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EMIGRATION AND THE ECONOMY OF THE NETHERLANDS

by

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Wageningen

## EMIGRATION AND THE ECONOMY OF THE NETHERLANDS

Since World War II relatively important overseas migration has been one of the remarkable features of social life in the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> As Figure I shows, the total number of emigrants and the emigration surplus - Indonesia and the Dutch overseas territories excluded - in several years after the war were much higher than ever since 1865.<sup>2</sup> If we divide international migration to and from the Netherlands - Indonesia and the overseas territories excluded again - during the period since the war into migration to and from European countries and migration to and from other countries (Figure II) we see that the relatively high emigration surplus has little to do with intra-European migration.<sup>3</sup> After some years of rather high migration from and to European countries, which can be considered as a demographic readjustment to post-war conditions, intra-European migration sank

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<sup>1</sup> There is, of course, an extensive literature in the Dutch language on post-war emigration from the Netherlands, but as a result of the activities of the Research Group for European Migration Problems (R.E.M.P.), some of the best studies are published in English. We mention: G. Beijer and J.J. Oudegeest, "Some aspects of migration problems in the Netherlands," Publication No. 3, R.E.M.P., The Hague, 1952; William Petersen, "Some factors influencing post-war emigration from the Netherlands", Publication No. 6, R.E.M.P., The Hague, 1952; Willem Steigenga, "Industrialization/Emigration, the consequences of the demographic development in the Netherlands", Publication No.10, R.E.M.P., 1955.

An important study is William Petersen's doctorate thesis: "Holland, Canada and International Migration", which is in the press and at the author's disposal in manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> The high figures for emigration during World War II (see Figure I) are not reliable, because conditions during the German occupation made it impossible to make the normal differentiation between those who left the Dutch municipalities for an unknown destination and those who left to migrate to a foreign country. Besides, emigration, as far as it took place, was for the greater part, of course, not normal migration.

<sup>3</sup> See as regards intra-European migration from the Netherlands: E.W. Hofstee, "De functie van de internationale migratie" (The function of international migration), Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geographie, 1949, pp.10-22; T. van den Brink, "Les Pays-Bas et la migration intra-européenne"; Études européennes de population, pp.251-265, Paris, 1954; S.J. Groenman et E.W. Hofstee, "Chances de succès d'une émigration hollandaise à l'intérieur de l'Europe", Études européennes de population, Paris, 1954, pp. 266-276

to a low level. As a whole the years 1946-1954, as to intra-European migration, showed an immigration surplus. Overseas migration on the other hand, still at a low level in the first years after the war, shows a rapid increase till it comes to a peak in 1952. In the following years it shows some decline, but still remains on a relatively high level. Overseas migration permanently shows an important emigration surplus.

In the Netherlands the people and the Government are very much interested in this post-war overseas migration. In thousands of families the possibilities of migration are discussed. In newspapers and periodicals numerous articles on migration are published. The Government stimulates migration as much as possible. It charters ships for transport of migrants, it subsidizes the transport of emigrants to the overseas countries, it organizes migration by means of a special government agency, it employs special migration officers in the most important immigration countries, it tries to make migration arrangements with all countries which offer some possibility for Dutch migrants and it gives information to would-be migrants by means of the employment offices. Farmers' unions and other private organizations propagate migration, churches occupy themselves seriously with the problems of migration, scientists study the possibilities and the consequences of migration, almost every one and everything in the Netherlands is in some way touched by these activities in the field of migration.

For many, Dutchmen as well as foreigners, who were interested in this post-war migration, the phenomenon seemed easy to explain. Thinking of the high density of population and the high surplus of births in the Netherlands and of its limited natural resources, they saw it as a clear case of emigration as a result of an over-population in the economic sense. In the following pages we hope to show that this view is a far too simple one. It is by no means so easy to explain this

emigration, on the contrary it is very remarkable from an historical as well as from a demographic and economic point of view.

Historically the Netherlands never were a real emigration country. Figure I shows that before World War I the Netherlands normally had an emigration surplus, but only a very small one. Seldom was it higher than 5,000 - 10,000 a year. Between the two wars there was mostly an immigration surplus. During the period from 1865 to 1940 as a whole, emigration was practically counterbalanced by immigration, so that until World War II the influence of migration upon the total number of the population of the Netherlands was almost nil. It is a pity that Dutch migration statistics before World War II do not permit one to divide the emigrants according to the country of destination, but probably the majority - if we again exclude Indonesia and the Dutch overseas territories - went to European countries. In 1930 in North and South America, South Africa and Australia together there lived about 160,000 people born in the Netherlands, and at the same time in Europe outside the Netherlands there lived about 178,000 people of Dutch nationality.<sup>4</sup> Probably in Europe there was a further unknown number of people born in the Netherlands who had changed their nationality. Special statistics of those who left the Netherlands for permanent settlement in overseas countries - i.e. migrants in the more restricted sense - show that their number was seldom higher than a few thousand a year. These special statistics are not very reliable and the number may have been somewhat higher, but there is no doubt that the contribution of the Netherlands to the white population of overseas territories prior to World War II was a very modest one, if we compare it for example with the contributions of Great Britain, Sweden, Germany, etc.

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<sup>4</sup> Dudley Kirk, "Europe's Population in the Inter-war Years", 1947, Appendix III, tables 3 and 4.

From the demographic point of view the development of the migration movement after World War II was remarkable because in this period the young people appearing for the first time on the labour market were born in the beginning of the thirties, when the crude birth rate and the surplus of births were at a lower level than ever before or after, so that the supply of labour after the war was certainly not extraordinarily abundant.

From the economic point of view the development of this migration was rather surprising, because in the post-war period the demand for labour in the Netherlands was higher than it had been for decades. Apart from a light recession in 1951 and 1952, the ten years since the liberation have been a period of full employment, which culminated in 1954 and 1955 in a definite shortage of labour.

After the war many believed that the rupture of the formerly existing political ties with Indonesia would have serious direct and indirect influences on economic development in the Netherlands. Figure III shows one aspect of the direct influences; in the post-war period, there was an important immigration surplus from Indonesia because many who had been waiting there returned to the Netherlands. But neither the direct nor the indirect consequences of the changes in the relations between the two countries, as is shown by the development of economic life in the Netherlands in general and by the development of employment in particular, meant an insuperable drawback.

There is no direct relation between the immigration from Indonesia and the increase of emigration to other overseas countries from the Netherlands; only relatively few of those who returned from Indonesia emigrated afterwards.

Perhaps the objection will be made that in the foregoing only the short-term economic development was discussed and that probably the long-term development will show a discrepancy between the increase of the population and the development

of employment, so that those who migrate now rightly anticipate a situation to be expected in the near future.

The problem of the long-term economic development in relation to emigration was discussed at length in the Netherlands during recent years. As was mentioned above, the Netherlands Government displays great activity in the field of emigration. In the beginning this activity was hardly more than an expression of the general feeling in the Netherlands that migration was necessary, but afterwards the Government tried to base its migration policy on an insight into its meaning for future economic conditions in the Netherlands. Consequently many studies were made of emigration from this point of view, and their results served as a basis for the motivation of the government's policy. It must be said that the economic motivation of the Government's policy never has been very convincing and now, by the development of the economy of the Netherlands, it has become practically obsolete.

In the first years after the war shortage of capital was stressed and calculations were made to show that every emigrant meant the saving of an important investment. It is clear now that this was only a short-term motive and one not suited as a starting-point for a long-term emigration policy. Shortage of capital was only a temporary post-war phenomenon and now-a-day's capital is again abundant in the Netherlands.

Later the attention of the Government shifted to the long-term problems of the balance of payments. It was pointed out that the Dutch economy was already heavily dependent on international trade and that the natural increase in the population, combined with the shortage of natural resources in the Netherlands, would mean - assuming that a fair standard of living and full employment had to be maintained - that imports and exports had to develop to such an extent that

it would be virtually impossible to reach that goal. It is, of course, far beyond the scope of this paper - supposing that the author would be qualified to do so - to discuss here at full length the problems of the Dutch balance of payment. Figure IV and Table 1 give a picture of the relative importance of imports and exports in the economy of the Netherlands. They certainly show a high degree of dependence on international trade. But does this mean that the economic problems of the Netherlands in the future can be solved only if an important part of the natural increase of the population emigrates, because a further expansion of the Dutch foreign trade, as a consequence of this increase, will soon bring it near certain limits which cannot be surpassed? Figure IV shows that foreign trade as a percentage of the national income is not very much higher now than it was during boom periods in the twenties, notwithstanding the fact that the population from 1920 to 1955 increased from 6,900,000 to 10,000,000. These figures are not a definite refutation of the opinion mentioned above, of course, but they show that a relatively enormous increase of population, combined with rapid industrialization, can take place without seriously disturbing the traditional ratio between national income and foreign trade.

The econometric approach of Isaac and van den Beld<sup>5</sup> to the problem of the desirable number of emigrants from the Netherlands, from the point of view of the economic development of this country, has already shown that a relatively

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<sup>5</sup> Julius Isaac and C.A. van den Beld, "The effect of European migration on the economy of sending and receiving countries", Report by the Research Group for European Migration Problems, The Hague, 1953; Julius Isaac, "Conditions influencing in selected European countries needs and possibilities of emigration", Paper No. 32, World Population Conference, Rome, 1954. According to their conclusions, an increase of one per cent in the expected volume of exports from the Netherlands leads to a reduction of the desirable volume of emigration by 5,000 persons.

unimportant change in the volume of international trade will lead to a relatively important change in this desirable number of emigrants. This means that a slightly more optimistic view on the possibilities of development of exports from the Netherlands in the future would lead to the conclusion that there is no necessity for emigration, which, according to the estimates of Isaac and van den Beld, had to have a volume of about 30,000 to 45,000. The development of Dutch foreign trade during the last years justifies such a more optimistic view and so at present long-term calculations hardly show any need for emigration.

Thus neither the conditions in the post-war period nor the long-term expectations as to the economic development of the Netherlands seem to give an economic basis for Dutch overseas migration and the emigration policy of the government.

Is perhaps this post-war migration nothing but a very temporary phenomenon, caused by an abnormal socio-psychological situation in which the war left the Dutch people? And are the activities of the Dutch government nothing but an over-hasty reaction to these attitudes towards emigration after the war? And are these activities of the government at the moment perhaps already like a machine which, once put in action, cannot be stopped, because it has already become an end in itself?

It cannot be denied that there are facts which seem to support this assumption. In many respects the conditions in the first post-war years created a socio-psychological climate which favoured emigration. We mention the following points:

- a) After the war there was a strong feeling in the Netherlands, like perhaps that in other European countries, that it was impossible to make a normal society again out of the immense chaos in which the war had left Western Europe;



- b) This feeling of facing a hopeless situation was strengthened in the Netherlands by the political events in Indonesia, which meant the separation of the Netherlands from a territory which formerly played such an important role in the economic and social life of this country;
- c) The war and the German occupation and in another way already the economic depression in the thirties, caused in the Netherlands strong feelings of frustration and an almost physical feeling of oppression. Many after the war felt a need of expansion and of more space, physically and mentally;
- d) For the plundered, starved and impoverished Netherlands, the prosperity in the overseas countries of immigration was very attractive;
- e) For many the fear of a new war and of a possible Russian occupation made emigration more attractive;
- f) Intensive and very friendly relations with the Canadian soldiers who liberated the Netherlands and remained in the country for some time after the war created strong ties between the Netherlands and Canada, which were afterwards maintained by the "war-brides" and which played a very important role in the development of emigration to Canada;
- g) Partly because of the very high birth-rates in the Netherlands after the war, which caused many controversies in newspapers and periodicals about the demographic situation in the Netherlands, the Dutch people have become much more conscious of population problems than ever before and even the man in the street has become convinced that the Netherlands are "over populated".

There is no doubt that all the factors mentioned above had an important influence on the initial development of emigration after the war. Without this

influence there would perhaps not have been a beginning of a migration of any importance. Afterwards the success of those who went first stimulated others, while in the meantime the activities of the Government to stimulate and to facilitate migration became of increasing importance.

The recession in 1951 and 1952 influenced the propensity to migrate and hence in 1952, the peak year, 55,368 people migrated to overseas countries (see Figure II). But gradually the socio-psychological factors which inaugurated and stimulated post-war migration have disappeared. It is evident now that the Netherlands can prosper again in post-war Europe, even without Indonesia. People take the cold war more or less for granted and the feeling of oppression has disappeared.

Is it not to be expected that the post-war emigration wave from the Netherlands will come to an end within a short time? Is not the decrease of the number of emigrants since 1952 the beginning of the end? Is it not perhaps the stimulating activity of the Government agencies alone that keeps emigration still going?

After the foregoing it seems logical indeed to predict a rapid end of Dutch overseas migration. But yet probably every one in the Netherlands who has some knowledge of the phenomenon of migration is convinced that overseas migration will go on; in all classes of Dutch society there is still a strong and active interest in emigration. It cannot be denied that government activities in the field of migration have become an important factor in keeping up the present volume of migration, but the Government is not compelling people to leave their country; it is only paving the road for those who are inclined to migrate. When a fear of a serious depression disappeared after 1952, the number of migrants decreased indeed, but after all even in 1954, a year of definite shortage of labour, overseas migration remained on a relatively high level.

What is the reason of this seeming contradiction? We must admit that we are not able to give a clear and complete answer to this question. It is a pity that a thorough study has not yet been made of the real motives inducing the migrants from the Netherlands to make their decision, so that we have to rely on general impressions and hypotheses. But there is hardly any doubt that the most general reason for migration mentioned by the migrants is lack of opportunities in the Netherlands, lack of opportunities for themselves and supposed lack of opportunities for their children too. How can this feeling of lack of opportunities, now and in the future, be in accordance with what is said above about the economic situation in the Netherlands at present and about the expectations for the future? Probably the real background of the seemingly inexplicable situation is not a misunderstanding of the real situation on the part of the would-be migrants, but a discrepancy which exists between the results of the calculation of the ratio between the total number of the potential active population and the total number of jobs available on the one hand, and the sum of the possible solutions of all the petty problems which have to be solved by the thousands of individuals and families who try to find a suitable job for themselves and for their children on the other hand.

A rapidly growing population means that relatively many new jobs must be created and that entails far more difficulties than merely succeeding the older generation in already existing jobs. Expansion of economic life is mostly a somewhat one-sided expansion and in the Netherlands this is certainly the case. This means that many people have no opportunity to follow the same trade and to live in the same conditions as their parents did, even if they wish to do so and if they consider other possible openings as not suitable for them. A clear example of this situation is found in the Netherlands in agriculture. The

farmers in the eastern and southern parts of the country generally still have rather large families. Many farmers' sons are brought up as farmers on the parents' farm, but will never have an opportunity of getting a farm of their own because there is no more land available. These young farmers certainly can find jobs as unskilled labourers in industry now but consider that position as a social degradation. For many ambitious young people conditions in the Netherlands, which result from the high birthrate and the high density of population, bar the way to a higher place on the social ladder. In the Netherlands the chances for a farmhand to become a farmer are practically nil, because land is scarce and he had to compete with a multitude of farmer's sons who bid desperately for a farm. In some overseas countries land is still abundant and, as the history of Dutch migration to Canada after the war shows, migrants there get a chance to become an independent farmer in a few years. For young craftsmen and skilled labourers the chances of getting some kind of business of their own are few in the Netherlands. In Australia and Canada the chances for good craftsmen to become their own master are much better.

These few examples, to which many could be added, may show that in a country with a dense and rapidly increasing population there is not only the problem of the total number of jobs available; the problem of the quality of the opportunities that are open for the active population is far more urgent. The number of jobs that are offered may be sufficient, but often these jobs will not be suitable from the economic, technical or socio-psychological point of view for those who try to find a position which gives them satisfaction.

There is still another indirect relation between the propensity to emigrate and the intensity of population growth which I think is often forgotten. As was mentioned above, even if the total number of jobs offered in a certain country to

those seeking a position is sufficient, a rapid increase of the population makes the process of bringing the man and the job together far more difficult than in countries where the population is increasing very slowly or not at all. Mostly the possibilities for new jobs will be concentrated in certain parts of the country, in certain industries and within these industries in certain types of positions (skilled labour, unskilled labour etc.) and so for many finding a new job in a country such as the Netherlands (for example) means from the outset a rupture of many ties with the geographical, social and psychological environment from which the people in question originate; to put it in other words, in a country with a high surplus of births, finding a job means for many that they have to cover an important "social distance". Consciousness of this fact makes people less afraid of the changes in environment which are inherent in emigration. Generally speaking, we can say that a modern society with a rapidly growing population will be a dynamic society and in a dynamic society the resistance to changes in personal life, including those arising from emigration, will be less than in a society in which social life is changing only gradually.

Perhaps the question will arise as to why, if what is said above is true, this migration developed only after the war and not already between the two wars, when in this respect the situation was about the same as it is now. Besides changes in the overseas countries which lead to far greater chances for the immigrants and besides the activities of the Dutch Government to facilitate emigration, we must mention here an important change in the mentality of the Dutch people.

Before the war and certainly before the economic depression of the thirties, there was a trait of complacency and conservatism in the mentality of the people of the Netherlands, by comparison with the situation nowadays. There was a certain

resistance to rapid and far-reaching changes in personal life and in society. There was a feeling, perhaps often unconscious, that things in the world in general, and in the Netherlands in particular, were going well and that the future was safe and secure. World War I influenced the Netherlands only superficially and in fact the 19th century ended only in 1930 in this country.

Mentally the economic depression of the thirties, the development of Nazism and World War II were an enormous blow to the Dutch people. They shattered a picture of the world which the Dutch had made for themselves during the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. The feeling of living in a world where people are materially and mentally safe, where a man can form a picture of his future life when he is twenty, where things are going well and will certainly go better in the future, has gone. Perhaps the Dutch, and especially the youth, have become more sceptical than they were formerly, but certainly they have become more restless, more mentally mobile and active, more inclined to take chances when they offer themselves, without thinking too much of the petty problems of the near future and of the past, less afraid to burn their boats. It is clear that this post-war mentality is more compatible with emigration than the former one.

Thus we come to the conclusion that probably the relation between the economy of the Netherlands and post-war emigration from this country is not so self-evident as many seem to believe. There are probably certain relations between emigration and the economic-demographic conditions, but perhaps these relations are more indirect than direct. A more intensive study of these relations is needed.

The motivation of the migration policy of the Dutch Government after the war was not very convincing. This does not mean that this policy as such was not right. In addition the importance of emigration for the solution of the special

socio-economic problems of separate individuals and families, of certain regions and certain professional groups, there are problems of a non-economic character which make a limitation of population growth by means of emigration desirable. The Netherlands are simply becoming too crowded. Recreation, modern traffic and military training, for example, are up against ever-increasing problems of space. A reduction of the future population would be very welcome from the point of view of giving people in the Netherlands more space for all kinds of necessary activities. But this is not the place to enlarge on that question.

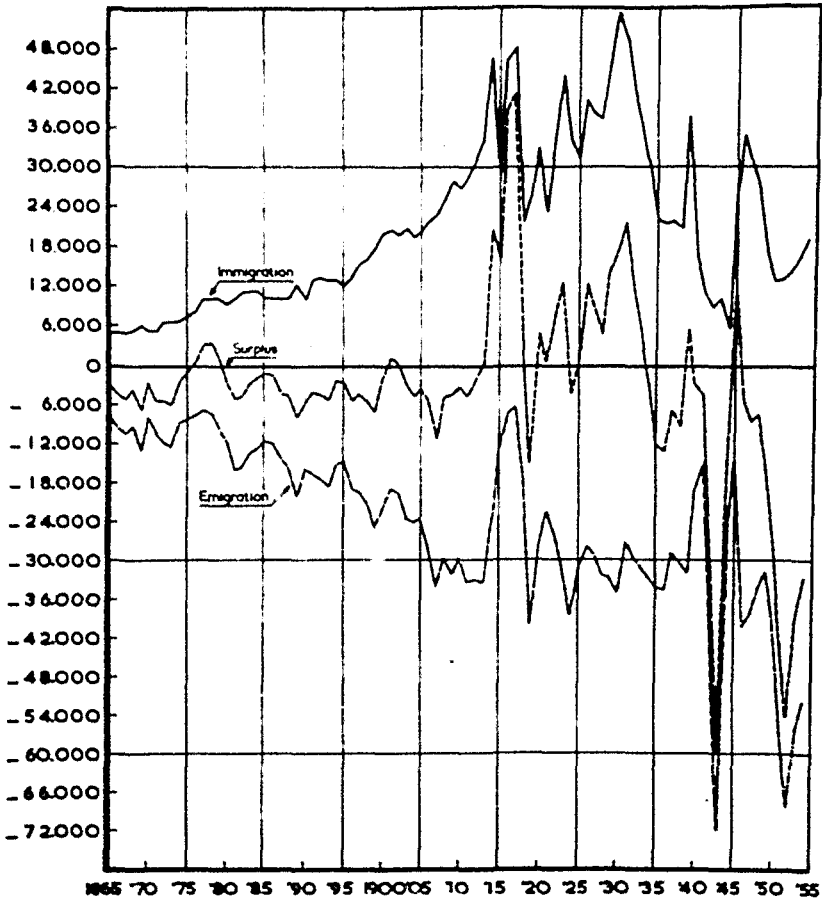


Figure 1  
Emigration and immigration from and to the Netherlands  
(Indonesia and Dutch overseas territories excluded) 1865-1955



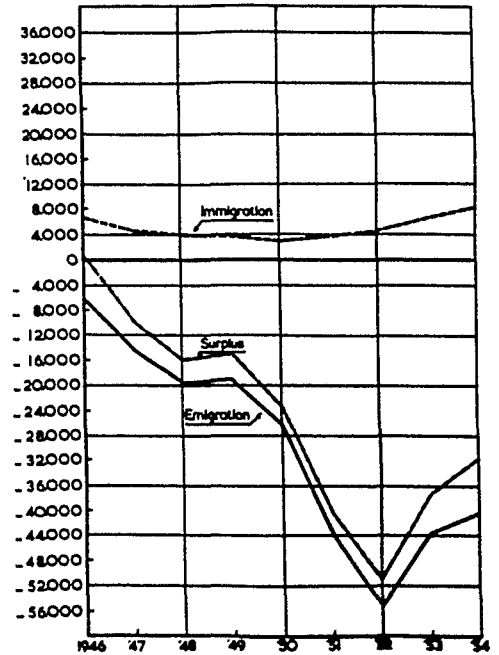
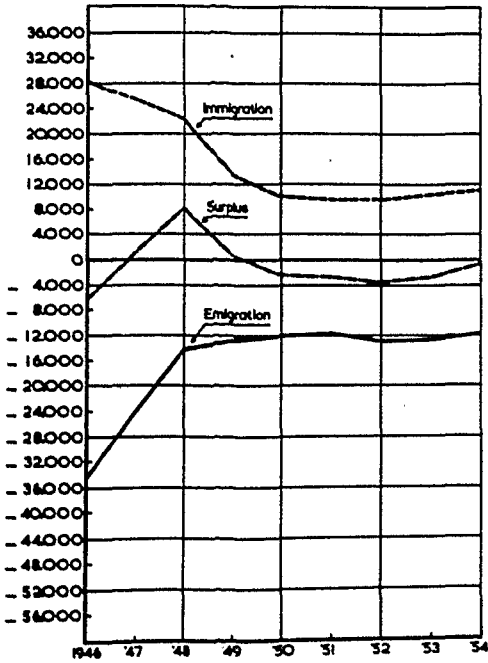


Figure II

Emigration and immigration from and to the Netherlands, to and from other European countries (right) and to and from overseas countries (left) 1946-1954

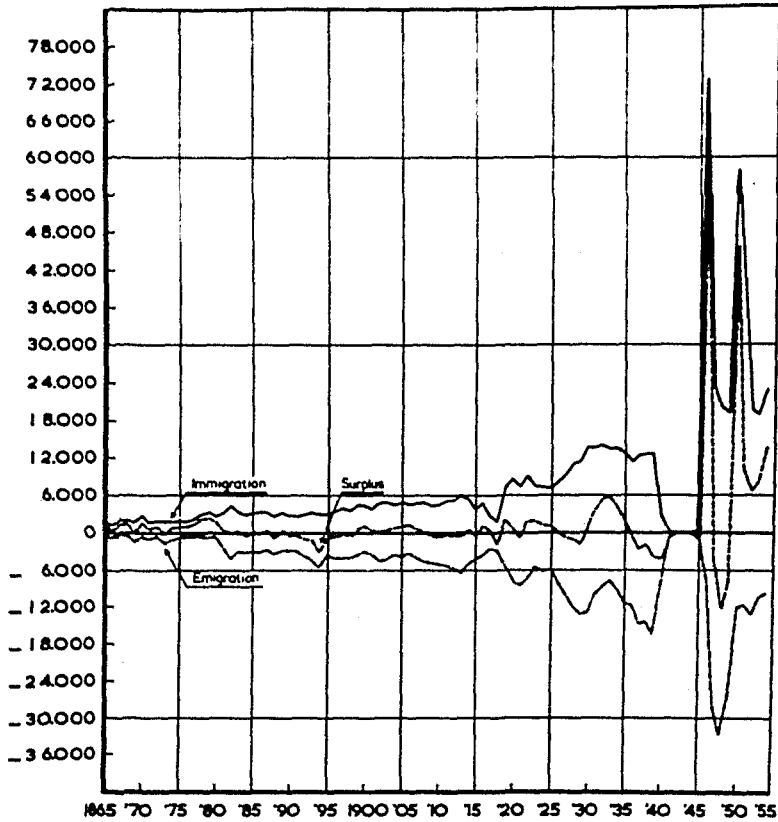


Figure III  
Emigration and immigration to and from Indonesia and Dutch overseas territories from and to the Netherlands 1865 -1955.

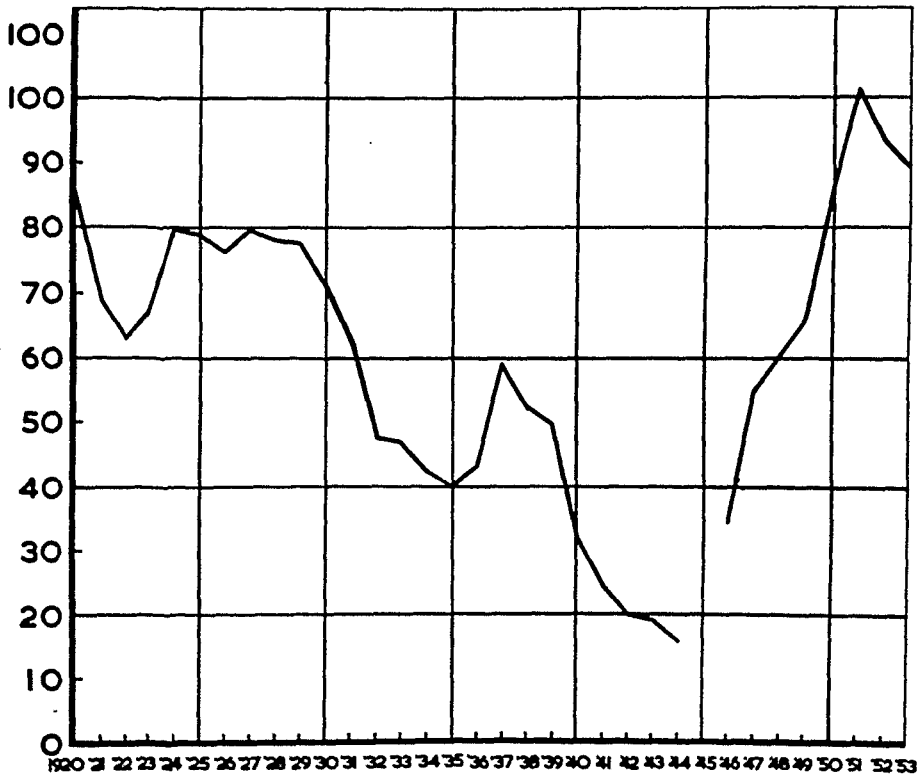


Figure IV  
Sum of imports and exports from the Netherlands as a percentage of the Dutch  
National Income 1920-1953

Belgium and Luxemburg	85.2	United Kingdom	58.2
Denmark	61.8	Sweden	50.0
Germany, Western	32.5	Switzerland	54.4
France	33.6	United States	9.4
Italy	30.2	Argentina	-
Netherlands	100.7	Union of South Africa	-
Norway	69.0	Australia	53.2
Austria	-	New Zealand	73.8
		Canada	46.7

TABLE 1.

Imports + exports in 1951 as a percentage  
of the national income in different countries

(Source : Monthly Bulletin of Statistics. U.N.O.)