Most likely it did hope to make a pretence of progressiveness without having to chance the military force fundamentally. Another of its considerations could have been that by meeting a number of material demands of the VVDM at an early stage, it could prevent sweeping protests from the side of conscripts.

Moreover, meeting the demands of the VVDM had been made easier by the fact that in the course of the sixties the defence top itself had already left the idea of constructing a normative organisation. In the West, the ideologization of the military man — officer as well as private soldier — in the West has never counted many protagonists and during the sixties, as a result of the thaw in the cold war, it was more unthinkable than ever. Instead, the defence authorities wanted to lend to the military force the standing of an attractive organisation offering chances of promotion, interesting work and a good salary. They wanted to build up a dynamic organisation, which by offering a pleasant atmosphere, group solidarity and technical jobs, would be able to compete without difficulty with other undertakings and organisations on the labour market. So, instead of appealing, in accordance with tradition, to normative compliance, they correctly realized that in modern Western society an appeal to utilitarian and social-normative compliance opened perspectives with regard to personnel policy, even for the military force. So, for the time being, the top and the inmates (the conscripts) in the military force knew a certain compliance congruence. Both saw the military force in a utilitarian and social-normative perspective and the acceptance of the VVMD by the defence top certainly fitted in with the framework of this congruence.⁴

In February 1969 this co-operation of top and basis found expression in the setting up of so-called Contact-Committees in the barracks. These were intended to enable the conscripts to discuss their wishes with their commanders in the barracks, the conscripts in any case, assuming that these

discussions would lead to real changes. Only now, however, as the defence top had called in the middle cadres, it became evident to what extent the latter had a negative attitude towards the concessions that, behind their backs, had been made to the conscripts. Much less than the top of the military structure the middle cadres were orientated to the social setting of the military organization and they were to a lesser degree than the top inclined to take into account societal reactions to all sorts of decrees. Also, more than the top, they were stuck in the mentality of the cold war period and accordingly they preferred to conceive of the military force as a normative organisation. For this reason they did not shrink from holding strictly to discipline and even from using sanctions, should the occasion arise, against members of the organisation who did not agree to this form of compliance – for the sake of these members themselves and for the sake of society, which had to be protected against communism. More given to the image of the hero than to that of the manager, those belonging to the military middle cadres were less than the top prepared to introduce reforms. As the military profession went through hard times, they feared an erosion of their command, of discipline and of defensive power. Further they were of the opinion that the defence top had not taken into account their problems which arose from being in direct contact with both the conscripts and – in case of war – the enemy. The defence top, however, had met the utilitarian demands of the VVDM in order to be able to stifle further going protests and to make the strength of this union subordinate to the military force.

Much as utilitarian and social-normative compliance is considered the ideal for the military force, instead of purely normative compliance, the VVDM can nevertheless be compared with the absorption of protests led by purely normative-charismatic people, into partly bureaucratic, partly normative-charismatic organisations.⁵ By forming an enclave where the 'rebels' are allowed to practice experimentally their ideas, the top of the organisation gives itself many possibilities. If the experiment falls through, the rebels can be silenced, but if it succeeds the whole organisation can profit by it. Moreover, this form of absorption gives the top an opportunity of appearing progressive and broad-minded without being obliged to exert itself for that purpose. The forming of the experimenting enclave, just like in the VVDM, further takes place by means of direct contacts between the top and the inmates, by-passing the middle cadres. As the inmates expect the middle cadres to answer to their proposals in the negative – the middle cadres regarding the reforms as an attack on their management and the proposals as an undermining of their position – they try to directly contact the top. Also, as the activities of the enclave are further developing, the resistance of the middle cadres remains and so, in this respect, too, repressive toleration towards the VVDM conforms to the encapsulation of the protest led by charismatic people, in more purely normative organisations.

In the case of the VVDM the opposition of the middle cadres appeared from the fact that in course of time the Contact-Committees were reduced

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to no more than a kind of ineffective 'discussion clubs'.⁶ Hence the conscripts were of course under the impression that they were manipulated. They believed that the commanders in the barracks used the committees to give the conscripts an opportunity of expressing their frustrations, without having any intent whatsoever to really do something about their problems. The aversive attitude of the middle cadres was probably also connected with the fact that the VVDM was now gradually bringing the discussions round to the pervasiveness, to the measure in which life in the organisation was regulated by formal norms.⁷ Changes in this field would affect the authority of the middle cadres much stronger than the demands made by the VVDM at the very beginning and, consequently, objections to these changes can be understood. The VVDM, in its turn, thought the Contact-Committees ineffective and more and more confrontations between members of the VVDM and the middle cadres occurred in the barracks. Moreover, as a result of these conflicts, the importance of the contacts that the VVDM maintained with the defence top, was pushed into the background. In the military forces a vacuum developed, resulting from the fact that the inmates no longer reacted to the moves towards compliance of the top and because the ultimate means of compliance, physical coercion, for a number of reasons could no longer be fully applied.

Consequently, since the failure of the Contact-Committees the VVDM began to carry on campaigns of a different kind. To fight its direct adversary the middle cadres, it took up a weapon, that had already been thoroughly tested by underdogs in Holland. It tried to ridicule its adversary in order to undermine the pretensions to legitimacy of the latter. Round about 1966 this strategy had so successfully been developed by the group of 'Provo's' in Amsterdam during many street campaigns against the police, that it even owed its name to this form of resistance. For it provoked the policeman in such a way that they lost control of themselves, took much more violent action than was warranted by the character of the street campaigns and so laid themselves open to criticism, this time from much broader groups in society.⁸ The same tactics were now used by the VVDM against the military middle cadres. All sorts of military idiosyncracies, with which the middle cadres identified strongly, from which they partly derived their self-esteem and which, accordingly, they considered more or less sacred practices, were made the target of campaigns by members of the VVDM. They imitated these idiosyncracies and made a butt of them in every possible way to show that the military force could function without them. As little as, at the time of the Provos the policeman had been able to give an answer to these 'guerilla'-tactics, mentally or with regard to organisation, did the members of the middle cadres now succeed in finding adequate counter-moves. They, too, made themselves ridiculous by reacting to these activi-

ties of the VVDM with negative sanctions that were far too severe, whereupon indignation at these disproportional punishments was widely evoked. Moreover, in this way they gave the conscripts an opportunity to call attention to the fact that the military force had been unmasked and had shown its real image as an organisation of coercion.

With respect to its more external activities, the VVDM, after its disappointment with the failure of the Contact-Committees, directed its attention less and less to the defence top.⁹ In the latter it was disappointed, too, and from now it had decided to lend no longer priority to its role as a partner in discussions in intermediary organs, but to operate more as a pressure group. It now hoped to attain its objects by entering into contact with Members of Parliament and with the Press and by a coordination of campaigns with all sorts of protest groups outside the army.¹⁰ The use of Provo-tactics, however, had already indicated this strategical change of course. For these tactics, too, were leveled at their effect upon the public at large and had been intended to mobilize public opinion for the attaining of the internal-organizational objects of the VVDM. The intermediary organs that had been founded by the defence top in 1970 and 1971 could not retrieve the situation. The underlying Human Relations-approach assumed that the inmates had accepted the idea of the top of a social-normative, at the utmost utilitarian compliance, but this assumption no longer fitted the facts. The conscripts thought no longer in terms of harmony, but in terms of conflicting interests. As a result of the disappointments it had experienced, the VVDM more and more politicized, its demands went further and further, it sought confrontations — especially with the middle cadres — and more and more it made it its task to elevate the political conscience of the conscripts. It started to probe now into all sorts of macro-social, political and economic problems — as far as it believed to be concerned with these through the term of military service — and in this framework it even opened discussions on the NATO-alliance.

This politicizing and its attendant escalation of the conflict must indeed partly be explained from the fact that the members of the VVDM were disappointed by the slow rate at which the top and the middle cadres complied with their requests. Besides, circumstances must be mentioned however, which until then had not yet played a role in the VVDM, in the military force and in the conflict. Earlier in this report it has been stated that 'contamination' of the conscripts had been prevented by the isolation of conscientious objectors, who were orientated to pacifism. These often radical-socialist and pacifist young men now decided, however, to refuse military service no longer, but to propagate their radical ideas among the other conscripts. They founded their organisation, the BVD (Union for Conscripts) and, moreover, joined the VVDM individually. Especially at

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the middle level in the VVDM they succeeded in building up fairly strong positions and they had a hand in many hard campaigns that were carried on by the VVDM. Since, however, the central committee of the VVDM continued to advocate a more moderate approach in order, among other things, to keep open opportunities of negotiating with the defence top and to guarantee the retention of facilities that had been granted by the top, tensions arose in the VVDM. The members of the BVD in the VVDM reproached the latter with being helpful, indeed, to the attaining of a number of objects, but ultimately playing into the hands of the army-top. They blamed the VVDM for keeping too narrowly orientated to material interests only and for persisting in a short-term vision and not putting the questions that are really important. Further, they reproached the top of the VVDM with being less radical already than its rear and with even sometimes dissociating itself, for tactical reasons, from spontaneous campaigns by conscripts in the barracks.¹¹

The foundation of the BVVDM (Union for Volunteers and Conscripts) must be seen as a direct consequence of this development, since this union can be considered a counter-move from the side of the military establishment. The initiative in founding the BVVDM came from the lower military middle cadres — lieutenants, sergeants, but also some conscripts — which also form the Union's board at the moment. Whether, and to what extent the defence top has been involved in or has produced a stimulating effect on the foundation of the BVVDM is very difficult to decide. So much is certain that many high-placed military men — off duty in this case — have agreed to sitting in a recommending committee.¹² With regard to the defence top it must be stated, however, that it does live up to a relatively impartial policy towards the VVDM and this group from the middle cadres alike. For this reason the strength of the BVVDM is difficult to judge, the more so as its membership includes also a very large number of civilians (from a union of a rather Right-wing signature).

For the time being, little activity from the BVVDM can be reported. From its programme only appears that it wants to integrate the military forces and society more strongly, while it hopes to prevent troubles with conscripts by a strengthening of parental authority. Accordingly, the Right-wing association which it has joined, devotes itself to this cause, while the BVVDM further appears to be worried about the demoralization among the youth (sex and drugs) and the alleged preference of the latter of anarchist and extreme-socialist trends. The VVDM is of the opinion that it has no cause to fear the BVVDM as a competitor — which seems a reasonable assessment — but is concerned at the deterioration of atmosphere the BVVDM could bring about in the military force by its rather simplified accounts. On the other hand the BVVDM reproaches the VVDM with not having adhered

to its original intention of being a union for the promotion of material interests — to which nobody could have objections — and with allowing itself to be exploited for political purposes both by the BVD and by a number of parliamentary groups. Further it blames the VVDM for not complying with the rules of parliamentary democracy while carrying on its direct campaigns and for undermining the resilience of society and the military forces. All in all the conclusions seems justifiable to me that the BVVVDM, small and of little influence as it may be, at least derives a certain significance from the fact that it is a pawn in the polarization that is gradually developing in the Dutch military force.

Besides laying stress on more political demands and, in addition to that, bringing the discussion round to the military force as such, the VVDM continued to agitate for the improvement of material points, as well.

It asked for participation in decisions in all those fields in the military force in which conscripts were directly involved and on which they were more or less competent to judge. Their material demands further covered a rather large field and referred to (1) better food; (2) the reform of criminal and disciplinary law; (3) alleviation of the regulation of leaves in weekends; (4) revision of guard, duties; (5) better lodging; (6) reconsideration of work- and resting-times; (7) rise in salary; and finally the abolition of all sorts of differences still existing between the various army-units.¹³ To be able to study the possibility of realizing these demands, the VVDM pleaded the foundation of a test-battalion — preferably in the sector that is in state of preparedness — to make room for experiments. Up till now, however, the army-administration — with the support of the middle cadres — has declined such a test-battalion and, apparently, has made the discussion about the introduction of further material improvements conditional on a more compliant attitude of the VVDM on political issues. In this manner a process of bargaining is getting under way, in which, for the time being, the first step by the defence top is to go back on a number of privileges that have been obtained by the conscripts. The argumentation refers to concern for the hygiene of the soldiers e.g. long hair), but the VVDM, not unjustly, notices in this a manoeuvre meant to gather concessions from the VVDM in the domain of politics and, moreover, a reaction to pressure from abroad. For, to the extent as that Germany — where Dutch and German soldiers train together — the conscripts have achieved less than their Dutch colleagues on material issues, the German army-administration apparently is afraid that feelings of relative deprivation may arise among their recruits. Following this 'hard policy', however, the Government goes that far that in Parliament protests are made and voices are heard demanding that this policy be mitigated and the military law, for instance, be revised.

The VVDM has been in existence for 6 years and has considerably grown

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during that period. While the percentage of conscripts on the total number of soldiers in the military force amounts to the following figures: Army about 60 per cent, Air-Force about 30 per cent and Navy about 18 per cent.¹⁴ The VVDM takes the following parts from these conscripts to its account: Army about 60 per cent, Air-Force about 45 per cent and Navy about 18 per cent.¹⁵ An explanation for the fact that conscripts in the Air-Force and in the Navy are less organized, could be, as far as the Air-Force is concerned, that in this technologized unit the military 'frill' of barrack-life, so much detested by the conscripts, is less needed. In any case as the Air-Force has always assumed a more progressive and tolerant attitude towards its staff than the Army, this slightly lessened the need for campaigns by the VVDM. The lower percentage of organization in the Navy strikes us as strange, if we realize that this service it said to be the most conservative and, according to the VVDM, allows the union the smallest margin. This last phenomenon could be explained by the 'role-distance mechanism'.¹⁶ The continuous close companionship between officers and sailors in the private and secluded world of the ship evokes a reaction from the side of the officers to keep aloof again symbolically by means of a formal and rank-conscious attitude. On the other hand, in the Navy a very large number of volunteers is found, who, moreover, better than in the Army and in the Air-Force, can be kept isolated from civil life. So the process of socialization in the Navy as a 'total institution' can reach a greater intensity. In addition, the rule obtains in the Navy that conscripts are allowed to join the unions that promote the interests of regular military men.

However, as a result of this rapid growth of the VVDM, problems have arisen which will sound familiar to investigators of trade unions. Here the danger of too large a social distance between the top and the mass of the members must be pointed out and further the fact that among its own adherents various wings have arisen with divergent views on the Union's end and means.¹⁷ I have already pointed out that the middle cadres in the VVDM seem to be the most 'ideologized'. Further these cadres are inclined to pay least attention to contacts with the defence top, Government, Parliament, etc. and to devote more attention to somewhat harder campaigns at the local level of the barracks. This has put the central committee of the VVDM into an awkward position. On the one hand it presumes that the main body of its members and of the conscripts are only interested in achieving improvements on material issues and it is, more than its own middle cadres, conscious of the importance of good contacts with all sorts of external bodies. On the other hand it cannot but see advantages in a certain decentralization and in the stimulation of autonomous, local campaigns. For each reform that is acquired locally, creates a precedent that in negotiations with

the defence top can be handled as an instrument for the consolidation of its own position and for the attainment of more distant goals. The reproach leveled at the general committee, for incrementalism and a vision that is too narrowly orientated to material and short-term problems is unjust in so far as it is not amazing (considering the short period during which they are in the army) that the majority of conscripts are interested in material improvements only. Since each draft of recruits is soon relieved by the next, which – no matter how many material improvements have been acquired by its predecessor – will still experience feelings of relative deprivation in this respect, a short-term vision is continuously getting strong impulses.

The conscripts stay in the army for too short a time and for a still shorter time in the VVDM to be in a position to start here a process of oligarchisation.¹⁸ On the contrary, just the reverse danger is imminent. As a result of the rapid change of members of the central committee – some of whom, moreover, quite often find themselves in prison – a lack of managerial resolution and experience threatens. Accordingly, to keep off this danger, the central committee has made it a rule that during the first months of its sitting-session it is still supported by some members of the retired board. Not only at the top, however, is the VVDM confronted with the danger of losing resolution by a too rapid change of staff. Being confronted with an opponent who has the advantage of continuity at his side, the VVDM, indeed, up to the mark. It must always be able to refute the argument of its opponent who has the advantage of continuity at his side, the VVDM, indeed, must pay special attention to keeping its own ranks and its own motivation up to the mark. It always must be able to refute the argument of its opponent that it does not represent the mass of the conscripts and, consequently, has no right to speak. So the fact that the VVDM, in spite of much opposition from the authorities, again and again succeeds in supplying itself, with new members must be seen as a great achievement in respect to organization. In addition to intensive canvassing-campaigns – well-organized by the middle cadres of the VVDM each time a new draft of conscripts enters the barracks- the spontaneous canvassing-campaigns proceeding from conscripts who have been demobilized must be mentioned as well. Further it is important, of course, that the new conscripts know the VVDM before entering barracks already through its campaigns on which the press comments.

From this point of view, we must even come to the conclusion that the VVDM is probably in no small measure relieved of its canvassing efforts by the military hierarchy. The sharper the latter reacts to the VVDM-campaigns, the better the VVDM can point at the character of coercion that the military force has to the conscripts and at the lack of legitimacy of the military hierarchy. Besides, the more publicity is given to the VVDM and

the better the new recruits are informed already on the conflict in the military force. So a dialectic process is developing, to which an end can only be put by the military hierarchy itself.

In the course of the sixties the military organization has changed from a closed system into a more open one. A strong exposure external to social forces, led to an inequality and dissilarity, of compliance in so far as the top, the middle cadres and the basis developed divergent views on the ends and the structure of the armed forces. The efficiency, the use, and in addition to that, also the legitimacy of the internal structure of this organisation were brought up for discussion by the inmates, but subsequently, questions on the external functions of the military force inevitably arose. In the course of this conflict the conscripts showed the 'punishment centered' nature of the bureaucratization in the armed forces and at the same time pursued a bureaucratization 'from the bottom'. For the initiative to formalization can also emanate from the lower participants, who want to make the conduct of their superiors predictable by binding it to rules. The arbitrariness and the discretion of especially the military middle cadres were indeed curtailed by the campaigns of the VVDM. The power of the middle cadres has not yet disappeared of course, but they have lost influence in so far as their conduct can be predicted now while the conscripts better than formerly know where they stand.

The tactics of provocation and ridiculing of the VVDM appeared very suited to bring forth hasty and ungovernable actions from the side of the military hierarchy. This underlines once more the value of David Mechanic's observations on 'The Power of Lower Participants'.¹⁹ Mechanic points to the fact that in an organisation, the inmates can obtain influence over their superiors by making themselves in some way indispensable to them. The VVDM certainly pursues this line of action. After first having disturbed 'law and order', it can point out now that its kind attitude and co-operative disposition are indispensable to the restoration of the normal situation in the armed forces. If, in other words, the members of the military middle cadres want to save troubles with the conscripts, they will have to try and come to terms with the VVDM.

Altogether, we must not exaggerate the seriousness of the conflict between the VVDM and the military hierarchy. The time for an averse or even panic-stricken attitude towards conflicts in organisations is at an end, though the question to what extent conflicts in various kinds of organisations can be tolerated, remains unanswered and the answer will depend on the situation. Democratization and participation in decision-making are questions of graduation and a categorical answer cannot be given neither to the question how much participation is justified (and when), nor to the question for which part military symbols and conduct are functional to the preservation of the

spirit of the corps and to the organizational and professional identity, and for which part they give evidence of ritualism and uncertainty. In a period in which both society and the technics of weapons are subject to rapid changes, and in which comparable data on which a point of view can firmly rest are simply lacking, one must proceed with caution when formulating a starting-point for a policy. At any rate the proceedings of the VVDM will give a strong stimulus to the seeking of alternatives to and variants of the conscript army.

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- 6 Kalishoek; S. F. Breuer, De Vereniging voor Dienstplichtige Militairen: het kritische jaar 1971, in: *Streven*, 25, 1971, blz. 283-296.
- 7 The VVDM produced several reports on military law and discipline. These reports, as all VVDM-papers, stand out by their exceptionally high 'professional' quality and their thoroughness of investigation.
- 8 J. A. A. van Doorn, Provocatie en Conflict; de Amsterdamse Provo-Affaire opnieuw bezien, in: A. van Braam (ed.), *Actuele Sociologie*. Assen 1970.
- 9 Breuer.
- 10 Of course these contacts had not been entirely neglected before this time.
- 11 Numerous articles in Dutch newspapers are concerned with these problems, see for instance B. Steinmetz, Barsten bedreigen VVDM, in: *de Volkskrant*, may 20th 1972. Members of the Central Committee of the VVDM claim however that, quite apart from the activities of the BVD, they were already by themselves steering towards a more radical course.
- 12 See the program of the BVVDM, Amersfoort 1971.
- 13 All these problems were investigated by the VVDM and a number of papers were written on these subjects.
- 14 *Dienstvervulling naar Keuze*, Den Haag 1972; rapport uitgebracht aan de Commissie van Civiele en Militaire Deskundigen tot Onderzoek van de Nederlandse Defensie.
- 15 Numbers obtained from the VVDM- Chairman, january 1973.
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