

amsterdam,  
the netherlands  
fall 2005



# Banner Wars

[Spandoeken Oorlog]



## **preface to the american edition**

In late spring 2006, a squatter's magazine, *Lawaai*, released its first issue in Amsterdam. The magazine included news and articles about squatting in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and the rest of the world. The *spandoeken oorlog* [banner wars] was a pullout exposition that included first hand accounts of intrusive—albeit non-lethal—state repression against the political, anti-fascist squatters of A'dam. I was lucky enough to help with the original layout, and here I have redone it in a smaller zine format for an american audience.

I have removed the original accounts in dutch, leaving only the english translations. Some dutch and dutchlish (englutch?) words are common slang in the international squatter's english dialect, and they have been italicized, with bracketed translations.

Contextually, it is important to note that squatting is legal in the Netherlands, and has been for decades. Unfortunately, this may not be the case for too much longer, so many anarchists and anti-authoritarians are currently working both within and outside the system in order to keep their way of life from being further illegalized. The entire scene of politics and resistance in the Netherlands is different from ours, and it is important to avoid looking at it from an american-centric viewpoint.

The events below took place in late fall 2005.

To download Lawaai and the original Banner Wars [formatted for A3 paper], go to <http://squat.net/lawaai>

# the banner-war & its context,

## an introduction.

This extra inlay tells the story of the inhabitants of several squats in Amsterdam attacked during the so-called 'banner-war'; it was a very obvious example of state-repression and censorship of those who speak out against state-policy – in this case, the immigration policy. As in many other countries, the policy in Nederland concerning refugees and immigrants has gotten harsher over the last few years. Even though the attitude towards immigrants has never been positive and policy towards this group has always been horrible and inhuman, no minister has been so fierce, cold, blunt and brutal as our current minister of integration and immigration; Rita Verdonk. She seems to take an indecent kind of pleasure from executing inhuman policy as strictly as possible - policy that, incidentally, was mostly designed by her predecessors. Verdonk shows no mercy; 'to act firm' is her motto. Her attitude and harsh policy has evoked many reactions, positive as well as negative. For many activists, she is the face of the growing xenophobia and racism in dutch society and the dehumanization of immigrants.

In September there was a fire in one of the deportation centers of the Netherlands at Schiphol Airport. In these prisons with a very 'sober' regime, 'illegalized' people, (or those who are suspected of being illegal), are locked up; most of them are there to await deportation. Because immigration policy has gotten so much stricter, so quickly, many of these deportation centers were/are built in a great hurry; (slap-dash human pens, hurriedly put together to accommodate the growing casualties of Verdonk's immigration Policy). During this idiotically fast, en mass construction of prisons, many safety conditions were and are being neglected.

In September 2005, one could see the horrible consequence of this when 11 imprisoned people were killed in the fire at the deportation center Schiphol. Many disgusting details found their way to the outside world; about the fire, the role of the guards, the 'safety' of the complexes, (or lack of it!), and the personal stories of those who died. The fire became a scandal. Here, what was especially shocking, were the stories of guards who held people at gun point when they tried to help others or escape the fire. Verdonk's first reaction, as minister responsible for the imprisonment and deportation of these people, evoked more indignation. All she commented was that the guards had 'adequately' taken care of the situation. (As cold as if she arranged for it herself).

In response to this disgraceful event, several squats in Amsterdam hung banners out to show their anger and repulsion at what happened. Many of them referred to Rita Verdonk because she is responsible for the deportation prisons (together with the Minister of (in)Justice Donner). This critique in the form of banners was not tolerated by the mayor of the city, Job Cohen. The banners were removed with a ridiculous amount of police force; a spectacular Theatre of Repression. Apparently, critique on immigration policy is something those in power would rather not have publicly displayed. The article below is a detailed report of these events.

However, last but not least, I'd like to say something about what happened after the 'Banner War' in Amsterdam. Basically, the actions of Cohen and his armed forces boomeranged. Everywhere throughout the country, people started to hang out banners, squatters as well as non-squatters. In many cities these banners were removed as well. But for every banner that was removed, more banners appeared. There were posters made, stencils spray-painted on walls, stickers, postcards... The issue appeared everywhere... People who usually wouldn't show their opinion through a banner or another public display felt a need to speak out as well, by hanging a banner on their house or a poster in their window.

We found this story important to publish because it shows the ever-growing state repression against activists, squatters and others who don't agree with its policy. And very importantly to expose the policy of illegalization of immigrants and the way the 'illegalized' are treated. Which I would say is one of the most disgraceful practices in Dutch society today. This is something we won't let go of. We will continue to fight and resist this policy wherever we can. We won't stop, and we won't be silenced!



**part I**  
**Bilderdijkstraat 82**  
**(Friday evening &**  
**Saturday afternoon)**

**report by Jop van Galen:**

I am a volunteer at the political info center the Wilde Westen, which is established in a boarded-up, squatted coffee shop on the Bilderdijkstraat. On the ground floor we have a meeting place for local residents and activists with, amongst other things, a soup kitchen. Political meetings about different social topics are regularly being organized there and the first floor is living space for several people. On Friday evening I was visiting a friend, when, around eight, my colleagues called me. They told me the police were standing in front of the door and they wanted to kick the door in because there was a banner on the outside wall:

The message was ‘possibly’ insulting. However, we didn’t think this was reason to remove the banner; after all, the message was a direct reference to a speech minister Verdonk held for the dutch parliament as a result of the so-called Congo debate. In our opinion, and our lawyer’s, this was by no means punishable.

We were incredibly angry about the leaking of confidential asylum information to torturing, raping and murdering secret services, and about the horrible Schiphol fire. When we heard the minister’s reaction to the fire and the reproaches about this leaking of information to secret services, we thought it was necessary to express our anger. We thought hanging a banner on the outside wall was the proper way to do this.

People in the Wilde Westen decided not to open the door to the police. People asked me to come by to negotiate with the officers, because this is easier on the street than through a closed door.

When I arrived at the building the officers (as far as I can remember they were high ranked) were just leaving. I stepped towards them and introduced myself as representative of the Wilde Westen. I asked them what the problem was with the banner. They couldn’t give me a satisfactory answer, so I told them the banner was staying. I assumed responsibility for the banner and the message that was on it. I even went as far as offering myself for arrest, if prosecution was legally demanded. The police then refused to react to that. Then I offered to give them my identity to make prosecution, if necessary, possible. I had to insist strongly, then they noted down the information. They told me they were going to present this to the Public Prosecutor. Then, threatening to come back during the night, they left.

The next morning, at half past five, the place was violently raided and the banner was seized. I wasn’t there during the raid and I only have the details second hand, so I won’t say more about that. Later that day, in the afternoon, we were cleaning up the damage the raid had caused that morning. Our soup kitchen was reduced to ruins, pieces of glass from the windows were everywhere and we had to ventilate because of the huge amounts of pepper spray they’d sprayed in.

We put up a new banner that said;

**Burned alive, thanks to Rita!!!**

because we thought the removal of the first one was a brutal violation of our freedom of speech. Also, at that moment, we still expected the order to remove the banners to come from the local police. After all, the *Kinkerbuurt* [the neighborhood in which the

cafe was] police have a history of raiding to restrict the freedom of speech. For instance, there was once a decision of the court, which was crushing to the police, regarding their confiscation of posters from the Autonoom Centrum [a radical space], which is nearby.

Saturday afternoon, around half past four, a neighbor came to tell us that the riot police had just removed a banner from a building further down). Several minutes later a column of riot police vehicles stopped in front of our door. A group of group of police stepped out and started to cut at the banner with a sort of knife attached to a stick, without any warning or formal demand. While we were trying to pull the banner inside, the police went on slashing away at the banner. Luckily nobody was seriously wounded during these audacious actions. We succeeded in pulling the banner inside and thus saved it.

We hung out the banner again, after a part of the riot police drove off. A group of plain-clothes policemen directly came to observe the building, and they told us the riot police would be back soon to smash the door in, and then they would personally give us a beating. They said this while ostentatiously cracking their fingers, showing their weapons, and making cutting movements past their throats. Not the kind of behavior you may expect from a civil servant, but we were not intimidated by this. We don't allow our right to freedom of speech to be restricted through intimidation and violence. That's why we decided to barricade the front door with a sturdy beam, and to wait for the riot police to come back.

A little while later (about half past five) the riot police, indeed, came back. They brought the tram and all traffic to a standstill and beat neighbors and curious people out of the street with their batons. Meanwhile, the plain-clothes policemen were still offering threats like: "you will go out on a stretcher", and "we're going to kick the shit out of you." After the riot police were destroying our door for at least ten minutes, one of the officers gave a colleague a leg up, and the banner was ripped off the wall. Triumphantly they held it up, then the whole circus got into their vehicles and left, leaving us again with a wrecked door and an empty space on the wall. Again they didn't give us any official document or anything.

I would like to emphasize the fact that I repeatedly assumed responsibility for the banner and opened myself to prosecution. We would like to know why the police were so intent on just confiscating the banner and didn't want to prosecute. According to us there were no legal grounds for this action. Further we would like to know if it was necessary to completely destroy our doors twice, and to threaten us with grievous bodily harm. Our domestic peace was violated, and physical violence was used against visitors of our building, while the banners could also have been removed with a stepladder.



In spite of promises made by the mayor and the Public Prosecutor, and the fact that the minister wants to prosecute, I still haven't received a writ of summons. That's why I would like to send my personal details again to the *driehoek* [triangle of legal power], and I want to insist on prosecution, so the proper court procedure can have its course.

## part 2 Prins Hendrikkade 106

report from an occupant:

### October 27th 2005

I was bewildered when, on Thursday October 27th, 2005, I heard the news of the previous night. In the deportation center at Schiphol eleven people died in a fire. The policy of locking up illegalized people and the remarks of the minister concerned, who said the actions that were taken during the fire in the center were "very adequate" still fill me with shame.

In a broadcast by Netwerk on March 26th, 2004 it already came to light that in a comparable center in Zestienhoven[a small airport], people were not taken care of in a safe enough way. "Emergency situations produce problems, especially in the evenings and at night." Furthermore it turns out that, "Acute psychiatric care is not regulated". The deportation center at Schiphol came to the attention of national and regional media as well, when on March 28th, 2004, activists occupied it two weeks before its opening.

In this light you would expect the safety of the controversial deportation centers to be a subject of debate for the government. You would expect increased care; however, during the fire eleven people died in their cells. This happened even though there were serious complains about the safety a long time before. So with her statements, Rita Verdonk brought about a feeling of disgust for many people.

## October 31st 2005

In reaction to the recent statements of Minister Verdonk, and out of solidarity with the eleven deceased, their families and the survivors (who have either been deported or continue to be detained awaiting deportation) the members of my house decided to take a stand against the minister. On Monday, October 31st, 2005 we had hung a banner on the outside wall of our house, Prins Hendrikkade 106, which stated:

**Burned Alive, Thank You Rita!**

We chose this message because it's a direct reference to the statement in the media, in which Minister Verdonk described the actions during the fire as "Very adequate", although she knew eleven people had died.

## November 5th 2005

On November 5th, about a quarter to 2:00, the police rang the doorbell of our house. Several hours before that my housemates and I had had a discussion. The unconfirmed message had reached us that on the previous night the police had taken away a similar banner from a house on the Bilderdijkstraat. (Later it turned out the message on this banner read "Verdonk, Still No Blood on Your Hands?") Besides, we had seen a big, expensive passenger car parked across from our house in the morning. In the car was a man with a big camera, who was taking pictures of our house, and probably of the banner hanging on the wall. When we took notice of the man, and pointed in his direction, he dropped his camera and hastily took to his heels.

After the police rang the bell, I stepped outside the house to talk to them; I have been a police spokesperson before and so am practiced in turning a tense situation into a meaningful discussion. Because of the previous meeting with my house-

mates, I was well prepared to speak to the police about the banner. However the officer seemed to be in a hurry, the motor of his car was still running. The officer asked me to take away the banner. After I told him I was fellow owner of the banner, I said I didn't understand why the banner had to be taken away, and that I alone could not make the decision to take down the banner. The officer stated that the banner was "politically insensitive" and if we didn't take it down "the riot police would come by." I asked the officer if he could ask the person who requested that the banner be taken away for a concrete reason for this request. I told the officer I was not looking for a confrontation and if there were to be one I would hand over the banner and let a Judge decide on who's side the law was on. The officer then told me that he "did not have time for that." I then witnessed the officer calling someone and telling them we would not remove the banner. The police then immediately left. My requests for more clarity were brushed aside.

In consultation with my housemates, we decided this treatment was indecent and we were going to stick to our guns. We decided again that if the police would actually come back, we would hand over the banner under verbal protest if they would give us the reason for the removal order. We would then wait for the court case.

After sunset, around six, several police cars suddenly appeared in front of our door. I stepped outside and tried to get in to contact with the police. However, a group of police in plain clothes quickly assumed a threatening stance. One even threw an empty can to a photographer whom I met in front of my door. At this moment a group of riot police stormed around the corner and onto our street. They did this without any warning or communication towards me. The riot police pushed me and some other people away from my door, beating us with their batons.

As soon as the people upstairs in the house noticed this police force go on they started to remove the banner, after which they threw it down to the street. A riot cop picked it up and took it away with him. There was a four-year-old child in the house and we didn't want to expose him to the still unknown actions of the police. Practically at once the police left again, in the same hurry I noticed earlier that day.

Once again the police did not explain their actions and we had to learn from the news what this was really all about. Until then we hadn't been given any clarity about the police actions; not a single authority approached us.

# November 8th 2005

Because we felt violated in our freedom of speech, my housemates and I decided to hang up a new banner. In the meantime people through out the country decided to hang up banners as well. Banners and freedom of speech became national topics and were given attention from every kind of media. The messages on our new banners were:

**Verdonk, Still no blood on your hands**

**4 Banners more important than 11  
human lifes? We demand Justice!  
I want my banner back!**

When we were busy hanging up these banners on Tuesday, November 8th, 2005 we noticed at about half-past two our that street was being closed off. After deliberating with my housemates, we decided again to wait until the police got in contact with us. At that moment a housemate came home. We told her when she was standing in front of the door that it would be better if she left. She did and was arrested. A phone call from a journalist at a quarter to three made us suspect even worse. The journalist told us there was word that shots have been fired from the building and the police were looking for a black gun. (Later it turned out this controversial observation came from the police themselves).

In the program "Ter Plaats" [means "on the spot"] on AT5 [a local TV station] you can hear a recording from a police scanner in which a police officer reported to the central department "They are still shooting but I don't hear any shots." After analyzing the information and the situation we concluded it was possibly referring to a black *accudrill* [cordless electric drill] that we used to hang up the banners, which they probably mistook for a weapon. However we didn't see any police until they came to close off our street. There were only a few friends of ours standing on the street in front of the building before the police started closing off the street; they were checking to see if the banners were hanging right. The people inside and outside communicated about this.

Although we suspected foul play, we decided de-escalation was necessary. At that moment we heard about the arrest of our housemate. After finding the *accudrill*, I walked outside with it. I wanted to make contact with the police, to prevent or clear up any misun-

derstandings. With my hands in the air, the *accudrill* hanging from a small cord, I walked away from my front door step to the middle of the street, where I was clearly visible. The police shouted at me to drop the *accudrill*. I put the *accudrill* on the ground. I was arrested and brought to an old GVB-office [the public transportation company] across the street. By then a crowd of people had gathered there, including cameramen. This surprised me because I understood the police expected guns. I was taken away in a police car; the police took the *accudrill* with them on the front seat. I don't know what would have happened if I would not have come out.

I was taken to a cell at ij-tunnel [the name of a police station]. After a while I saw four other people who had also been inside the house being taken in, handcuffed, and blindfolded. I witnessed them having to undress and be searched. The police who were holding them belonged to a special squad according to the inscription on their gear (Later I saw in pictures that they had automatic weapons aimed at our house, and probably at me and my housemates as well). My housemates told me that they had decided to come out voluntarily, shortly after they had seen me being arrested. Later that evening I heard from the owner of the building, The Geldersekkade, that borders on the Prins Hendrikkade, that he was furious at the police, because the special squad had forced its way into his building and had destroyed several of his doors. The special squad never ended up at our place. In the end my housemates opened up the door themselves, when they came out voluntarily.

Sometime after that the policeman who interrogated me told me we were suspected of attempted murder. Some of my housemates who were born in other countries told me the police who interrogated them had told them they should "fuck off, get out of our country," and that they were not wanted here. We were outraged at this, even more so because the people who had put up with these insults are all working or studying here.

I was arrested at around three and at eight I was suddenly released. They did not give me any papers about my arrest. All this time it must have been clear it was about an *accudrill* and not about a weapon. Later I was told the whole thing had been broadcast on AT5.

When I came back to Prins Hendrikkade 106, I saw they had searched through our stuff. The contents of some closets had been thrown about the room while other closets hadn't been touched at all. Later we found a garbage bin filled with dog droppings in a locked closet, while the previous contents of the garbage bin were on the floor of the room. To put it mildly I suspect they didn't look after the dog all that well. Furthermore I suspect searching for a weapon with this dog wasn't the reason the police and sev-

eral unknown people without uniforms were inside the building for several hours. What the police actually came for isn't exactly clear.

On November 15, (after my lawyer informed me about this the day before) two police officers came to me door to give back the *accudrill*. If necessary we wanted to use it to hang up many more banners. At this moment we have a banner hanging outside that states:

**Banners Dont Kill  
Accudrills Dont Kill  
The Deportation Policies Do!**

### **part 3 Amstel 22**

#### **report by Sjoerd:**

My name is Sjoerd and I'm an occupant of the building Amstel 22 in Amsterdam. The building has been squatted since March 2005, after a long-term vacancy. The law couldn't establish an offense and therefore our residence isn't punishable. The building is the property of the heirs of liquidated Bertus Luske, a speculator with a very bad and violent reputation.

On October 26th 2005 there was a fire in the detention center Schipol where people were imprisoned, awaiting their deportation. Eleven people died and many were injured. Like many dutch people I was shocked and angry when I heard this. My anger only became worse when the responsible minister declared immediately that she was not to blame. I think there is a direct connection between the policies of the government towards foreigners and the eleven dead people. My housemates and I decided to hang a banner on the outside wall as a protest. Some of the other squatters in Amsterdam did the same.

We hung up our banner on Saturday October 29th. The banner was around 10 feet tall and hung from the balcony on the second floor. The message on the banner was:

**burned alive, thank you Rita!**

With this message, we wanted to say that, according to us, eleven people died because of this minister's policies. We wanted to stimulate opinions and make people think. In my opinion it is necessary for a democracy to have discussions, and therefore it's necessary to put the cat among the pigeons [a dutch idiom - to stir things up]. This banner was our means to do that.

On Friday the 4th of November, we heard from other squatters there were problems at a squat on Bilderdijkstraat 82. They also had a banner hanging on the outside wall and the police had demanded that it be taken away. The message on their banner was "Verdonk, still no blood on your hands?" This was a reference to a debate about deported refugees from Congo. The IND [immigration office] had given these people's files to the authorities of Congo, which resulted in them being tortured and in some cases probably even murdered. Verdonk declared she did not have blood on her hands because she hadn't been torturing anybody herself.

The west [a district of Amsterdam], where the squat was, often had problems with the police because the local officer doesn't really like squatters. At first everybody thought this was a local conflict, which in fact had nothing to do with the banner.

Friday night the situation at the Bilderdijkstraat escalated. The riot cops kicked the door in, beat people up, used pepper-spray and confiscated the banner. They didn't give the occupants any reason why they did this. They also didn't give them a certificate of this. This kind of news spreads very quickly in the squatter scene and everybody was tense about a possible continuation of this. Obviously, the occupants of Bilderdijkstraat were going to hang up a new banner. Everybody was nervous about how the police would react.

In the course of the day more problems arose on the Bilderdijkstraat and a little while later police appeared at a building on the Prins Hendrikkade. Again they demanded a banner should be taken away. The occupants did not respond to that.

Around 2pm a black Mercedes parked in front of our house. In the car were two men in plain clothes with ear-telephones. For about an hour and a half they observed our house. Now and then another black Mercedes drove by and stopped for a while to talk to them. By then it was clear that the police were going to come in to action. We were observed and we had contact with other squats that had already had visitors. At a certain moment AT5 came to film our banner. We pointed out the black Mercedes and when the camera was turned on the passengers, they were told that that was not allowed.

Again trouble had arisen on the Bilderdijkstraat. By telephone we were kept informed. With great display of power another banner was pulled down. Shortly after that the riot cops appeared at a

building on the Prins Hendrikkade. By then several squatters had gathered there to give moral support to the occupants. A member of the city council was also present. Without a warning the riot cops beat everybody out of the street. The occupants were told to hand over the banner or that they would come in and get it themselves. The occupants had heard from the Bilderdijkstraat how this would be done. Since there was a four year old boy in the house, and the police were obviously not afraid of using pepper-spray and other violent means, they threw the banner down.

After a short discussion it became clear we were not going to give in to this kind of censorship. According to us the freedom of speech was in danger and we were not going to cooperate. Both my housemates and I have experiences with squatting and also evictions. During and directly after the squat action in March, the building was barricaded against a possible attack by a hitsquad of the owner [a frighteningly common thing for squatters in The Netherlands to deal with]. Barricading against a violent owner is something very different from barricading against the riot cops, but still they would have some difficulties with our house. We decided we wanted to resist in a primarily symbolic way, without the use of violence. We wanted to demonstrate that this was a conscious choice, and not a lack of courage or means, by throwing water balloons at the riot cops. Without any threat, but still a clear signal. We put up a beam behind the front door, closed the hatch and filled the water balloons. To enhance the spectacle a housemate was hanging in front of the banner from a climbing rope.

Around a quarter to seven several vans of the dog brigade came in to the street, as well as press and sympathizers who had been at the Prins Hendrikkade first. Then three vans with Romeo-special squad [undercover police, called *stillen*, who are very recognizable and are used for intimidation] appeared. They jumped out and mixed with the people on the street. After that a long line of riot cop vans arrived. We counted two platoons, and on top of that the *Bra Tra* [riot cops specialized in evicting buildings]. It was clear that they didn't just want to take the banner because they could reach it easily with a ladder. The riot cops cleared the street and beat up everybody who didn't run away fast enough. Then the command car drove up to the house and summoned us to surrender the banner: "This is the police speaking! This is the second warning! Hand over the banner!" I myself never heard a first warning, nor a third. The people outside responded to this call by jeering.

In no way did they ever try to communicate with us before the summons. We never received a written message. Nobody told us what was wrong with our banner or if someone had brought charges against us. We never saw a warrant by the mayor, a writ of summons or any other



official document. Likewise they never asked us, politely, for an explanation about the banner, nor if we could remove it.

We had agreed that we would not throw the water balloons if they only came for the banner. In that case we just wanted to quickly hang up a substitute banner to show that we would not be silenced so easily. The water balloons were meant to defend our home as a soft variation of playful paint bombs or hard bricks. But they never attempted to take the banner. Directly after the summons a unit of *Bra Tra* stormed the door. They were covered by riot cops with shields. After a few hits with a sledge hammer the door appeared to be too firmly closed. We threw our first balloons and heard a chainsaw being started.

Our building, Amstel 22, is a national monument [an old house, protected under law] and determines the picture of this part of Amsterdam. The richly ornamented front door is an important part of this. At least it was, until the police's chainsaw destroyed it. We tried to defend the front door with water balloons, but they were hardly impressed. When we were out of balloons several buckets of water followed, but finally we were through.

We, the four occupants and our guests, had experienced evictions before. To a great extent evictions of squats are ritualized. There are certain rules of play and we were keeping to that. One of the most important ones is that you cease resisting actively as soon as the *Bra Tra* are inside. When the front door was destroyed almost everybody went to the living room on the first floor and waited for the *Bra Tra* to come in. A friend and I stayed on the balcony of the second floor to assist the climber who was hanging off. During actions there always has to be someone with a climber, to aid in case of emergency. The *Bra Tra* also has experience with this, and we assumed they would respect this.

With a chainsaw they took on the hatch door to the stairs. The hatch door was never meant to stop the *Bra Tra*, just the owner's hit squad. It didn't hold out for long. Making a lot of racket they stormed the living room. "You are all under arrest, on the floor now." They didn't give a reason for this. Everybody was waiting on the couch peacefully. There wasn't any resistance, the room was surveyable and the light was on. There was certainly no threat for the police at all. The woman who was sitting closest to the door shouted "Take it easy jerk!" and they immediately punched her in the face, causing a heavy nosebleed. They threw the table and other furniture through the room and shouting, threatening, pushing and pulling they forced everybody to lie on the floor. Everybody had to lie on their stomach with their hands behind their heads. We were being treated like we were dangerous terrorists. If somebody said something they would beat that person. Even after everybody was lying on the floor, they went on threatening and throwing things around the room until the chief came in.

He said, "Take it easy now, stop destroying things." That helped, and they calmed down a bit. But they were still making insulting and threatening remarks like, "bunch of cowards, please give me a reason and then you'll find out!"

We were lying on the floor and didn't respond to the remarks. The woman who was punched in her face was bleeding badly. Somebody from the *Bra Tra* took a short look at it, but thought it wasn't worth the effort to let somebody with a medical background have a look.

At that moment, I was still on the second floor on the balcony with the climber. Five men stormed up the stairs and came to a halt in the hall. They shone their lights into the room and saw us on the balcony. From the hall they yelled that we had to come out with our hands behind our heads. I refused and told them about the climber. "We don't care!" they answered. I refused again partly out of solidarity with the climber, partly because it goes against all safety rules to leave a climber alone somewhere. The *Bra Tra* yelled that if I didn't come out, they would come and get us and we would be sorry. I knew how much violence was used at the Bilderdijkstraat, so we complied to prevent this. My friend and I had to sit in the corner with our hands behind our heads while the *Bra Tra* turned the room upside down. They were extremely frustrated that they couldn't reach the climber; in the end the fire brigade plucked him out of the air. Through their walkie-talkies we followed their discussion about which laws they could use to arrest us. There were several suggestions, such as public violence or not showing identification (which they had never asked for). We were told to stand up and go downstairs; everyone was pressed against the wall outside and then pushed past the line of riot cops into the crowd. Still a bit baffled, we were welcomed by our friends who stood waiting outside while the riot cops got in to their vans and drove off without any further explanation.

I walked back to the building and saw the damage that was done. The front door was completely destroyed by the chainsaw. Naturally the hatch door had been sawn into pieces as well and the whole house was turned upside down. The living room table was destroyed as well as everything that had been previously on it, and the digital receiver for the TV was broken. On the second floor the curtains were ripped off and a full ashtray was emptied onto the computer keyboard. Its difficult for me to imagine this was necessary to confiscate a banner.

Besides the banner against minister Verdonk, another smaller banner was also confiscated. The message was:

**The Netherlands Policestate**

We'd put the banner out as a protest against the removal actions at other squats. Even if there would be legal base to remove the banner against Verdonk, this could not be the case with our other banner, on which she isn't mentioned. I suppose this banner is now decorating a police station's cafeteria. Furthermore, they also removed a black and red flag without any words on it! Why the police did this, they never told us, and we were never told why it wasn't allowed to hang up these banners. They never gave us a certificate of confiscation, nor a writ of summons for libel, defamation, mayhem, or any other kind of 'crime'.



rita verdonk: out, out, damn spot

## part 4 Amstel 22

### report from the climber:



Since Friday evening the police had been busy bothering squats that displayed banners against Verdonk. After the Wilde Westen and the Prins Hendrikkade it was clear that the Amstel was going to be next.

Although all of us think that such a violation of our democratic basic rights justified much more and heavier resistance, we still decided to keep our resistance playful and passive. We wouldn't let the police in and we wouldn't hand over the banner voluntarily. If they took the banner away, we would hang up a substitute banner. Only if they tried to break in would we wage a symbolic fight with water balloons; water isn't a weapon. To make it more difficult for them to cut off the banner, I was to hang under the banner from a climbing rope. The fact that we weren't going to throw paintbombs didn't necessarily mean that it was going to be boring. The police action was illegal and unjust, and we were going to make it as difficult as possible for them.

When the police came, I climbed over the fence of the balcony. The balcony was on the second floor [third floor, by american standards] and the ground floor was much taller than normal, so I was hanging from a considerable height. During the entire action two of my friends were to stay on the balcony for safety reasons, to intervene when necessary. This is standard procedure, whether it's for an action, mountaineering or window-cleaning.

The riot police arrived and beat everybody out of the street. Units of cops in plain clothes walked around all worked up and tried to provoke our supporters, but they were used to that and waited peacefully. From the 'command car' they demanded that we throw down the banner. People re-

sponded by jeering and, of course, we didn't throw the banner down. I then expected the *Bra Tra* to come with a ladder or a tower wagon to take away the banner. It was my job to make that more difficult, but I realized I would only slow things down a bit.

To my surprise no tower wagon came. The *Bra Tra* ran towards the building and started to batter away at the door with sledgehammers. That, of course, didn't work. It was obvious that they would do anything to get inside, and as a reaction to that the first water balloons came down. The *Bra Tra* protected themselves against the water with their shields and tried to demolish the door with chainsaws. That took a long time. Our water balloons were long gone when they finally had a hole big enough for them to fit through. The entire door was smashed to smithereens.

I knew there was a hatch door on the stairs inside and it took them at least a half an hour to get through. They stormed the living room, where most of the people were sitting. They shouted and threw stuff—plants and household goods—through the room. I was hanging outside the living room window and I had a clear view of what happened inside. There was no reason at all for those cowardly actions.

While people in the living room had to lie on the floor with their hands behind their heads, the *Bra Tra* appeared on the second floor. I heard them shouting orders at my protectors, but they refused to leave me alone. In the end they were taken away roughly. The *Bra Tra* came to the balcony and started to tug at the banner. Triumphantly they held it aloft, and then threw it down. They waved a knife and threatened to cut my rope. The knife touched my rope; one wrong movement and I would lie on the pavement. I didn't have any intention to assist my own arrest, but I was starting to become a little scared. They started to discuss what to do with me. Meanwhile, I managed to convince the riot cop with the knife that they were responsible for my safety since they had arrested my protectors and taken them away. He seemed to take that seriously and stayed with the rope. From that moment on his colleagues threatened that to just cut the rope and that I would be down nice and quick, and more of these things. Finally they told me that they would leave me there and that the fire brigade would come.

I think that it's ridiculous to deploy the fire brigade against activists. The fire brigade should always be neutral. But I was no longer able to climb back up by myself, so as far as I was concerned they could make an exception. The ladder truck arrived. I declared that I wouldn't resist and that I would come down with them. I climbed into the cabin and undid my equipment. The *Bra Tra* said I had to hurry, but the firemen allowed me time and urged

the police to stay calm. I assumed they understood that I wouldn't take unnecessary risks at such a height. They sympathized with us - after all, their barracks were filled with banners. They were even willing to drop me at the other side of the police lines, but my climbing gear had restricted my blood flow, so I definitely would not have been able to run.

When I came down, the riot cops awaited me, but the firemen told them that they had to leave me alone until the blood flow in my legs was normal again. To my surprise the riot cops then pushed me past their lines to where my fellow activists and the press awaited me. A little later I saw that the people who were inside brought out and pushed past the lines as well. Even though we were all guilty of hanging up the banner against Verdonk, nobody was arrested, or even asked for their names. I'm still angry with the mayor for using this kind of means to shut people up who are protesting against the government. This doesn't have anything to do with a constitutional state, let alone a democracy.



**Spandoeken doden niet,  
Accuboren doden niet,  
Het uitzettingsbeleid doodt wel.**

**Verdonk, nog steeds geen bloed  
aan je handen?**

**4 spandoeken belangrijker dan 11  
mensenlevens? 650 Wij eisen re-  
cht!**

**Ik wil mijn spandoek terug**

“We don’t allow our right to freedom of speech to be restricted through intimidation and violence. That’s why we decided to barricade the front door with a sturdy beam and await the riot police.”

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