CHAPTER III

David versus Goliath

A master/servant or rider/horse relationship no longer exists (Ambassador Herrenberg, Trouw, 21-6-1983:3).

Following the December Murders of 1982 Dutch-Surinamese relations became severely strained at all levels. The Netherlands reacted angrily to the executions and, more importantly, strongly refused to accept the military’s political influence. Paramaribo in turn denounced the neocolonial interference by The Hague and rejected its stance. Rapidly, relations deteriorated, becoming increasingly antagonistic. In this tense atmosphere both governments resorted to a wide range of foreign-policy tactics in a battle of one-upmanship. These actions included the termination of military, technical, professional and educational cooperation, support for various opposition movements within the other’s country, use and misuse of the media, disruption of air links, lobbying other governments and international organizations, expulsion of each others’ diplomats, while The Hague also suspended economic assistance. The primary objective of both parties was purely and simply to undermine the other to as great an extent as possible. In view of the fact that the Dutch were holding most of the cards, the battle was decidedly one-sided.

The Netherlands becomes the ‘enemy’

To understand the bitter tensions between The Hague and Paramaribo throughout 1983, the political and ideological backgrounds of both governments have to be understood. Whereas in Suriname the numerous cabinets which had led the Republic since the February coup had been predominantly of a technocratic nature, the influence of RVP and PALU had steadily grown stronger. The various internal and external factors contributing to this development will be discussed in more depth in Chapter IV. What should be mentioned here, however, is the strong nationalist and anti-colonialist attitude of the newly appointed Alibux cabinet governing the Republic (following Neyhorst’s resignation after the December Murders) from early 1983 until
8 January 1984 (Chin and Buddingh’ 1987:177). In particular the dominant PALU, which was represented by five ministers (including Errol Alibux himself), against the RVP (with two positions in the cabinet), was an important contributory factor in Paramaribo’s hardening stance towards The Hague (*Suriname schijnnonafhankelijkheid* 1985:23). Whereas the Dutch were deeply angered by the events of December 1982, the Alibux cabinet, the most radical regime to rule Suriname to date, was thus ready and willing to withstand the anticipated diplomatic assault from across the Atlantic.

In the Netherlands a new CDA-VVD coalition under Lubbers had taken office in November 1982. This cabinet, therefore, was merely a few weeks in office when it was confronted with the December Murders. While attempting to gather information about the circumstances leading to the executions in order to formulate a response, the majority of the sizeable Surinamese community in the Netherlands – numbering around 180,000 by the end of 1982 – exerted strong pressure on the Dutch Prime Minister to denounce Bouterse’s latest move swiftly and harshly (*NRC Handelsblad*, 23-12-1982:3). On 12 December several thousand Surinamese protested against the Murders and burned an effigy of Bouterse in front of the Surinamese embassy in The Hague (*Weekkrant Suriname*, 18-12-1982:3). Similar demonstrations continued through the month and, as illustrated by the occupation of the Surinamese consulate in Amsterdam by the opposition group Herstel Democratie Suriname (HDS, Restoration of Democracy in Suriname), not all protests were expressed by peaceful means (*NRC Handelsblad*, 27-12-1982:3).

Whereas the outcry by Surinamese migrants against the killings in Paramaribo had so far mainly been asserted by groups and associations speaking primarily for the interests of the various ethnic and religious communities, the pressure on Lubbers mounted as leading multi-ethnic organizations began to express their opposition to the Bouterse regime. For instance, the principal alliance representing the socio-economic affairs of Surinamese residing in the Netherlands issued a statement condemning the massacre.

The National Federation of Welfare Associations for Surinamese expresses its horror and indignation with regard to the manner in which influential personalities of Surinamese society have been robbed of their lives. It believes that by perpetrating this action the current rulers in Suriname have seriously violated human rights and hence, have forfeited any form of respect and dignity. (*Weekrant Suriname*, 18-12-1982:1.)

With an overview of the political climate on both sides of the Atlantic, the deteriorating Dutch-Surinamese relations can now be analysed. It must be noted that initially it was the Netherlands taking steps that would further deteriorate bilateral links. Besides suspending its aid programme, The Hague
introduced a variety of measures which were clearly aimed at opposing Paramaribo on a broad range of political and socio-economic fronts. Just over a week after the executions, the Dutch government unilaterally terminated a series of treaties signed with Suriname in 1975 and 1976, including those relating to diplomatic representation of the Republic where needed and to the provision of legal advice and organizational support in the field of foreign policy (*Het Parool*, 18-12-1982:3).

Another decision taken by the Lubbers cabinet was to immediately terminate the *suppletiebetalingen* (supplementary payments) which had been paid to officers of the NL. This action was justified as the ‘brutal and exceedingly harsh treatment’ of the opposition by the Surinamese military indicated, according to the Dutch Foreign Ministry, that the officers feared a return to democracy – thus making it unlikely that they would hand over power to a civilian government in the near future (*NRC Handelsblad*, 16-12-1982:1). Consequently, The Hague was unwilling to continue supplementing the salaries of 59 Surinamese officers who so far had received around Nf 113,000 in monthly wages on top of their Surinamese salaries, as guaranteed by an agreement signed at the end of 1975 (*NRC Handelsblad*, 18-12-1982:3). This affected the wages of all sixteen officers leading the February 1980 coup.

In a similar vein, the cooperation between the Dutch and Surinamese armed forces was suspended on both a personal and a material level. All Dutch military officers working as instructors in the Republic were recalled by The Hague and Surinamese soldiers attending training and educational courses in the Netherlands were asked to return to their home country (Bouterse 1990:126-7). Following on from this, an embargo was announced on the sale of military equipment to the Republic (*NRC Handelsblad*, 18-12-1982:3) and on the practice of coordinating the purchase of weapons from third parties (*Het Parool*, 18-12-1982:3). To complete the end of military cooperation, Bouterse retaliated by demanding the withdrawal of Dutch Military Attaché Colonel Bas van Tussenbroek and his assistant from Paramaribo by 31 January 1983 while simultaneously recalling his own Military Attaché from The Hague (*Trouw*, 8-1-1983:1).

One of the more drastic steps considered by The Hague was the plan to evacuate the 4,700 Dutch citizens residing in the former colony. This plan had been drawn up just days after the December Murders (*NRC Handelsblad*, 14-12-1982:1). Although it was unlikely that this could be achieved by Dutch marines copying the tactics of their American colleagues, it is understandable that the Lubbers cabinet was concerned about protecting its citizens still residing in Suriname, especially given the unstable political climate at that time. From a Surinamese perspective, it can also be argued that the plan to evacuate Dutch nationals, many of whom occupied important positions, was clearly a provocative move, attempting to undermine Suriname’s socio-
economic stability, which to some extent depended on Dutch professional skills.

While the Alibux regime regarded these initial retributory policies as harsh but not necessarily threatening to the military’s influence in Paramaribo – the suspension of aid at this stage was only a temporary measure – The Hague’s next steps, in contrast, were interpreted as a clear sign of open ‘hostility’. This included the Dutch support, as Bouterse interpreted it, of the Raad voor de Bevrijding van Suriname (Council for the Liberation of Suriname, the main, non-violent exiled opposition group). Following the executions in 1982, and a purge of the officer corps early in 1983, many Surinamese decided to flee this increasingly authoritarian rule. Among these refugees were several high-ranking dignitaries from the civil and military administration, including Director of the Central Bank and former Prime Minister Sedney (Het Parool, 18-1-1983:1), Air Force Commander Vasilda (NRC Handelsblad, 13-1-1983:4) and the leaders of the Military Police, Captain Ramon Abrahams and Lieutenant Polak (Trouw, 24-1-1983:1). Most of these refugees, often after difficult journeys through the Caribbean or Latin America, sought asylum in the Netherlands. Several joined their compatriots who had left the Republic at an earlier stage, thus transforming the Liberation Council into a strong opposition movement (de Volkskrant, 5-1-1983:5).

One of these dignitaries and earlier refugees in the Council was former Prime Minister and President Chin A Sen, under whose leadership the group had been organized. Chin A Sen defined the Council’s main objective as being the Republic’s redemocratization. It must be emphasized that to obtain this goal, the Council denounced the use of violence and refrained from portraying itself as a government in exile. According to Chin A Sen:

> It is our task to bring the military dictatorship to an end. We, in the Netherlands, cannot decide what is best for the country; afterwards, the people of Suriname will have to do that themselves. As a result of our membership of the Council we will not lay any claim to positions of power later in Suriname (Trouw, 14-1-1983:1).

Instead, the Council perceived itself as a pressure group operating on the global stage with the purpose of providing information to foreign governments and international organizations in an effort to forge a worldwide anti-Bouterse alliance.

Predictably, Paramaribo reacted with outrage to the establishment of the Council in Amsterdam on 4 January 1983. Although unable to take direct action against the Council, Foreign Minister Glenn Sankatsing1 accused Lub-
bers of not only failing to outlaw the Council’s activities but also of actually supporting the dissidents (Trouw, 9-2-1983:1). Several Surinamese leaders, including Bouterse, were concerned that the Council, despite its public declaration to the contrary, might still attempt to set up a government in exile and become involved in military-style operations aimed at overthrowing the authorities (Bouterse 1990:141).

The Hague, still furious, was in no mood to swallow any accusations hurled at it by the regime. Although Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek totally rejected Sankatsing’s claims and pointed out that all anti-Bouterse organizations operating in the Netherlands were bound by Dutch law and therefore prohibited from planning or carrying out any military operations against Paramaribo, this issue added to the already tense bilateral relations. All the more so since Van den Broek had also stressed the Council’s freedom to use all legal, diplomatic and political means available in the Netherlands that could contribute to bringing about the Republic’s redemocratization (Meel 1990:87).

The fear that the anti-Bouterse movement in the Netherlands might be a threat to the authorities in Paramaribo was understandable in view of the fact that other opposition groups were now being founded. Among these were the Amsterdams Volksverzet (AVV, Amsterdam People’s Resistance Movement) led by former Foreign Minister Haakmat (Verschuuren 1994:138), the HDS, founded by Rob Wormer (NRC Handelsblad, 27-12-1982:3) and the Moederbond Nederland, the exiled Dutch branch of the Moederbond, organized by exiled union members under Ben Kohinor (Het Parool, 25-3-1983:9). Although these groups generally promoted similar goals to those of the Council, they differed in their methods, with some, for instance, openly advocating the use of violence (NRC Handelsblad, 11-10-1982:3). In view of the series of countercoups since February 1980 and their possible links to external support, the Surinamese government was highly concerned about the activities of these groups, doubly so as they were convinced that they often enjoyed direct or indirect support from The Hague.

At a press conference in Paramaribo in January 1983, Suriname’s Ambassador to the Netherlands Herrenberg had already warned that ‘the new government must be able to beat off all hostile attacks from abroad. If we do not realize this, we will not survive the onslaught of mercenaries’ (Trouw, 31-1-1983:1). Herrenberg also referred to recent reports of an attempted invasion by a group of Surinamese dissidents residing in the Netherlands and in the United States. At the beginning of 1983, with the help of Belgian and American mercenaries, this group had planned to overthrow Bouterse in a military-style operation. Fearing further coups and invasions, the Paramaribo authorities began to question the Dutch position on such activities while, once again, accusing The Hague of failing to restrict the scope of action of
exile movements in the Netherlands (Trouw, 31-1-1983:1). This criticism was repeated in March 1983 at the meeting of the UN Commission for Human Rights in Geneva, where Surinamese diplomat Ronald Kensmil detailed Paramaribo’s claims that The Hague provided support for numerous anti-Bouterse groups: ‘certain Dutch authorities provide moral support to movements in the Netherlands that are now threatening our country with an armed invasion, possibly utilizing mercenaries’ (Trouw, 2-3-1983:10).

Suriname’s accusations proved difficult to shrug off following the failed attempt of another invasion in the summer of 1983. In mid-July it became public that with the support of 150 mercenaries, several hundred exiled Surinamese (some of whom were former soldiers) had planned an operation to overthrow Bouterse. This operation was suspended after it had become apparent, according to the leader, that the Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst (BVD, Dutch homeland security, now AIVD) had gathered detailed information of the plan. As a result, the leader argued: ‘I found it impossible to bear the responsibility for human lives once I heard that the BVD knew about it. I thought it was possible that the Netherlands would inform the Bouterse regime of this type of action, as the government had claimed it would’ (Weekkrant Suriname, 23-7-1983:1). In other words, despite Suriname’s claim that The Hague supported anti-Bouterse groups, dissidents in the Netherlands acted on the assumption that the Dutch government would uphold its own laws.

Nonetheless, the alleged Dutch assistance to exile groups continued to put strain on bilateral relations. In November 1983 Surinamese Defence Minister Wilfred Meynard reported that his government had again handed a protest letter to the Dutch Ambassador, accusing The Hague of supporting yet another planned invasion. Meynard claimed that the Liberation Council – which was believed to be responsible – had attempted ‘to create chaos in order to prepare Suriname for an invasion by mercenaries’ (Trouw, 2-12-1983:7). He also claimed that this latest assault, which was to be carried out from bases inside French Guiana, had been assisted by Dutch homeland security and their French colleagues who had some knowledge of the Council’s undertakings. The response from The Hague was predictable as the Foreign Ministry published the statement that ‘the Dutch government would under no circumstances directly or indirectly support an action such as the one described by Suriname. In no way is the government involved in such an undertaking’ (Trouw, 2-12-1983:7). Yet this statement did not ease Paramaribo’s anxiety, particularly as, at the same time, it became known that the Dutch Foreign Minister had circulated an order to all departmental staff to decline any official invitations issued by the Surinamese embassy to celebrate the Republic’s independence day.

Another factor contributing to the deterioration of bilateral relations was the negative way in which the Republic’s politics were reported and discussed
in the Dutch media. This development prompted Paramaribo to strongly object to what it perceived to be a deliberate attempt to create a ‘hostile’ atmosphere towards Suriname within Dutch society. Even though former Prime Minister Arron had already frequently complained about the extensive media coverage of his government’s involvement in corruption scandals (de Volkskrant, 23-10-1978:2), the negative tone adopted by Dutch journalists had become more extreme following the February 1980 coup. To counter this trend, former Surinamese Foreign Minister Naarendorp organized regular meetings with the international press throughout 1982, during which particular attention was paid to the Dutch media in a bid to positively influence the coverage of Surinamese affairs (Oltmans 1984:40).

However, Naarendorp’s strategy failed and the uneasy relationship between Paramaribo and the Dutch media continued to sour. One reason for this was that amongst the victims of the killings had been several local journalists: Jozef Slagveer, Abraham Behr, André Kamperveen, Leslie Rahman and Frank Wijngaarde (Lagerberg 1989:125). Fuel was added to the fire during the controversial arrest, in January 1983, of Major Horb, second in command to Bouterse. He was accused of conspiring with the Council and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in a plot against the regime (Trouw, 2-2-1983:7). Following what Paramaribo described as the ‘suicide’ of Horb while in military custody, the condemnation of the regime in the Dutch media reached new heights as journalists questioned Paramaribo’s suicide finding, claiming that the Major had in fact been executed (NRC Handelsblad, 4-2-1983:1). They portrayed Horb as a popular and moderate leader who had paid with his life for opposing Bouterse’s increasingly authoritarian rule (Trouw, 4-2-1983:7).

This in turn provoked further outrage. In late January 1983, the Surinamese cabinet ordered the state-controlled Nationale Voorlichtingsdienst (NVD, National Information Service) to provide Dutch journalists with no information whatsoever since ‘in the Netherlands only rumours, half-truths and lies are published about the situation in Suriname’ (Trouw, 28-1-1983:1). In addition, Herrenberg expressed his anger about reports of the December Murders and the Horb affair and invited the journalists concerned to the Surinamese embassy in February. He seized this opportunity to give a damning critique of the Dutch media under the pretext: ‘I am qualified to judge. I have also been a journalist, educated in Algiers’ (Trouw, 3-2-1983:3). The objective of the press conference, modifying the viewpoint of the Dutch media while accusing it of reporting ‘colonial bullshit’, unsurprisingly backfired as newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations in the Netherlands honed their criticism of developments in Suriname.

The best example of Herrenberg’s failure to ‘tame’ the media can be seen in Cartoon 4, published in Trouw a few days after the press conference. The Ambassador himself is made the target of the media as he is shown attempting...
to ‘choke’ any journalist reporting on the Horb affair. Paramaribo reacted promptly by accusing The Hague of failing to put an end to the ‘hostile’ atmosphere created by the Dutch media. Again, the Dutch response was quick: Van den Broek completely rejected Paramaribo’s claim that The Hague indirectly supported the Dutch media in its attacks on the regime. As the Dutch Foreign Minister pointed out, the Lubbers cabinet had no authority to intervene in the editorial content of newspapers, magazines or in radio and television programmes (Meel 1990:87).

The increase in tension certainly came at an inconvenient moment for Paramaribo, flaring up as Bouterse had just decided to bring Herrenberg back to Suriname in order to help establish a new cabinet following Neyhorst’s resignation (Het Parool, 19-1-1983:3). Herrenberg’s harsh criticism of the Dutch media seemed particularly unprofessional as he left behind an even more antagonistic atmosphere. Furthermore, Herrenberg only added to the turmoil by announcing that, before returning to Suriname, he would take a holiday in Algeria. In doing so he fuelled the already heated political climate as this suggested that he found the present bilateral problems of minor importance. On his return from North Africa, on 19 February, Herrenberg inflamed relations further by declaring that for the duration of his trip to

![Cartoon 4. Henk Herrenberg and the Dutch media (Trouw, 4-2-1983:10)](image-url)

The Ambassador’s strong stand soon generated media speculation on both sides of the Atlantic, as the press attempted to gauge the risk of a complete diplomatic breakdown (*Trouw*, 11-1-1983:8). These speculations gained credence as voices in Surinamese government circles argued that official relations with the Netherlands should at least be downgraded. Notably, Herrenberg’s party colleague Arthur ten Berge (an influential ideologist within the RVP) declared that if The Hague had not suspended the Aid Treaty, the regime would have rejected Dutch financial assistance of its own accord because, according to Ten Berge, ‘independence from this type of aid is the basis of our revolutionary view’ (*Trouw*, 22-1-1983.5). That the Surinamese leadership was at this point indeed prepared to accept the challenges posed by the Dutch media and government can be deduced from the regime’s decision to arrest Ruud de Wit, a Dutch journalist stationed in Suriname, on a rather dubious pretext.

To be able to understand Paramaribo’s aggressive position it is important to consider the extent of the anger felt in the Republic towards, in the first place, The Hague’s announcement of terminating its aid and, secondly, the decision to allow both the Liberation Council and the media to unleash their scathing attacks against the regime. It should also be recognized that since the resignation of the Neyhorst cabinet, Suriname’s Foreign Affairs Department had been operating without any clear directives. Thus when Foreign Minister Naarendorp, who had significantly shaped Suriname’s foreign relations in the last one and a half year (see Chapters IV and V) withdrew from his post, this resulted in a power vacuum within the department. The Ministry was temporarily deprived of strong leadership at the critical moment of having to deal not only with strained relations with the Netherlands, but also with the United States and several Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The problem of how to respond to international condemnation of the December Murders eventually led to Bouterse calling a meeting of his most senior diplomats and foreign affairs experts. A fresh global foreign policy approach was urgently needed, even though by Christmas 1982 Naarendorp had already introduced a regional strategy aimed at informing Caribbean and Latin American governments about the ‘real’ events that had led to the executions. Therefore, in late February and early March 1983, besides Herrenberg, Heidweiler and Arnold Halfhide – Suriname’s Ambassador and Consul General in the United States – also arrived in Paramaribo to discuss with Bouterse, Naarendorp and other influential politicians the launch of a diplomatic offensive to counter the risk of becoming internationally isolated (*Trouw*, 20-1-1983:1).

The issue dominating these discussions was the deterioration of relations
between The Hague and Paramaribo. Whereas consensus was soon reached about a diplomatic offensive aimed at defending and strengthening Suriname’s international position, the relationship with the Netherlands proved to be more complex. Herrenberg’s belligerent stance was no secret and Bouterse also expressed his anger towards The Hague by accusing the Lubbers cabinet of using the unilateral suspension of aid as ‘economic blackmail with the sole aim of creating socio-economic chaos in our country in order to reimpose its political rule over our destiny’ (Trouw, 10-3-1983:1). In contrast, career diplomat Heidweiler adopted a more conciliatory tone while calling for a dialogue with The Hague: ‘Suriname is still far too dependent on the Netherlands. Consequently, there is not enough room for an intensive policy directed at countries in our own region’ (Trouw, 10-3-1983:7).

At the end of the conference a compromise – somewhere between the viewpoints of Herrenberg and Bouterse on the one hand, and Heidweiler on the other – was agreed upon and subsequently accepted by the new Alibux cabinet. This essentially entailed the adoption of a pragmatic foreign policy which would leave the ‘door open’ for further developments. In other words, although Alibux recognized the potential economic and financial benefits of an improvement in Dutch-Surinamese relations, the dominant party in his cabinet, PALU, saw the main cause of the deteriorating links primarily in the stance taken by The Hague. It was thus believed that the first step towards improved relations should come from the Lubbers cabinet. If The Hague was to revise its decision to suspend the aid, it was considered possible that relations could normalize. This non-committal position was clearly reflected in two successive statements made by Alibux. In the first, the Prime Minister noted:

> Relations [between the two states] are disturbed. We are not to blame for this. By suspending development aid the Netherlands has committed a wrongful act which has already led to considerable international condemnation. It is a hostile action taken against the Surinamese people. With this, the Netherlands has shown what it really wants to achieve with the development aid: rather than helping the people, it wants to strengthen its own political and economic interests. (Trouw, 24-3-1983:7.)

However, on 1 May 1983, during his inauguration speech, Alibux (also Foreign Minister) noticeably moderated his tone in an attempt to persuade the Dutch cabinet to reopen the flow of financial assistance. He claimed that ‘It is very likely that the Netherlands and Suriname still harbour animosity for one another. However, they can work together positively if the interests of the people of both countries are respected’ (Trouw, 2-5-1983:1). These contrasting views must not be interpreted as an ideological shift, but as an expression of the ambivalence existing within the ruling party with regard to its policy towards the Netherlands.

The nationalist and anti-colonial position of PALU was clearly represented...
in the first statement, while the second expressed the recognition that the ‘Revolution’ could only progress if funds could be gained from external sources, including the Netherlands. In other words, although the intention to propose a normalization of relations with the former colonial master by the left-wing regime may have come as a surprise to many political observers, the understanding that the revolutionary process was based on Suriname’s ability to raise financial assistance primarily from the treasuries of the industrialized world, contributed to the moderate stance adopted by Alibux in his dealings with the Netherlands.

Yet, the Lubbers cabinet showed no interest in responding to Paramaribo’s overtures, rejecting instead any attempt to allow the normalization of bilateral ties. At this point it should be remembered that, mirroring the situation in Suriname, the new Lubbers cabinet included several newcomers who attempted to introduce new policies (Gladdish 1991:63). Among them Minister for Development Cooperation Eegje Schoo, who would become notorious in Paramaribo after her announcement of the indefinite suspension of all aid to the Republic. In addition, she ensured to withdraw thirty Dutch technicians who were still working on development projects by 1 March 1983.

In other words, in view of the December Murders, the purge of the officer corps, the suspicious death of Major Horb and the rise in power of PALU, accompanied by the escalating conflict between the Dutch media and the Bouterse regime, The Hague effectively ruled out the possibility of re-establishing financial and technical assistance to Paramaribo in either the short or medium term. This position was reflected in Schoo’s statement that ‘any other destination for that money is out of the question. But certainly after the events of this week we must take into account that the development aid will be suspended for a long time to come’ (Trouw, 5-2-1983:5). The attitude adopted by the Dutch Foreign Minister, who dismissed the call for a fresh start in bilateral relations as outlined in the inauguration address of the Alibux cabinet, must likewise have been extremely frustrating for Paramaribo. In Van den Broek’s view, which was widely supported by both government and opposition parties in the Dutch parliament, as long as no serious steps were taken by the regime to introduce a redemocratization process, the Netherlands would firmly uphold its decision to suspend financial and technical assistance to the former colony (NRC Handelsblad, 3-5-1983:3).

In Suriname the Dutch rejection of Alibux’s programme led to a reorientation of PALU’s position. As it became clear that the reopening of Dutch assistance had been ruled out, the party’s nationalist and anticolonial ideology significantly affected Suriname’s foreign policy towards The Hague – resulting in abandoning what might best be described as a cautiously pragmatic approach. As a first step, Alibux once again recalled the Surinamese Ambassador from the Netherlands for consultations (Trouw, 11-5-1983:7).
Returning to The Hague one month later, a sharp intensification was recognizable in Herrenberg’s accusations levelled at the Dutch media and government, alleging culpability in attempting to overthrow the Bouterse regime: ‘As a result of the Dutch position we now stand opposite each other as enemies. And I shall behave as such’ (*Trouw*, 15-6-1983:7).

Thus, while The Hague had made it very clear that no compromise with Suriname was possible unless steps were taken towards the Republic’s redemocratization, Paramaribo began to prepare for a long diplomatic conflict. It is in this context that Herrenberg’s choice of the word ‘enemy’ must be understood. A few days later he reiterated his perception of the Netherlands as the enemy, adding threateningly that the regime would treat The Hague accordingly. A spokesperson for Herrenberg stated: ‘Here in the Netherlands they think that the Surinamese do not have a clue of what they are doing. But when we say that the Netherlands is our enemy, we will bear the consequences. This will become clear before long’ (*Trouw*, 18-6-1983:1).

Herrenberg’s remark was certainly no empty threat. In fact, as agreed during the final meeting between Alibux and Herrenberg in May, even if the Netherlands did reopen the flow of aid, the Bouterse regime would insist on redrafting the Aid Treaty. The purpose of this was to give more weight to the Republic’s interests with regard to which development projects were to be carried out and how to distribute the funds. Furthermore, the Alibux cabinet decided to downgrade the diplomatic status of Dutch-Surinamese relations to the level of a *chargé d’affaires* and also proposed a significant reduction of staff at both missions in The Hague and Paramaribo (*Trouw*, 18-6-1983:1).

No bilateral agreement on the reduction of embassy staff was needed, however, as both countries soon began to expel each other’s diplomats. Alibux took the first step with demanding the withdrawal of the Dutch diplomat Ronald Schermel from Paramaribo, accusing him of proliferating negative images of Suriname’s domestic situation in the Dutch media (*de Volkskrant*, 22-7-1983:1). The Netherlands reacted swiftly by expelling – in the same week – Glenn Alvares, the First Secretary of the Surinamese embassy in The Hague, simply stating that he had become a persona non grata (*Trouw*, 22-7-1983:1).

The gloves are off

The intensifying conflict between the Netherlands and Suriname was expressed in a variety of political manoeuvres conducted by both governments with the specific aim of weakening the opponent’s internal and external positions. In this diplomatic conflict the Netherlands obviously enjoyed a wide range

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2 Not an Ambassador represents the country, but an official of a lower rank.
of foreign policy options to pressurize Suriname, whereas Paramaribo was largely although not entirely powerless, as can be observed in its dealings with the opposition movement in exile.

At the height of the diplomatic conflict in May and June 1983, Bouterse approached some of his opponents in the Netherlands. By mid-May, special agents had convinced two leading members of the HDS, Wormer and Evert Tjon, to travel to Paramaribo to gain first-hand information about the ‘real’ developments in Suriname (*NRC Handelsblad*, 18-4-1983:2). Upon their return to the Netherlands a week later, the two men declared to have changed their position. Wormer called upon The Hague to improve relations with the regime ‘to prevent Suriname from following a path it does not want to follow’ (*Trouw*, 28-05-1983:3), while Tjon questioned the Liberation Council’s decision to elect Chin A Sen as chairman of the movement. Nevertheless, the idea of negotiating with opponents was not new as Bouterse had used a similar – although less successful – approach in September 1982 as he and Haakmat signed the so-called Akkoord van Katwijk (Katwijk Agreement), outlining democratic reforms and setting the stage for his opponent’s possible return to Suriname (Verschuuren 1994:131).

Besides the strategy of dividing the exile movement – a special task force was assembled to this end – Bouterse also decided to support a pro-regime organization in the Netherlands. For this purpose, a delegation under Sergeant Major Carlo Doedel travelled to Amsterdam in June 1983 to meet with representatives of the Liga van Surinaamse Patriotten (League of Surinamese Patriots), a pressure group only recently established with Paramaribo’s backing. One of the League’s main objectives was to voice its protest against the ‘intervention politics of the Netherlands’ (*Trouw*, 8-6-1983:3). According to its chairman Waldi Breedveld

it is about time that we counterbalance the one-sided information about our country. We must demonstrate that there are also Surinamese people who have a balanced view of the revolution. A great deal has happened in the last few months. Internally, the process has stabilized within Suriname. However, the threat from abroad still exists. (*Trouw*, 8-6-1983:3.)

Nonetheless, Suriname’s foreign policy options were relatively few and weak when compared with those available to the Netherlands. One of the most powerful tools used by The Hague was the service of Radio Nederland Wereldomroep (Radio Netherlands Worldwide), the official overseas broadcasting station in Hilversum transmitting programmes around the globe in several languages, including Dutch, Indonesian, Papiamento and Sranan Tongo (*Europa year book* 1982, 1:944). Prior to the December Murders Radio Wereldomroep had two fifty-minute programmes daily transmitted
to Suriname and as of January 1983 this service was doubled (*Trouw*, 27-1-1983:7).

Although two hundred minutes per day of foreign-radio transmission may not necessarily be seen as being sufficient to endanger the internal political stability of another country, in the case of Suriname it is important to remember that over the period of the December Murders, the NL had arrested, tortured and executed some of the Republic’s leading journalists and deliberately set fire to local radio stations and newspaper publishers. Ironically, these drastic actions had resulted in strengthening the influence of Radio Wereldomroep, particularly as all Surinamese FM radio stations had ceased to operate. With only two newspapers in print at the time, *De Ware Tijd* and *De West*, both heavily censored by the regime, the Dutch radio programme provided many Surinamese with an alternative source of information.

Even though it is difficult to estimate the actual influence exerted by Radio Wereldomroep at this critical juncture, its programmes certainly served as an important instrument of communication. For instance, the Surinamese National Liberation Army (SNLA, a guerrilla front active in East Suriname) founded at a later date, received valuable information about the policies of the Liberation Council and other anti-Bouterse organizations operating in the Netherlands, thus allowing a certain degree of cross-Atlantic cooperation between the regime’s opponents. In addition, the movement’s leader, Ronnie Brunswijk, used the radio service to address the local population and the NL about the activities of the Jungle Commando, as the SNLA was also called. His voice could be heard on Radio Wereldomroep at politically crucial moments such as in August 1986, during a violent conflict between the NL and the SNLA in Albina:

> With this, the Jungle Commando demands that Desi Bouterse withdraw all his extra troops from Albina. If this demand is not met, the Jungle Commando will strike again. Furthermore, the Jungle Commando demands that before 21 August all political prisoners and citizens unjustly arrested be freed. (Van der Beek 1987:51.)

Consequently, Paramaribo saw Radio Wereldomroep as a neocolonial instrument for Dutch intervention in Suriname’s domestic affairs. According to claims made by the Bureau van Volksmobilisatie (Bureau of People Mobilization), the station was broadcasting ‘false and misleading information’ with the intention of swinging public opinion against the Paramaribo authorities (*Trouw*, 27-1-1983:7). Bouterse was even more outspoken, as he accused the radio station of operating on behalf of the Dutch government. During an interview with the Dutch journalist Oltmans (1984:69), for instance, Bouterse expressed his anger about what he considered the Wereldomroep’s inaccurate interpretation of a government reshuffle in early 1984.
Also aggravating are the campaigns through Radio Nederland Wereldomroep, according to which Prime Minister Errol Alibux would have resigned and Iwan Krolis have gone into hiding. How does the Dutch radio benefit from continuously creating unrest among the Surinamese? The divide and rule principle of the colonial Netherlands seems to have taken firm root. The government in The Hague knows precisely what we are doing. Of course it is not concerned with democracy and human rights, it just wants to restore its former stranglehold [on Suriname]. (Oltmans 1984:69.)

Indeed, Suriname’s claim that the programmes were generally biased against the regime was well-founded since the news items aired were primarily supplied by the Dutch media. Victor Hafkamp, director of the Caribbean Section of Radio Wereldomroep, not only publicly admitted his biased sources but also justified this by arguing that the Surinamese authorities refused to provide the Dutch media with any official information. In other words, since the Surinamese cabinet had taken the decision to exclude Dutch journalists from official press conferences, the news was necessarily one-sided. Accordingly to Hafkamp:

> our goal is to provide a Dutch perspective. In our press review we do nothing more than quote what has appeared in newspapers and on radio and television. We always clearly indicate that we have read the report in this or that newspaper. We only point things out; the responsibility for the truth of the report lies with the respective newspaper (Trouw, 27-1-1983-7.)

Confronted with this powerful instrument, Paramaribo attempted to disrupt and counter Radio Wereldomroep’s transmissions. Bouterse called upon all Surinamese residing in the Netherlands who supported the Revolution to take legal action against the radio station and to occupy its offices in Hilversum. In addition, from September 1984, Radio Suriname International began to broadcast in Western Europe, where it endeavoured to provide ‘alternative’ information specifically targeted at Surinamese people in the Netherlands (NRC Handelsblad, 3-9-1984:3). These actions only had a limited effect. While the local police in Hilversum increased its security around the offices of Radio Wereldomroep to safeguard the continued operation of the station, the programmes of Radio Suriname International were plagued with reception problems, which actually raised questions about the effectiveness of this costly service (De Ware Tijd, 5-9-1984:1).

A successful strategy of swaying public opinion both in the Netherlands and in Suriname was followed by the Lubbers cabinet as it demanded an independent commission to inquire into the events surrounding the December Murders. In February 1983 the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation argued that to resume the flow of financial assistance, Paramaribo ‘has at
any moment the opportunity to take concrete steps in the direction indicated by the Dutch government’ (Trouw, 5-2-1983:5). Besides redemocratization, these measures included the launch of an independent investigation into the executions of the opponents of the regime. According to Schoo:

We must certainly cast severe doubt on the position of the Surinamese authorities that the death of fifteen people in December was an incident. There is reason for great concern. We must take into account the possibility of a more systematic violation of human rights. (Trouw, 5-2-1983:5.)

In May 1983 Dutch politicians renewed their demands for an inquiry into the December Murders. Particularly Bert De Vries (CDA), Frans Weisglas (VVD) and Henk Knol (PvdA) expressed their disappointment that Alibux, in his inauguration speech, had not distanced himself from the executions nor called for an investigation. Consequently, the Dutch parliament rejected any possibility of re-establishing the aid programme (Trouw, 3-5-1983:1). This position was reaffirmed a few days later – following the publication of a book in which it was claimed that besides Bouterse, Alibux had also been present at the executions – when the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs once again called upon Paramaribo to carry out an ‘independent and impartial investigation’ (Het Parool, 18-5-1983:7).

As was expected, Bouterse repeatedly rejected these demands. In a Dutch television interview in July 1983 he argued that ‘the Netherlands has nothing to investigate here. On the other hand, Suriname has nothing to hide. Therefore we have accepted investigation commissions from the Red Cross and the United Nations’ (Trouw, 20-7-1983:4). As a result of this deadlock and at the instigation of Foreign Affairs, The Hague eventually decided to establish its own commission. Its findings, published in June 1984 under the title Advies Commissie Mensenrechten; Hulp voor mensenrechten – Suriname en de rechten van de mens (Advice Human Rights Commission; Help for human rights – Suriname and the human rights) was a detailed account of violations carried out by the NL since the February coup. Based on investigations by the Inter-American Commission, ILO, UN Commission for Human Rights Abuses and several Surinamese religious organizations (Advies Commissie Mensenrechten 1984:10-20), the allegations raised in the report proved an influential tool in publicizing Suriname’s human rights violations and increasing the political burden on Paramaribo.

However, prior to the publication of this report The Hague itself came under pressure as yet another commission presented its findings on the coup carried out in 1980 which implicated Dutch officers. In July 1983 an investigation had been ordered by Dutch Defence Minister Jacob de Ruiter. Chairman Den Uyl (the former Prime Minister) described – foreseeing its conclusion – the
inquiry as a ‘painful affair’ (*Trouw*, 29-7-1983:1). On the basis of information provided by former SKM personnel living in the Netherlands, the commission confirmed Colonel Valk’s involvement in the February coup. To compound things further, it became known that The Hague had purposely prevented an initial investigation immediately after the military takeover which probably would have implicated the Dutch officer. Revealing this information to the government, Den Uyl’s request for further independent hearings was, unsurprisingly, rejected by Minister De Ruiter (*Het Parool*, 1-9-1983:5).

Instead, Lubbers ordered the Foreign Ministry to set up its own inquiry into the Valk affair. On 28 February 1984 the Ministry presented its report to the House of Representatives. According to its introduction as has emerged from the answer to questions put to the commission by us, it has not appeared that the leader of the Dutch Military Mission in Suriname, Colonel Valk, has participated in the preparation or execution of the [military] takeover. Neither does this seem likely to the commission. Nor has it appeared that members of the mission were involved. What does become clear from the commission’s conclusions is that the actions of Colonel Valk on a number of points are open to serious criticism (*Rapport Buitenlandse Zaken* 1984:1.)

The Dutch government thus tried to distance itself from the consequences of the February coup despite evidence pointing at Colonel Valk’s involvement in the military takeover.

As these investigations continued another point of friction developed with regard to scheduled flights between the two capitals. This time it was Paramaribo’s turn to put pressure on The Hague by reiterating its earlier threat to suspend KLM’s licence for its *goudlijntje* (golden line) to Zanderij in June 1983, a scheme the regime had already tried once before, at the end of 1982 (see Chapter II). This threat was finally carried out in October 1983, thus effectively terminating the Luchtvaartovereenkomst (Civil Aviation Treaty) of 1975. Even though Bouterse recognized that SLM would lose its licence to serve Schiphol, he refused to extend the treaty regulating the air traffic between the two states (*Het Parool*, 3-10-1983:1). This action becomes understandable since the Surinamese authorities had already negotiated with British Caledonian for an alternative Paramaribo-London-Amsterdam service (*Trouw*, 4-10-1983:1).

However, Suriname’s strategy did not pay off as at the last possible moment the Dutch Civil Aviation Authority retaliated against the regime and dismissed the British Caledonian request for a new service licence, citing as a reason ‘the exceptional circumstances’ (*Trouw*, 15-10-1983:3). This clearly indicated that the application had been rejected simply due to Suriname’s initial cancellation of KLM landing rights in Paramaribo. Meanwhile, the hundreds of passengers stranded at Zanderij and Schiphol were the real victims of this latest stage in
In search of a path

the Dutch-Surinamese conflict. Following tense negotiations between British and Dutch officials, the Dutch Civil Aviation Authority eventually allowed British Caledonian to use four smaller aircrafts to transport passengers on the Amsterdam-London leg before embarking onto a larger DC-10 for the other leg between London-Paramaribo. The catch in this arrangement was that the additional costs caused by the four extra flights between Amsterdam and London were to be covered by SLM. Consequently, this option failed to provide a permanent solution (Trouw, 26-10-1983:6).

In other words, Paramaribo’s strike against one of the Netherlands’ most prestigious companies had badly backfired as The Hague retaliated vigorously. Unfortunately for Bouterse, the need for a regular flight service was more urgent for Suriname than for the Netherlands in view of the significant commercial position held by Dutch companies in the Republic and the large number of Surinamese expatriates in the Kingdom – including Bouterse’s own relatives (Oltmans 1984:47). Vice versa, the Republic constituted only a small proportion of the total overseas market of the Netherlands while hardly any Dutch citizens resided in the former colony. As a result, the onus to resume a scheduled service between Zanderij and Schiphol lay with Paramaribo rather than with The Hague – a political development which had not been anticipated by Bouterse when rejecting the renewal of the Civil Aviation Treaty.

As an alternative to the transatlantic route via London, SLM approached the Belgian carrier Sobelair with the objective of operating direct flights between Paramaribo and Brussels. Again the Dutch authorities responded by pressurizing their Belgian counterparts to withdraw the airline’s licence for this particular route. In a bid not to upset Dutch-Belgian relations and recognizing the obvious importance The Hague attached to its ‘mission’ of isolating Paramaribo, officials in Brussels gave the airline permission for just one single flight which took place in November 1983 (Trouw, 2-11-1983:11). Meanwhile, KLM’s attempt to redirect its service to Caracas and connect with a Venezolana Internacional de Aviación (VIASA, International Airline of Venezuela) flight to Paramaribo was fruitless as, in their turn, the Surinamese authorities also denied the Venezuelan airline landing rights (de Volkskrant, 18-10-1983:3).

Following the disappointing outcome of the negotiations with Sobelair, SLM was once again forced to search for a partner. Eventually, the American carrier Arrow Air emerged as a suitable alternative to link Suriname with the Netherlands via San Juan in Puerto Rico (Trouw, 12-11-1983:3). The Dutch Aviation Authority was unable to prevent Arrow Air from serving this route, stymied by the liberal US-Dutch treaty regulating civil air transport between the two countries. As a result, regular flights were introduced in November 1983 on the Amsterdam-San Juan-Paramaribo service. In the meantime, this foolish conflict had cost both national airlines, KLM and SLM, dearly both in
terms of prestige and financial losses, not to mention considerably disrupting private and commercial links in the process. Recognizing the damage, in March 1984 The Hague and Paramaribo entered into negotiations to reopen the traditional direct service between Schiphol and Zanderij (NRC Handelsblad, 3-3-1984:1). Four months later, the service was finally resumed with the first direct flight to Paramaribo leaving Amsterdam (de Volkskrant, 13-7-1984:1).

The vigour with which the Netherlands used the transmissions by Radio Wereldomroep and defended KLM’s landing rights must have issued a sharp warning to the Surinamese leadership: The Hague did not only condemn the December Murders but was utterly opposed to the political influence of the military. The severity with which the Lubbers cabinet objected to the perceived undemocratic rule in Suriname could also be found in the use of other diplomatic tools to obstruct the Republic’s political and socio-economic development despite the knowledge that, as had been illustrated during the civil aviation conflict, it was not only the Paramaribo authorities who had to ‘pay a price’, but also the general public.

The following two cases illustrate how the Surinamese community experienced hardship due to the Dutch policy of opposing the Republic on all ‘fronts’ – both ensuing from The Hague’s decision to withhold any form of intellectual and professional assistance to Suriname. In the educational field, in December 1982, the Lubbers cabinet issued a decree preventing all universities in the Kingdom (including the University of the Netherlands Antilles) from cooperating with the Anton de Kom Universiteit, the former ‘University of Suriname’, renamed by the regime in the early 1980s (Trouw, 17-1-1986:7). This decree followed the initiative of several Dutch universities to halt all educational assistance to Suriname in protest against the fact that, besides the aforementioned journalists, a number of lawyers and business people (some of whom had been educated in the Netherlands) had been amongst the victims of the December Murders: John Baboeram, Kenneth Gonçalves, Eddy Hoost, Gerald Leckie, Sugrim Oemrawsingh, Harold Riedewald, and Somradj Sohansingh (Lagerberg 1989:125). For linguistic reasons, to a significant degree the Republic’s educational sector relied on Dutch scholars and on literature published in the Netherlands. Therefore the continued operation of higher educational institutions was severely hindered and hence both the government and the students – many of whom, ironically, in the past had participated in anti-Bouterse demonstrations – paid the price.

Even though closer contacts between the Anton de Kom Universiteit and a number of higher educational institutions in the Caribbean and Latin America had been established in the early 1980s, these universities taught either in Spanish, Portuguese, English or French. Consequently, a language barrier restricted the cooperation between tertiary educational institutions in Suriname and those in neighbouring countries. The Republic’s educational
dependence on the Netherlands was only eased after the Vrije Universiteit van Brussel (Belgium) agreed to exchange Dutch-(Flemish) speaking academics and postgraduate students with the Anton de Kom Universiteit at the beginning of 1986 (Trouw, 17-1-1986:7).

In addition to this educational boycott, The Hague followed a strategy of discouraging its officials from providing Paramaribo with professional advice, as was illustrated by the so-called Albeda affair which commenced when the Dutch Professor Willem Albeda received an invitation from the regime to work as a socio-economic advisor to President Misier in mid-1985. Albeda’s request to be allowed to take up this position was dismissed by The Hague since he, himself a former Dutch Minister of Social Affairs, was still employed as Chairman of the Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (Scientific Council for Government Policy) and in that capacity served as an advisor to the Lubbers government. In this context Van den Broek stated that, ‘under those circumstances I do not think it would be wise for him to assume such a position’ (Het Parool, 24-5-1985:3). Albeda was subsequently forced to decline Misier’s offer. Clearly, Dutch antagonism towards the officers was so absolute that the possibly moderating influence Albeda may have exercised on Paramaribo was overlooked or intentionally disregarded by politicians in The Hague.

Yet it would be wrong to argue that the Lubbers cabinet was not concerned about the well-being of the Surinamese public. Just over a year after the suspension of Dutch aid, at the start of 1984, the cabinet, supported by the main opposition parties, decided to provide its embassy in Paramaribo with Nf 100,000 for small humanitarian projects involving less than Nf 10,000 in costs each – the only stipulation being, according to Weisglas, that ‘not a cent of the 100,000 Dutch guilders ends up with the Surinamese rulers’ (NRC Handelsblad, 8-2-1984:2). In other words, some financial support was made available as long as the recipients were not linked with the regime.3

In May 1984 additional funds were offered to NGOs operating both inside and outside of the Republic. One of these was the Surinamese Student Union in the Netherlands, which received Nf 2 million from the Dutch authorities since many parents in Suriname were unable to support their sons and daughters studying overseas. Accepting some responsibility for the socio-economic difficulties experienced by the parents of these students, Minister Schoo justified these payments while arguing: ‘I think that in the coming half year part of the Surinamese population will experience hardship. I believe it is our duty to time and time again behave in a compassionate way towards the Surinamese people. These funds are a means of achieving this’ (NRC

3 These projects did not need to be approved by the Dutch cabinet or the Ministry of Development Co-operation.
Despite these noble sentiments, it must be noted that these financial measures also seemed to have an ulterior motive. The money conveniently contributed to strengthening a positive public image of the Netherlands, since the Surinamese were able to request funds directly from The Hague. By contrast, the Alibux regime was increasingly perceived in a negative light as its social expenditure was severely restricted.

These various Dutch initiatives aimed at undermining Bouterse’s rule were not only introduced within the closed framework of the bilateral relationship. The Hague also became active on a wider global level in a bid to reinforce the effects of its policies against Paramaribo. These activities included raising allegations at the UN Human Rights Conference in Geneva in February-March 1983, where the Netherlands accused the Surinamese military of gross human rights violations. The Dutch initiative – to the dismay of the regime – paid off handsomely. In the final document of the conference (see Chapter IV) human rights abuses in Suriname were cited and UN delegates designated special reporters to investigate the December Murders (United Nations 1983:5). In other words, The Hague successfully managed to direct the international spotlight onto the Republic which, in turn, led to Bouterse’s claim that the Dutch government was following a strategy designed at isolating Suriname on the global stage: ‘The Netherlands had found a reason to isolate the Surinamese revolution, to pursue economic aggression and boycott, and to launch international smear campaigns’ (Bouterse 1990:133).

Bouterse’s claim gained in validity as it became obvious that The Hague had indeed introduced initiatives aimed at preventing any external support for the regime. This became apparent when, in the summer of 1983, the Dutch Prime Minister and his Foreign Minister visited Brasilia to seek information about the nature and extent of Brazil’s relations with Suriname. During the discussions Van den Broek and Lubbers attempted to influence the policy of the Figueiredo cabinet towards its small neighbour. According to Lubbers, they attempted to persuade their Brazilian counterparts to implement ‘concrete steps that would lead to the restoration of freedom and human dignity in Suriname’ (Trouw, 2-6-1983:6). These ‘concrete steps’ included the wish that Brasilia refrain from supplying the NL with military equipment.

Shortly before the official trip of Lubbers and Van den Broek, Suriname’s Prime Minister, in a cunning move, had visited Brazil personally to secure cooperation between the two nations. Alibux’s anxiety about the Dutch delegation possibly influencing Brasilia’s position was probably the main reason for this rather pre-emptive appearance in Brazil. Upon his return, the Prime Minister publicly declared that General João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo had assured him of considerable support in a wide range of fields. This declaration forced somewhat embarrassed Brazilian cabinet members to explain to the Dutch delegation that the level of cooperation with
Suriname should not be exaggerated. Ultimately, The Hague’s attempt to cut off its former colony with the help of the Brazilians failed as Figueiredo, as will be analysed in Chapter IV, decided to cooperate to some extent both militarily and economically. What must be pointed out here, nonetheless, is the remarkable lengths to which The Hague was willing to go in order to accomplish Paramaribo’s isolation.

Evidence that the Dutch initiatives carried out at the UN conference and in Brazil were not isolated incidents revealed itself as The Hague focused its attention on financial aid allocated to Suriname by the European Community. In December 1983 Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation Schoo expressed her opposition to the Nƒ 19 million the European Community provided the regime with, arguing in the House of Representatives that ‘during negotiations within the EC the Netherlands has objected, if only for technical reasons, to this plan. Consequently, we have abstained from voting, which means as much that the Dutch government does not agree with providing this aid’ (Trouw, 9-12-1983:7). Once again, the Dutch initiative failed and the European Community ratified its Nƒ 12.3 million in aid and Nƒ 6.6 million loan to Suriname (NRC Handelsblad, 10-1-1984:3).

The termination of Dutch aid and its socio-economic consequences

Unquestionably, the most potent policy implemented by The Hague to weaken the regime’s position, was the withholding of aid. Since the effect of this policy can be best analysed from a long-term perspective, this section evaluates the Republic’s economic performance following the suspension of Dutch assistance in December 1982 until the end of Bouterse’s reign in November 1987. As such it must be realized that terminating the Aid Treaty had direct consequences not only for the Republic’s numerous development projects and the government budget, but also for the general economy. Thus, Suriname’s overall economic performance needs to be discussed in order to understand the enormous pressure on the regime in seeking alternative financial and technical resources to compensate for the loss of Dutch assistance.

As a direct result of the Aid Treaty’s termination, the Paramaribo authorities were faced with severe budgetary problems since government expenditure for development projects had traditionally played an important role. This can easily be observed in Table 7, outlining government revenue and expenditure for the period 1981-1984 (with preliminary data for 1984). Of a total expenditure of Sƒ 754 million and Sƒ 829 million for 1981 and 1982, development expenditure accounted for Sƒ 175 million and Sƒ 189 million respectively. In other words, almost a quarter of all expenditure was allocated to projects in the field of socio-economic development.
The funds for these projects were almost exclusively provided as Dutch grants. Under the heading ‘Development Account’, the paramount position of Dutch aid is overwhelmingly evident, amounting to Sf 167 million and Sf 172 million out of a total of Sf 169 million and Sf 173 million in grants received in 1981 and 1982. Consequently, following the termination of Dutch aid, the lack of development funds led to a sudden rise in the deficit of the development account from a mere Sf 6 million in 1981 and Sf 17 million in 1982, to Sf 109 million and Sf 69 million for the next two years. That these deficits did not expand any further was only possible by drastically cutting development expenditure to Sf 114 million and Sf 76 million in 1983 and 1984 respectively.

Despite these cuts, the regime’s overall budget was thrown into shambles. Whereas the data in Table 7 (presented by the Surinamese Finance Ministry) demonstrate a ‘slight’ increase in the fiscal deficit from Sf 226 million and Sf 273 million for 1981 and 1982 to Sf 316 million and Sf 287 million for the following two years, these figures must be disputed. In fact, considering that the development account deficit for 1981 amounted to Sf 6 million and adding this to the current account deficit of Sf 51 million, the actual fiscal deficit for that year came to Sf 57 million. Similarly, the fiscal deficit for 1982 amounted to only Sf 100 million. Without substantial Dutch aid, the actual fiscal deficit for 1983 and 1984 ‘exploded’ to Sf 311 million (Sf 202 million on the current account and Sf 109 million on the development account) and Sf 280 million (Sf 211 million plus Sf 69 million), respectively. Obviously, the Finance Ministry tried to ‘play down’ the effects of the withheld Dutch aid.

The dramatic impact of the termination of the Aid Treaty on Suriname’s budget deficit was emphasized in a report compiled in 1984 by the UN’s Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. According to its introduction:

The suspension of Dutch aid meant for Suriname the loss of external resources equivalent to about 9% of the gross domestic product or some 90% of total net capital inflows. The continued suspension of this aid, together with the decline in the fortunes of the bauxite sector in 1982 and 1983 and a relatively poor performance in 1984, resulted in a situation where ‘hard-core’ government expenditure could not be financed from revenues. (United Nations 1984:187.)

To avoid bankruptcy the Alibux cabinet began to finance its ‘hard-core’ expenditure, including costs for ongoing development projects, mainly by drawing on assets held by the Central Bank of Suriname. One favourite method was to appropriate loans from this bank which had been supplemented by credits from domestic commercial banks. Whereas in 1980 and 1981 government debts to these financial institutions amounted to Sf 24 and Sf 72.4 million respectively, these credits rose sharply to Sf 172.5 million in 1982 and Sf 481.3 million in 1983, before reaching Sf 739.4 million in 1984. According to the UN
Table 7. Government revenue and expenditure, 1981-1984

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Millions of Surinamese guilders</th>
<th>Growth rate</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Current income</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Direct taxes</td>
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<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect taxes</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bauxite levy</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>69</td>
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<td>Profits from Central Bank</td>
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<td>66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other non-tax revenue</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>88</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Current expenditure</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wages and salaries</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>320</td>
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<td>Subsidies and transfers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goods and services</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficit / surplus</td>
<td>-51</td>
<td>-83</td>
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Development account

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<td></td>
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<td>United Netherlands</td>
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<td>173</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29.1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>31.1</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-37.5</td>
<td>-75</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td>Other grants</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Development expenditures</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>-40.1</td>
<td>-33.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deficit / surplus</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-17</td>
<td>-109</td>
<td>-69</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>184.5</td>
<td>506.6</td>
<td>-36.4</td>
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Total expenditure

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<tr>
<td>Total expenditure</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total deficit / surplus</td>
<td>-226</td>
<td>-273</td>
<td>-316</td>
<td>-287</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>-9.3</td>
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Source: United Nations 1984:198
report cited above, the Alibux cabinet also resorted to what is known as pre-financing

in order to finance development projects, [...] the sum of Sf 50 million was advanced to the State for a period of six months commencing in January 1983 through the issue of Treasury bills, and by the end of 1983 a total of Sf 109 million had been advanced under these terms. Up to the end of October 1984, Sf 170 million had been advanced to the State. (United Nations 1984:195.)

The adoption of these strategies was alarming since they contributed to the rapid depletion of foreign reserves administered by the Central Bank (World Bank 1988:59). Commenting on these controversial practices, the UN Economic Commission remarked that

largely as a consequence of the government deficit, net foreign assets fell from Sf 163 million at the end of 1983 to Sf 57 million at the end of 1984, despite an upward revaluation of monetary gold holdings by Sf 31 million. Without the revaluation, the foreign reserves in 1983 would have stood at only Sf 131.8 million. In 1984, the continuing government deficit was the main cause of the depletion of monetary reserves. (United Nations 1984:198.)

Table 8, relating to the gold and foreign exchange reserves of the Central Bank, clearly indicates the fall in reserves as of 1982 – although it should be noted that the data published by the Central Bank differ slightly from those quoted by the UN Economic Commission. This dangerous trend would continue throughout the Bouterse era; in 1987 reserves had reached an all-time low even when compared with the level held in 1975, the year of independence, or in 1980, at the time of the coup.

The main impact of these declining foreign reserves on the overall economy was that many local companies experienced serious difficulties in financing their imports. The first signs of this alarming trend appeared in mid-1985, as imports with a total value of Sf 35 million had accumulated in warehouses at Paramaribo harbour and, despite urgent demands from the local industry, no transference of goods took place since the Surinamese companies did not have the foreign currencies necessary to pay for them (Het Parool, 23-8-1985:7). Consequently, processing activities were reduced with the upshot that the Republic’s small manufacturing sector became even more depressed (United Nations 1984:187).

The severity of this crisis was made glaringly apparent in March 1987, when one of the two daily newspapers, De Ware Tijd, was forced to halt production as it was unable to pay for printing paper, a bitter irony in a country primarily covered by forest (Het Parool, 10-3-1987:3). The newspaper’s temporary suspension came after the directors had already reduced its print run from
In search of a path

40,000 to 35,000 copies and the content from twelve to four pages. The decision of the well-established trading company Kersten to cut its workforce by 20% due to the firm’s inability to sustain its normal level of business was, similarly, attributable to the lack of imported goods and highlighted the severe impact of the shortage in foreign reserves (Het Parool, 27-4-1987:9).

Table 8. Gold and foreign exchange reserves, 1974-1987

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gold reserves</th>
<th>Foreign reserves</th>
<th>Total reserves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>132.9</td>
<td>143.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>194.7</td>
<td>205.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>231.5</td>
<td>242.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>200.4</td>
<td>211.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>273.6</td>
<td>277.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>327.2</td>
<td>331.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>379.4</td>
<td>383.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>408.1</td>
<td>412.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>330.8</td>
<td>334.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>127.8</td>
<td>162.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>-10.2</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gedenkboek Centrale Bank 1992

The decision of Alibux to finance the government’s deficit largely by drawing on assets held by the Central Bank forced the succeeding Udenhout administration (inaugurated in February 1984) (De Ware Tijd, 4-2-1984:1) to create alternative policies in an attempt to stabilize the country’s fiscal problems. However, the new cabinet had only a limited amount of time to introduce fresh policies, which became apparent when in February 1984 the newly appointed Minister for Transport, Trade, Industry, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Forestry Dr Imro Fong Poen circulated a secret report amongst his cabinet colleagues in which he outlined the imminent threat of the Republic’s financial bankruptcy (NRC Handelsblad, 16-2-1984:1).

As a solution, Fong Poen put forward a variety of policies directed at
promoting the acquisition of foreign currencies. Measures were taken to stimulate the country’s exports, including a reduction in the levy on bauxite shipments and the liberalization of trade regulations on forestry products. At the same time the imports of luxury goods were severely curtailed so as to keep the scarce foreign reserves within the Republic. By July 1985 these austerity measures had created such drastic effects, according to an article in The Economist (20-7-1985:38), that ‘the government [had] banned imports of cars, radios, videos and other luxury products’. Eventually, in the bauxite and forestry sectors at least some increases in export sales were noticeable by the end of 1984, largely as a result of export-stimulating policies. Despite such glimmers of hope, it is of critical importance to realize that the outcome of these strategies eased the difficult financial situation only temporarily and to a marginal degree.

In May 1984 Fong Poen adopted even stricter measures, primarily focusing on the prevention of capital transfers by commercial banks to overseas accounts, including the prohibition of remittance payments on profits, dividends on shares and interests on debts to individuals residing, or companies registered, outside Suriname (NRC Handelsblad, 26-5-1984:1). Then in September, the regime forced each international visitor arriving at Zanderij Airport to exchange ‘hard’ currencies for at least Sƒ 500 and those crossing the border by land at Albina or Nickerie to do so for at least Sƒ 200 (De Ware Tijd, 24-9-1984:1). Again, these policies must be questioned as the limits placed on the transfer of funds to overseas accounts and the ‘entry fee’ may well have discouraged business men and holidaymakers from engaging in any kind of economic or tourist activities in Suriname.

During the second Udenhout cabinet (from January to June 1985), some international loans were obtained, as will be discussed in Chapters IV and V, easing the delicate financial situation somewhat. However, the impact of these external credits on the economy was again only short-term, as it was only a matter of time before this practice created its own new problem: that of debt service obligation. A 1988 report published by the World Bank on the economic situation of the Caribbean emphasized this dilemma, commenting with regard to Suriname that

| the country’s external debt climbed steadily from the equivalent of 3% of GDP in 1983 to about 19.5% of GDP in 1987. Likewise, the debt service ratio has risen steadily from under 1% in 1985 to nearly 6% in 1987. Debt service obligations amounted to about 8% of central governments revenues in 1987. As of end 1987, external payments arrears stood at US$ 88 million, or about 9% of GDP. (World Bank 1988:59.) |

It was only to be expected that, as a result of the growing repayment commitments and the drop in foreign exchange reserves, the regime would increas-
ingly experience difficulties in meeting its financial obligations. In June 1985 the first signs of this problem had already appeared with the government being forced to suspend repayments on a Nf 50 million loan received from the ABN in 1975 (De Ware Tijd, 26-6-1985:1). Yet financial institutions in the Netherlands were not the only ones affected, as might be assumed in view of the severe tensions marring Dutch-Surinamese relations. As illustrated by the case concerning loans received from the Brazilian government – which Suriname was unable to repay either on time or in full – Paramaribo failed to meet its obligations on a wider range of financial advances made to the Republic.

In other words, the Surinamese administrative and economic sectors experienced enormous difficulties which were primarily caused by the suspension of the Aid Treaty. This naturally trickled down to the general population, which often held the regime directly responsible for the fall in the standard of living. The financial crisis indeed had a negative impact in this respect, which becomes clear when comparing the per capita GDP for different years. Whereas in 1983 GDP stood at Sf 2,293, it fell to Sf 1,980 in 1985 and to Sf 1,820 in 1987 (Thorndike 1989:107). More compelling were the first-hand accounts made by Surinamese people, relating difficulties experienced in daily life. In an interview conducted in Paramaribo at the end of 1983 by journalist Armand Costes for the Dutch magazine Elseviers Weekblad, a Surinamese lawyer complained that:

Well, you can say that social life here is virtually dead on its feet. We dare not say anything anymore. As soon as the waiter brings your drink, I stop speaking because I do not know which side he is on. At present it is fairly quiet in Suriname, but what will happen if the development aid is not reinstalled? I already now have to plead with the Central Bank to transfer money to my son at the HTS [Higher Technical School] in Zwolle [the Netherlands]. Last month they refused to transfer five hundred guilders, now I’m trying again. If the Dutch development aid stays away, it is definitively over. Then I will have to call my son back to Suriname even though his specialist topic is not taught here. Or I will buy guilders on the black market. In my opinion they should devalue the Surinamese guilder to the level of the Dutch one and reintroduce the free exchange of currencies. (Elseviers Weekblad 5-11-1983:8.)

Another interviewee, an accountant employed by Kersten, stated: ‘If I can no longer support my son and daughter in the Netherlands because I am not allowed to transfer money, then I will quit my job and move to the Netherlands for good. I have arranged this with my wife. I have SPD 1 and 2 [Dutch accountant’s diplomas] and I should not have much trouble to find a job in the Netherlands.’ He continued: ‘When I arrive at Schiphol and show them this (waving his Dutch passport), the customs officer will say “Good morning, Sir”’ (Elseviers Weekblad, 2-11-1983:8). A third interviewee, an office clerk with Suralco, was rather outspoken in his criticism of the military leader:
'I think that man is a disaster for our country and a cowardly killer. My entire family thinks the same, but my brother-in-law is an acquaintance of Desi’s [Bouterse] wife Ingrid and therefore he drops in from time to time' (Elseviers Weekblad, 5-11-1983:8-9).

To make matters worse, the financial crisis deepened as the bauxite industry continued to decline. Table 9 and 10 demonstrate the significant reduction in value and volume of bauxite and aluminium exports during the Bouterse era (the figures for 1987 are estimates).

Table 9. Bauxite exports in value (US$ in millions) and in volume (’000 Tons)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>1,775</td>
<td>1,268</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>988</td>
<td>1,037</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 10. Aluminium exports in value (US$ in million) and in volume (’000 tons)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>279.4</td>
<td>264.0</td>
<td>232.2</td>
<td>217.0</td>
<td>198.7</td>
<td>173.6</td>
<td>176.4</td>
<td>66.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>1,329</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>1,055</td>
<td>1,143</td>
<td>1,096</td>
<td>1,265</td>
<td>1,342</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Bearing in mind that throughout the early 1980s bauxite mining and processing accounted for about 70% of Suriname’s export earnings, the drastic decline in revenue, as illustrated in the statistics, exerted additional strains on the economy and budget. The reasons for this disappointing development can be found in the fall of world prices and shrinking global demand for aluminium since the late 1970s. Moreover, production costs in Suriname were relatively high compared with other bauxite-mining countries (United Nations 1984:191). Although the data reveal that the reduced bauxite levy, as introduced by Fong Poen at the beginning of 1984, stimulated the industry to some extent, the effects were only temporary; by 1985/1986 production had once again started to decline. Eventually, these difficulties drove Billiton and Suralco to combine their resources; early in 1984 their Surinamese operations merged into a joint venture with the aim of increasing global efficiency and competitiveness (De Ware Tijd, 15-3-1984:1).

Unfortunately, other economic sectors failed to compensate for the loss in royalties previously received from the mining companies. In fact, these sectors were experiencing their own problems with regard to stagnating activities.
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Table 11 illustrates that by 1985 exports in the wood and agricultural sectors, second in importance to the mining industry, had also fallen in monetary terms when compared with 1980, even though their share of total exports had increased during the same time period.

Table 11. Exports of major products and product groups in millions of Surinamese guilders and as a percentage, 1980-1985

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bauxite</td>
<td>132 (14%)</td>
<td>112 (13%)</td>
<td>52 (7%)</td>
<td>45 (7%)</td>
<td>71 (11%)</td>
<td>62 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumina</td>
<td>508 (55%)</td>
<td>474 (56%)</td>
<td>412 (54%)</td>
<td>358 (59%)</td>
<td>354 (55%)</td>
<td>310 (52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluminium</td>
<td>114 (13%)</td>
<td>87 (11%)</td>
<td>124 (16%)</td>
<td>62 (9%)</td>
<td>76 (12%)</td>
<td>54 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total bauxite</td>
<td>754 (82%)</td>
<td>673 (80%)</td>
<td>588 (77%)</td>
<td>492 (75%)</td>
<td>501 (78%)</td>
<td>426 (72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood prod.</td>
<td>21 (2%)</td>
<td>19 (2%)</td>
<td>21 (3%)</td>
<td>12 (2%)</td>
<td>10 (2%)</td>
<td>6 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agric. prod.</td>
<td>143 (16%)</td>
<td>154 (18%)</td>
<td>156 (20%)</td>
<td>151 (23%)</td>
<td>130 (20%)</td>
<td>160 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total exports</td>
<td>918 (100%)</td>
<td>846 (100%)</td>
<td>765 (100%)</td>
<td>655 (100%)</td>
<td>641 (100%)</td>
<td>592 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Chin and Buddingh’ 1987:153

In other words, the regime’s hope of an increased output in forestry and agricultural activities – largely through government incentives relating to operation and management – so as to become an alternative economic pillar that could reduce the Republic’s dependence on mining, failed to materialize. Although this was partly a result of the fall in global prices for farming products, there were also incidental causes, such as the Tristeza disease affecting citrus harvests and the fire destroying one of Bruynzeel’s main sawmills (United Nations 1984:189-91).

As mining, forestry and agriculture formed the basis for activities in the manufacturing sector, these difficulties inevitably resulted in the stagnation of Suriname’s local industries.

Prospects for further growth in the manufacturing sector appear to be clouded by the trend in fairly recent times towards greater government control. The 1983 legislation that prohibited laying-off workers, even in the event of contraction of economic activity, has further added to the tendency to approach new investment in the manufacturing sector very cautiously. In addition, the sector’s potential as a major foreign exchange earner is adversely affected by the country’s distance from major markets and its high production costs. (United Nations 1984:192.)

This fall in Suriname’s overall economic production brought about a reduction in direct and indirect taxes, including the bauxite levies. As demonstrated in
Table 7, when combined with the almost complete absence of development funds, these losses had a significant impact on government revenue. At the same time, government expenditure continued to rise. In fact, under the Alibux administration, wages and salaries, subsidies and transfers, plus interest payments would continue to grow steadily. In anticipation of these financial problems just days following The Hague’s termination of its aid programme, Neyhorst warned that there would be a severe shortage in funds. In a letter addressed to the military leadership dated 4 January 1983 he expressed his fears that ‘the budget year 1983 will go down in history with a budget deficit which up until now had never reached such a staggering amount’. Furthermore, Neyhorst, who had meanwhile resigned as Prime Minister, stated that ‘at least within the administration the principle should exist that expenditure will be guided as far as possible by revenue’ (Trouw, 21-3-1983:1).

Acknowledging these concerns, the regime was forced to implement policies designed at reducing the fiscal deficit, including a sharp decrease in expenditure on development. Other government expenditure was subjected to cuts whereby reduced spending on goods and services helped to bring about a noticeable decrease in overall current expenditure from Sƒ 711 million in 1983 to an estimated Sƒ 698 million in 1984 (United Nations 1984:189). Among the government services most affected by these cuts were, from the very beginning, the funds assigned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As early as January 1983 it was decided to reduce diplomatic staff at Surinamese missions. This included, for instance, cutting five staff members from the consulate in Amsterdam (Trouw, 12-1-1983:1). A year later the Ministry’s budget was once more subjected to cuts, this time necessitating a reduction in staff at various diplomatic missions. Cuba was especially affected, with the post closing for both financial and political reasons (NRC Handelsblad, 16-2-1984:15; see Chapter IV). Since these savings were still insufficient, in May 1985 Prime Minister Wim Udenhout recalled Suriname’s Ambassador to the Netherlands Heidweiler to allow him to participate in restructuring the Foreign Affairs Department and thus save additional funds from its budget (De Ware Tijd, 25-5-1985:1).

In 1986, as in previous years, Foreign Affairs was faced with a diminishing budget. Senior officials claimed that attempts were made to cut costs by drastically restructuring the Ministry, which included the introduction of a smaller yet more professional diplomatic corps. This programme also meant the temporary suspension of the planned expansion of diplomatic posts abroad, including the urgently needed increase in missions in the Caribbean and Latin America. Instead, the fields of activity of existing diplomatic posts were broadened. For instance, Suriname’s Ambassador to the United States was now also responsible for Canada, where no embassy existed, while the
Ambassador stationed in Belgium was accredited to France, Czechoslovakia and Romania. On top of this a reshuffle of positions took place in which, most importantly, Ambassador to the UN Henry Guda was replaced by Suriname’s former Ambassador to the Netherlands, Herrenberg. Finally, once again, the number of diplomatic personal was further reduced (Trouw, 8-1-1986:7).

Ironically, although the Foreign Affairs Department was saddled with the enormous responsibility of solving Suriname’s monetary problems, the repeated cuts in its budget ultimately reduced the possibility of it being able to source alternative financial openings abroad. Consequently, Bouterse realized that re-establishing Dutch aid was of the utmost importance if the survival of his regime was to be secured. In December 1982 a Surinamese commission of international lawyers had already publicly questioned ‘from where did the Netherlands derive the moral right to express in bilateral relations its supposedly moral responsibility by suspending the execution of the treaty’ (NRC Handelsblad, 23-12-1982:3). Adopting the scholars’ advice, Bouterse vented his anger at the termination of Dutch aid. In an interview with Oltmans, the Lieutenant-Colonel pointed out:

the so-called CONS Treaty does not even have or acknowledge any suspension regulations. The treaty does not allow for a suspension. Therefore, when The Hague urges us to respect and take into account the ‘rule of law’ of the constitutional state, we think that in the first place the Netherlands should take into account the rule of law. (Oltmans 1984:67.)

As a result, the Surinamese government threatened their Dutch colleagues that they would bring this issue before the International Court of Justice, ironically located in The Hague. Bouterse stepped up pressure on the Netherlands in a speech at the UN’s Annual General Meeting in October 1983, arguing that ‘the relationship between the two countries has been damaged due to arbitrary and unilateral measures of the Dutch government, steps that affect the foundations of the international system – and I may say the structure itself on which the United Nations is based’ (Trouw, 13-10-1983:8).

However, Suriname’s strategy of threatening the Netherlands with legal actions did not pay off. The Dutch government emphasized that ‘it is widely known that the Netherlands tends to fully respect its treaty obligations’ (Trouw, 13-10-1983:8), while citing the so-called fabula rebus sic statibus clause in Article 62 of the Treaty of Treaties, according to which unforeseen circumstances, severely altering the very nature of the agreement, could make it possible for a country to revoke the treaty (Meel 1990:86). According to a spokesperson

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4 The Treaty of Treaties sets out some internationally recognized rules regarding treaties signed between countries.
of the Dutch Foreign Affairs Department, the Netherlands reserved the right to decide on the Aid Treaty’s suspension since, with a direct reference to the December Murders, ‘the circumstances under which the treaty must be carried out have changed fundamentally’ (Trouw, 13-10-1983:8). This position severely weakened Suriname’s legal stance and eventually limited Paramaribo’s chances of forcing the Netherlands to re-establish its aid programme through a ruling from the International Court of Justice.

1983 proved to be the most decisive year for the Surinamese Revolution. Following the December Murders, Suriname’s traditional political and socio-economic links with the Netherlands were in turmoil. The Dutch government’s position clearly indicated its absolute opposition to the regime. Nothing less than the redemocratization of the Republic was demanded. To achieve this, the Lubbers cabinet implemented a wide range of foreign policy tools. Undeterred, Suriname, at the time led by its most left-wing regime to date, took up the challenge and tried to counter The Hague’s moves by displaying a similar level of antagonism. Within a short time, tensions between the two nations reached a new breaking point.

During this process, particularly strong pressure was exerted on Paramaribo as, following the suspension of Dutch aid, Suriname’s political and socio-economic life was disrupted to a considerable degree. Throwing the regime’s budget into chaos, Bouterse was forced to cut government spending, including the withdrawing of funds for development projects and expenses for the Foreign Affairs Ministry. In addition, to cover government costs, the regime increasingly relied on withdrawals from the Central Bank, thereby reducing its foreign reserves. This, in turn, led to a recession in the country’s manufacturing activities, accompanied by difficulties in the mining and agricultural sectors. In other words, without Dutch assistance, the survival of the Bouterse regime was in jeopardy.