



Jan Floris de Jongh (1910 – 1988), President of IASSW 1954-1961

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Jan Floris de Jongh played an undoubtedly significant role in the development of social work within and beyond The Netherlands. Yet, he and his contributions to the field are barely known, particularly in The Netherlands. His achievements warrant much more attention given that this Dutchman was also one of the most relevant figures in the international social work community.

According to data in the Amsterdam Municipal Archives, Jan Floris de Jongh was born on April 7, 1910 in Buitenzorg in the former Dutch East Indies (now Bogor, Indonesia).

[Detail from a picture in Neij / Hueting \(1989\)](#)

The archives state that he was a registered lawyer in Amsterdam in 1933 and moved to The Hague to pursue a career as a civil servant in the Ministry of Economic Affairs in 1934. In the same year, he married Nel ter Weele. During his career at the Ministry (1934-1946) he witnessed considerable changes which influenced his views of society namely, the Great Depression and the German Occupation of The Netherlands in World War II.

Academic and professional activities

Apart from his activities at the Ministry of Economic Affairs, from which some letters, notes and a bill have been left with his name (IISH Archives), he undertook research on the renewal of the Dutch political and socio-economic system. His first academic writings were on this subject. His 1945 book on the renewal of the political system, largely written during the first years of World War II, emphasised the political discussion of the time to restore pre-war principles and traditions rather than the uprooted modernism. That same year, his Ph.D. thesis investigated the role of agencies in the (German occupied) Dutch socio-economic system and in particular, the pro-German lawyers in the National Office for Food Supply in War Time and their collaboration with occupying German forces.

Shortly after the war, De Jongh became active in spreading ideas about the Dutch political system and the political responsibility of civil servants. He did so by participating and leading conferences for socio-political movements like the Woodbrookers Workers' Community, the Dutch People's Movement (which was the driving force behind the emergence of the renewed Labour Party) and the Catholic resistance movement Christofoor.

Two of the central debates in the post-war era were the extent and acceptability of governmental control in social life. De Jongh argued that only some generations before the

task of the state was practically restricted to defence, the police and judicial authorities, foreign policy, law-making and taxes. With the exception of foreign policy, the main task of the state – in the Thorbecke era, founder of the Dutch Constitution – was to create laws and implement the adopted rules of law.

The introduction of social legislation, however, created a complete set of regulations and a new government apparatus, both of which have been continuously amplified and extended ever since in areas like social insurance and social care, (e.g., poor relief, unemployment benefits, health care, child welfare), housing programmes, new socio-economic agencies and directly after the war, despite much resistance, cultural policy. As a consequence, there was an enormous increase in civil service employment (De Jongh et al. 1948).

More than ever, the WWII period raised questions about the role of the Civil Service and the types of responsibilities civil servants had in relation to political authorities. Although civil servants were supposed to be politically impartial, adhering only to the policies of the government department they worked for and controlled by elected Ministers, it was not customary to have civil servants purely follow the ideas of higher authorities.

Director of the School for Social Work in Amsterdam (1946-1964)

In 1946, De Jongh left the civil service to fill the post of Director of the School of Social Work in Amsterdam, the world's oldest school of social work. From the beginning, De Jongh presented himself as an advocate of the renewal of social work education in the Netherlands. He argued for the academisation of social work and actively promoted the integration of social work education in the plans for a Political Science Faculty at the University of Amsterdam. Together with Marie Kamphuis, another pioneer of Dutch social work, he argued that similarly to the United States and the United Kingdom, social work education should have a place in Dutch universities. Social work training should be provided at the general basic education level *and* at the university level. Social work students should be able to continue their studies at a university and pursue a doctoral degree.

This failed endeavour is said to have been a regret carried by Marie Kamphuis until the end of her life. De Jongh and Kamphuis also shared the belief in the benefits of introducing American case work in Dutch social work. Their approaches varied however in the way that Kamphuis made an extensive description of social case work and introduced it into Dutch social work while De Jongh emphasised the education of case workers.

In 1947, De Jongh was introduced to social case work through the work of the American, Bertha Reynolds. Her book *Learning and Teaching in the Practice of Social Work* (1942) had great influence on his work. He was particularly interested in a central principle of social case work referred to as Client Self-Determination. It is an old ideal from the early days of social work that De Jongh (1950) wrote extensively about: the client's right to self-determination is the beginning and the end of all thought and action of the social worker. He saw the social worker's task as only to help the client make own decisions. De Jongh published several articles on social work, in general, and on American social case work, in particular. His writings on case work concentrated on supervision, mentor-teachers and the importance of good student internships. He saw American social case work as truly democratic and believed it to be an alternative for the patronising, mothering attitude that characterised Dutch social work of the time. Ultimately, De Jongh believed social case work to be a basic method for all social work.

President of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (1954-1961)

In 1954, De Jongh was elected president of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and Katherine A. Kendall was elected secretary. In 1971 she became the IASSW's first ever full-time secretary general, a position she held until her retirement in 1978. During this whole period, both would put their stamp on the development of international social work. Over 34 years, from 1954 until the end of his life, the two exchanged many letters (now preserved in the Social Welfare History Archives of the University of Minnesota) that paint a picture of not only a fruitful cooperation, but also of a growing and everlasting friendship.

On February 16, 1954, Kendall wrote to De Jongh, who was hesitating to accept the proposed appointment: "You are much, much too modest and I am glad we persuaded you to be president if only to make you aware of the very fine qualifications you hold for this job." These qualifications, such as his understanding of social work education in Europe and the United States and his actions in initiating progressive, forward-looking movements in social work education in Holland, made him the best possible choice for the presidency according to Kendall.

The name "International Association of Schools of Social Work" was given to the original International Committee of Schools for Social Work set up in Berlin in 1929. The objective of the Committee was "to bring about an exchange of opinion and experience between schools of social work and to deal with all problems of international co-operation of these schools, such as the exchange of teachers and students, the organisation of a centre of documentation and information, the formation of international social study courses and the participation in the preparation of international congresses for social work." (IASSW 1929)

After World War II, the focus of the work of the IASSW was, alongside its reconsolidation and enhancing cooperation with the United Nations, to propagate methods of social work, in particular case work, in Europe and more specifically in Germany, as a means of democratisation.

De Jongh's presidency of the IASSW marked the transformation of a European and North-American dominated International Committee of Schools of Social Work into a truly international Association. This becomes evident in a letter he wrote to Katherine Kendall on June 21, 1956 in which he states "We must indeed try to involve more people from other than the European and North-American areas." It also is mentioned in a tribute (IASSW 1964) given to him by Eileen Younghusband: "When he took office in the late 1940's the Association was still largely confined to Europe and it was thanks to the fruitful collaboration between him and its able Honorary Secretary, Dr. Katherine Kendall, that in the succeeding years it became truly a world-wide movement, affiliating schools of social work in increasing numbers in every continent."

Younghusband's tribute (idem 1964) reveals more of the personality behind his accomplishments: "Those of us who were fortunate enough to be members of the Executive Board during Dr. De Jongh's Presidency will never forget the gracious welcome he gave to every individual Board member and how much he knew about social work developments in each of their countries. Nor shall we forget the skill and clarity with which he led us through often intricate discussions, nor the delicious touches of sly humour which would often fall like a beneficent shower of rain upon dry stretches of earnest talk. He saw clearly the directions in which an international organisation like ours should move, and the schools of

social work all round the world owe him sincere gratitude for affording them the means of international association which they need at this stage of their development.”

A similar description is given by Katherine Kendall in a personal e-mail message (March 22, 2007) to the author of this article: “Greatly admired for his leadership, intelligence, scholarship, and breadth of knowledge of international affairs, he also was universally well liked for his personal qualities. Although somewhat reserved by nature, he related warmly and easily to all with whom he worked, no matter their station in life. My own connection with him from the time he became President of the IASSW until his death is an example of his ability to form deep and lasting friendships. All who worked with him in that period had much the same experience, based on his genuine interest in people, his understanding of cultural differences, and a sense of humor that was a bit understated but always there at the right moment.”

In addition to his IASSW activities, De Jongh was, for a number of years, closely associated with the United Nations (UN), as the Dutch representative at the UN Social Commission, as UN Advisor to Pakistan, as Director of various UN seminars and through the then Bureau of Social Affairs.

Director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development in Geneva

In 1964, De Jongh became the first Director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in Geneva. He was not involved in founding the institute, as he stressed in a letter to Katherine Kendall on May 21, 1978: “Don’t call me the founding director of UNRISD. Say: the first director if you want (...).” UNRISD was created as part of the first UN Development Decade. The Decade emphasised a new approach to development, in which purely economic indicators of progress were seen to provide only limited insight and might conceal as much as they indicated (UNRISD Internet Site). The association between social and economic interferences was a central theme in De Jongh’s work. In his Directorship, De Jongh widened his scope of thinking along two main lines; one being the relationship between social work and social planning and the other being the transplant of Western Social Work to the Afro-Asian World. This is reflected in a letter (SWHA, March 23, 1965) stating that “In this Institute I have more than ever felt how difficult it still is to describe exactly what the contribution of social work to a healthy society can and should be and how much research is needed to specify and quantify this possible contribution, so that social work can also get its share of the nation’s resources.”

In an article published in *International Social Work* (De Jongh 1965), he discussed the contribution of social work research to social planning by asking whether the role of social workers should be extended to policy making or social planning. At that time, the turbulent sixties, it was difficult to answer this question in an unambiguous manner. De Jongh’s straightforward answer was that schools of social work should not train in the area of social policy.

As early as the 1950s, De Jongh (1953, p. 17) saw the problem of transplanting American Social Work to European countries: “The transplanting of social work evolved out of American culture cannot be expected to work so effectively in other countries. While material resources are undoubtedly important in the development of social work programmes, the more intangible cultural aspects should not and cannot be neglected. From experience in teaching casework in the Netherlands, it has been realized to a greater extent that the difference in the cultural and scientific atmosphere in Europe and in the United States is a

major factor in preventing the importation of many American casework methods to Europe.” In the 1960s, the discussion focus shifted to the problem of transplanting Western Social Work to the so-called underdeveloped countries in the Afro-Asian World. In his article entitled “Western Social Work and the Afro-Asian World” (De Jongh 1969), he argued that social work had been imported to almost all the Afro-Asian countries from the West, especially from America and had not yet taken root in those countries. In fact, social work cannot simply be transplanted to any other country, even if it is not at a great distance. In De Jongh’s words (1969, p. 24): “I have never believed in the applicability of Dutch social work to the Papuan highlands of New Guinea, but it did come as a surprise to me that Dutch social work could not make any impact on our close Benelux neighbours in Brussels, nor they on us. I have never quite believed in the French social worker’s efficacy in Timbuktu, but I have begun to see that French social work concepts cannot take root even in Geneva, though the Genevois in many ways is as French as French can be.”

His last years

During De Jongh’s stay in Geneva, the situation of Dutch social work education had become more urgent than in previous years. In his view, incompetence reigned in the government and social work had become the handmaid of the churches and, even worse, of religious organisations (SWHA, Letter May 20, 1962). He returned to the Netherlands in 1967 to become Director of the Centre for the Study of Education in Changing Societies, in Amsterdam. One of the achievements of this Centre was the production of a study entitled “Primary education in Sukumaland” for which De Jongh wrote a summarising chapter and which coincided with the publication of President Nyerere’s message on “Education on Self-Reliance” (Nyerere 1967). His dissatisfaction with the Dutch situation continued in the late 1960s, as he later remarked in a January 2, 1986 letter to Kendall, in which he stated that both the social work field and international development work had become extremely popular in the Netherlands with a great number of young intellectuals, mostly with strong ideological tendencies and an enormous ambition. This atmosphere was not very congenial to him and despite his activities at the University of Amsterdam, he had neither the energy nor ambition, to fight for any kind of personal position.

On a more personal level, De Jongh experienced some of his own challenges. His restless life of almost constant travel took a toll on his health, as he confessed in the same 1986 letter: “When I left Geneva in 1967 I was exhausted, completely, and I have never really regained much of my old vitality – which by the way has always been limited due to my constitution.”

On September 15, 1982, his cherished wife, Nel ter Weele, passed away, “a truly beautiful woman, inside and outside”, as Katherine Kendall described her in a letter of consolation to De Jongh (SWHA, October 20, 1982). In De Jongh’s reply (SWHA, October 26, 1982) he described the character of his relationship with Nel as follows: “It seems to me that, whatever pleasure I got from my work, whatever energy I put into it, the essence of all that was mainly in the pleasure and satisfaction it gave to Nel, the joy of life she radiated. And so it is quite true what you write: that we are central to each other’s life. And that also explains the feeling of senselessness, which now so often threatens to empower me, the feeling what sense can life have now that she is no more there? Yes, there are my children and grandchildren and my friends, male and female, and they are very warm, but..... How else could it be? I have met her when I was 17, got engaged at 19 and married at 24, 48 years ago - a life time.”

Final word

Jan Floris de Jongh had a full and productive life, with the exception of his final years when his physical condition forced him to live in solitude, as he wrote in his last preserved letter to Kendall (SWHA, November 18, 1988). He was a distinguished leader who advanced the social work profession in the Netherlands and throughout the world in the mid-twentieth century. He made a significant contribution to advancing social work education, e.g., the academisation of social work and the introduction of American case work in Europe. Under his presidency, the IASSW moved from a mainly European and North-American membership to a truly international organisation. He helped to lay solid foundations for the United Nations' social welfare activities and greatly contributed to social development research particularly the emergence of social work in the Afro-Asian world.

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