

National Day of the Netherlands

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THE growth of the Dutch economy in 1990 did not match the level reached during the record year 1989. Nonetheless, 1990 could be said to have been a successful year. The volume of GNP grew by 3.3 per cent, which was higher than expected, and inflation remained low. The industrial sector reported a reasonable growth rate which in turn had a favourable effect on employment.

The effects of the crisis in the Gulf on the performance of the Dutch economy are not yet entirely clear. Only in the service sector, particularly in the area of transport, were negative repercussions in any way noticeable, as in the trading results of the port of Rotterdam. On the Amsterdam Stock Exchange, prices fell sharply at the end of the year. One of the few positive effects of the Gulf crisis was that government profits from natural gas, the price of which is linked to that of oil, rose considerably.

The direct influence of the crisis on Dutch exports was practically nil, given that of the total value of exports of 238 billion guilders in 1990, only 1.8 per cent was concerned with exports to the Middle East.

Although the growth in Dutch industrial production fell somewhat short of the exceptional growth rate of 1989, 1990 can still be regarded as having been a reasonable satisfactory year. Production rose by four per cent for industry as a whole, an increase to which practically all sectors contributed. The most significant growth occurred in the metal industry (+5%). The shipbuilding and engineering workshop sectors were also particularly notable for their positive contribution to the total performance result. The electro-technical industry also had a good year. Contrary to wide expectations, the Dutch elec-

The Dutch Economy Another Successful Year

International comparison of Gross National Product in 1989

Countries	GNP (bn US \$)	GNP per capita (PPP's*, EC = 100)
United States	5,178.5	154.5
Japan	2,807.7	115.8
Fed. Rep. of Germany	1,167.8	113.3
France	926.4	108.5
Denmark	102.2	106.0
Italy	857.0	105.1
United Kingdom	805.8	104.6
The Netherlands	219.6	103.5
Belgium	146.0	102.4
European Community	4,732.1	100.0
Spain	369.7	75.7
Ireland	32.2	66.0
Portugal	44.3	54.5

* PPP is Purchasing Power Parity
Source: EC, estimates to latest national figures.

tronics concern Philips succeeded in maintaining its lead over other European microchip producers. The other two large industrial sectors, i.e. the food processing and chemical industries, experienced a growth rate of respectively two and three per cent. Only the petroleum oil industry registered an overall fall of two per cent, linked to the drop in oil consumption in Western Europe because of high oil prices.

The strongly export-orientated Dutch dairy industry has had its sales opportunities restricted in the past year by European Community measures governing butter and powdered milk. This resulted in a marked increase in competition from a number of other important dairy export countries. Cheese sales formed an exception to this development. The production of cheese rose last year by 4.5

per cent to reach 584,000 tonnes. The increase in cheese production, coupled with the slight decrease in milk supply, means that an increasingly large proportion of milk produced is used in the manufacture of cheese. If current developments in cheese production continue, it is possible that next year, over 50 per cent of all milk produced will be used in cheese production. In line with the rise in production, cheese sales also experienced considerable growth. Exports of Dutch cheeses have risen annually by an average of five per cent in recent years.

The most important branch of the Dutch transport sector, the maritime shipping industry, registered a slight fall in the volume of goods handled, a development which was reflected in the trans-shipment figures for the port of Rotterdam. Total goods trans-

1990 dropped slightly to 288 million tonnes, which is 1.5 per cent down on the record year 1989. The low dollar, high oil prices, the weaker British and US economies and a slight reduction in German exports all contributed to this fall.

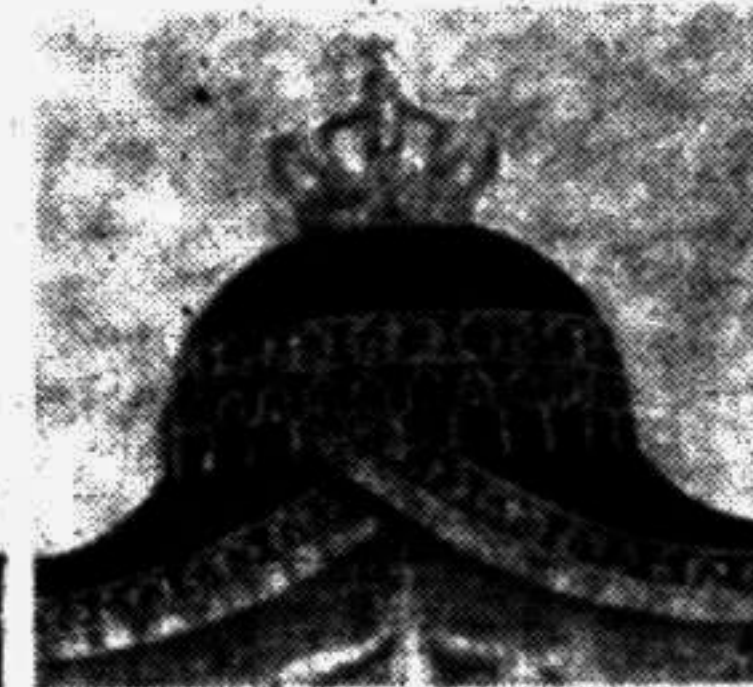
Container trans-shipments rose by 100,000 to total 3.7 million TEUs. Following the vigorous growth in container trans-shipments in 1989, it was expected that this year would bring a measure of stabilisation, particularly in the light of increased pressure on the US and British economies. Both countries are extremely important for container traffic.

Modest developments in the port of Rotterdam influenced the road haulage and inland shipping sectors, which also recorded unspectacular growth. Air transport had a somewhat better year, with the number of passengers and the volume of air freight, both incoming and outgoing, handled by Schiphol airport exceeding 1989 levels. In spite of higher ticket prices for scheduled services and fuel surcharges on charter flights, the volume of passenger traffic went up by more than five per cent. This growth was largely due to a rise in the number of travellers using scheduled services, during which the number of passenger flights to the Middle East, particularly in the last few months of 1990, dropped off sharply, and passenger flights chiefly within Europe, to Central and South America and to the Far East rose steeply. The volume of air

freight to the Far East and North America also showed a significant increase. Air freight traffic grew by a total over three per cent.

On Sunday 2 November 1990, the 15 millionth inhabitant of the Netherlands was born. Her name is Yasmin van der Meer. The Dutch population grew by 0.8 per cent over the entire year. With regard to future developments, the Dutch Central Statistical Bureau predicts that the population will reach 16 million shortly after the turn of the century. According to current population forecasts, however, population numbers will fall during the first half of the next century, so that the 17 million mark will not be attained. As a result of the increasing greying of the population, the annual number of deaths will, in the long term, exceed the number of births. Immigration will slow down the reversal process from a growing to a shrinking population but will not, according to current prognoses, prevent it.

The labour force grew over the past year by almost two per cent. Thanks to a healthy industrial orders portfolio, the number of unemployed fell and employment opportunities were able to develop positively. The number of registered unemployed dropped by almost 12 per cent. The number of company vacancies rose by 32 per cent. The service sector in particular had a considerable staff shortage.



Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands: Presiding over a prosperous nation

Against the Odds

Overcoming the Hostile Sea

THE impression of the Netherlands which exists in the minds of many people in other countries is simply confirmed by the view which greets the eye of the traveller flying into the airport of Schiphol near Amsterdam. The country is flat, it is low-lying and is crossed by numerous water courses.

In large parts of the country permanent occupation did not become possible until the construction of dikes enabled people to withstand most of the onslaughts of the sea. Only in the extreme southeast do altitudes above 200 metres occur.

The country is situated on the North Sea and at the mouths of the rivers Rhine, Maas and Scheldt. Physically, the Netherlands is a delta and forms part of the plain of northern and western Europe.

The highest point is located in the extreme southeast at 321 m. and the lowest point is north of Rotterdam at 6.70 m. below sea level. 27% of the total land area is below sea level and this part of the country is inhabited by about 60% of the total population.

If the Netherlands was to lose the protection of its dunes and dikes, the most densely populated part of the country would be inundated (largely by the sea, but in part also by the rivers). This part of the Netherlands, which generally does not lie higher than 1 metre above sea level, covers more than half the total area of the country. About a half of this in turn, i.e. 27% of the total area of the Netherlands, actually lies below sea level.

The rise in sea level after the last ice age greatly influenced the evolution of the map outline of what is now the Low Netherlands. Before this rise in sea level large parts of the North Sea were dry land and Great Britain was joined to the continent. Rivers such as the Rhine, the Thames and the Elbe flowed on well to the north of their present courses and did not empty into the sea until reaching north of what is now the Dogger Bank. After the sea level had reached approximately the present coastline, the rise became slower and more irregular. At times of relatively rapid rise, known as transgression phases, exten-

sive coastal areas were swallowed up by the sea.

The struggle waged by the inhabitants of these areas against the sea was at first purely defensive in character. They first built homes of villages on artificial mounds known as 'terps'. When they began to link the 'terps' together by means of dikes, they also created the possibility of keeping the land dry.

Advances in technique, such as the building of windmills with an upper section which could be turned into the wind, enabled the inhabitants to pass gradually from defence to the attack. In the 17th century, the 'Golden Age', a start was made on draining some of the lakes referred to above, particularly in the province of North Holland. There were various reasons for this, such as the increased demand of the growing towns for food, the capital resources and business enterprise of the Amsterdam merchants, the ever-increasing technical potential of the windmills and the fear of floods. The process continued until well into the 19th century, by which time the windmill had been replaced by the steam pump.

In the archipelago of the south-west Netherlands and in the coastal areas of the northern Netherlands land reclamation was already taking place in 1200, but this occurred in a different manner. The sea flowed in twice a day at high tide and let behind sand and silt as it retreated. When this process had continued for long enough, these areas came to lie above sea level, at least if no storm surges occurred for a long time. The silted-up lands were surrounded by a dike to protect them against the sea. In the north of Groningen and Friesland a system was developed in the 19th century to accelerate the accretion process. This took the form of building low dams out into the sea, behind and between which sand and silt could quietly settle. This process is still going on today.

After 1900 land reclamation was undertaken on a still larger scale. An ambitious plan was drawn up for reclaiming part of the Zuider Zee. The first polder, the

Wieringermeer, was drained in 1930, by which date the steam pump had been replaced by diesel and electrically driven pumps. In 1932, the Zuider Zee — subsequently called the IJsselmeer (Lake IJssel) — was sealed off from the Waddenzee by a 30-kilometres barrier dam. Four of the five projected polders have been completed.

With this completion of the land reclamation, the Dutch have won back virtually all the land that had to be abandoned to the sea during the course of the centuries. Archaeological finds, such as those made in the IJsselmeer polders, have shown that many of the areas reclaimed from the sea were inhabited in past ages.

The execution of the Delta Project was accelerated by the great storm surge which struck the low-lying polders of the South West Netherlands on 1 February 1953, causing over 1,800 deaths and inundating 160,000 hectares of land. This disaster was the result of a most unfortunate combination of circumstances: a deep depression, with north-westerly winds blowing at hurricane force straight onto the Dutch coast, coincided with the fortnightly spring tide when the sea had an exceptionally high water level.

The aims of the Delta Project were not only to reduce the flood danger through the construction of a number of dams, but also to achieve a general improvement in the water economy and increased accessibility of the archipelago. Land reclamation does not play a significant part in the scheme.

As early as 1950 the Brielse Maas (an arm of the Maas) was closed off by a dam. The first work to be completed after the disaster of 1953 was a movable storm surge barrier in the Hollandse IJssel, east of Rotterdam. If the water in the New Waterway (not sealed off because of the shipping interests of Rotterdam) is ponded up during a gale, this barrier serves to safeguard a large part of the polder land in the western Netherlands from flooding.

Through the implementation of the Delta Project the sea has largely been banished from the waters of the South West Netherlands. Besides the great advantage of the reduced danger of flooding, this also

means that the struggle against the seepage of salt water — the enemy of farmers and growers in the whole of the Low Netherlands — can be waged more successfully. New potential has also been created for the supply of drinking water and for water sport.

A radical scheme such as the Delta Project inevitably has its disadvantages. It was clear from the beginning that the coastal fisheries (mussels, shrimps etc) and oyster cultures would suffer serious damage and become in certain places impossible because of the desalination of the water in the lakes behind the barrier dams. During the course of the 1960s and increasing number of protests were made on environmental grounds. The debate on the environmental aspects which continued for many years has ultimately resulted in far-reaching changes in the plans for sealing off the Eastern Scheldt. The primary dam is now being constructed in the form of a storm surge barrier incorporating 61 closable openings (to be closed only in the event of flood danger) which will enable salt water to enter the estuary and about 75% of the tidal movement to be maintained. As a result, serious damage to the natural environment in the Eastern Scheldt will be limited and the oyster cultures will not be destroyed. This change necessitates the building of two additional secondary dams in order to separate the waters farther east from salt and tides.

In the well-watered and densely populated Netherlands a high level of water control is necessary, both in the soil and in the rivers, lakes and canals. Many purposes can be served by this, such as the prevention of flooding and salination, guaranteeing sufficient depth of water for navigation.

The Zuider Zee and Delta Works are of great importance for water control, because they give increased security and provide freshwater reservoirs with a water level which can be regulated. In combination with a third project, the canalisation of the Lower Rhine, a better control of the water economy in virtually the whole of the Netherlands is now possible.

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