

Watching and listening to the debate in the House of Representatives on the social domain in the Caribbean Netherlands (Tuesday evening, November 15), for some time things seemed to be going in the right direction with the establishment of the Social Minimum. But suddenly the harsh reality becomes clear again: Minister Schouten (Poverty Policy) tells in a soft voice that another commission will be established. This time to look at how benefits, legal minimum wage and the cost level for local people can interact to produce the requested Social Minimum. It is yet another delaying tactic to avoid arriving at the most obvious outcome: the Caribbean Netherlands is simply the Netherlands so the Dutch Social Minimum also applies to the Caribbean Netherlands! But the accounting masters of the Cabinet (whispered in by the gathered employers in the Caribbean Netherlands) prefer a solution that maintains the second-class character of the (Dutch!) population there. It is as if the Social Minimum in the Netherlands has a regional or even municipal diversification (which is not the case, at least in the European Netherlands). There is already a Social Minimum Committee for the Netherlands and now there must be another committee to do the same for three small Dutch villages seven or eight thousand kilometers west of The Hague. When will official and administrative The Hague come to its senses?

Furthermore, Minister Schouten asks for some leniency with the deadline of September 2023 to submit calculations until at least the budget discussion for 2024 (for the record: the present debate of November 15 was also postponed because this minister could not (read: did not want to) provide information to the Lower House on time). And she existed, moreover, to add so many words that it could be that even then the Social Minimum would not lead to any determination for the 2024 budget year. And if it were a particularly difficult sum, I could still understand it, but a little havo or vwo student can produce a profile paper on this without much difficulty that really makes sense. I can only describe this reversal and retreat by Minister Schouten as UNWIL.

A day later there is a debate about (among other things) health care in the Caribbean Netherlands. A complaints commission has been established for patients of St. Eustatius and Saba. Complaints from patients do not come directly here. Complaints are offered through the management of the SEHCF (healthcare institution on St. Eustatius). How this can be set up is beyond me. In a culture where harassment is still rife, patients think twice or three times before complaining. Any empathy for the population is completely absent from our ministerial administrators.

The call for an independent investigation into the organization and functioning of health care on St. Eustatius has been there for a long time and erupted in April in response to several deaths with an apparent link to the poor health care on the island. A silent march will be organized on April 5. SEHCF board and management promise the very best and, above all, lots of transparency. Then very recently there is an incident involving morphine allegedly stolen by a nurse. Despite pressure and protest from the local union as well as several local nurses (who dress in black T-shirts in protest), once again transparency is blacked out. No investigation follows and the nurse involved disappears from the scene. What is left of April's fine promises...? Nothing at all! And The Hague remains deaf and blind to these developments.

State Secretary Van Ooijen refuses an independent investigation into the functioning of health care and of the ZJCN (until recently known as ZVK) in particular. The importance of such an investigation is obvious but yes, the Ministry of VWS' own management is of course up to its ears in responsibility for the organization's misperformance in St. Eustatius. The Director Care and Youth Dutch Caribbean - it could hardly be otherwise, given his long involvement - is familiar with the behavior in the medical sector on St. Maarten where corrupt traits surface more than once, and with which the functioning of the SECHF is directly related. And so now Van Ooijen refuses an independent investigation. This is obviously a case of "butcher inspects his own meat" and the "cover-up" procedure is preferred. Where there is smoke, there is fire and the question of who is now holding the hand over whose head and what now remains invisible to the House of Representatives, or more broadly: to the Dutch public, will probably remain well hidden for the time being.

When will the House of Representatives take seriously its role as a check on the government. In other words, who is the Secretary of State that he just refuses an investigation? Why is the House of Representatives not biting through this? What interests are being defended or protected by whom and why?

The foregoing seems like a repetition of what Kadushi wrote in yesterday's "Big Thinkers" column. It is an amplification. It cannot be said and written often enough that fine words, outward appearances, mirrors and beads, neither fill stomachs nor address grassroots disadvantages. Ministers and Secretaries of State in the Cabinet are all unwilling, with haste, to make the Caribbean Dutch people pressed to their chests in 2010 feel at home and Dutch. We are 12 years down the road and at best there will be a study of something long known. If anyone wonders why it is that the Caribbean Dutchman is more averse to Dutchness, rather than attracted to it, should think a little harder about what is happening. But then again, electorally, the Caribbean Netherlands is not a portfolio with which you score easily and in the short term, and after all, that is what many politicians are all about....