



## A short history

The Nederlandse Woonbond is the Dutch national organisation of tenants. The Woonbond was founded in 1990. Three organisations that looked independently after the interests of different groups of tenants merged into one union. The Woonbond started with 110.000 members, but nowadays we represent 51,5% of all renting households. The Nederlandse Woonbond has always been associated with the International Union of Tenants.

De Nederlandse Woonbond represents over 1,5 million renting households. The Woonbond organises tenants mainly through its 548 member organisations and the residents' committees associated by them. Apart from them, there are over 6.000 individual members

## Cooperation with third parties

The organisation also has good cooperation with the central organisation for the public housing sector and - in some matters - with the private landlords' central organisation. We also confer with politicians, the (national) bureaucracy and the minister of housing. Also we often work together with organisations which are active on environmental issues and on a regular basis with organisations in the field of social care and the housing of special groups of tenants (older and/or disabled). Our member organisations operate on a local level. They mostly confer with city/state officers and their landlord.

## Major achievements in the last three years

This means the political work of the Woonbond from 2011 to 2013 has consisted mainly of defending tenants' rights, availability and affordability. This was done with a twofold strategy, that consisted of campaigning and presenting alternatives. The Woonbond organised a campaign against all of the plans and laws mentioned above, but was unable to stop most of them. There was some success: 'The right to buy' was cancelled, the rise of maximum rents was confined to ten regions with high pressure on the housing market and the income related rent rise was postponed for one year and adjusted. The rest was introduced, which made affordability a quickly increasing problem.

In spite of the political climate, there have been some positive experiences. The main results the Woonbond achieved in the last three years are 'Wonen 4.0' and the covenant energy saving rental sector. 'Wonen 4.0' is a historical agreement between four housing market parties: the home owners, the housing agents, the housing associations and the Woonbond. These four parties agreed on an radical reform of the housing system, as opposed to government policies. It featured equal treatment of home owners and tenants, a reform of tax benefits for home owners and a revision of the legislation on maximum rents and rent rise. The members of the Woonbond approved on the agreement reached with a 85% majority. Unfortunately, the governing parties chose to ignore this broadly based agreement when writing their coalition agreement.

The covenant energy saving rental sector is an agreement reached by the Woonbond, the housing associations, the commercial landlords and the government. The goal is to reduce energy consumption in rental houses by 33%.

## Current national housing policies

Since 2010 the Netherlands have had a right wing government under liberal prime minister Rutte. This has come with a serious attack on tenants, tenants' rights and the structure of the Dutch social housing system. The attacks have increased since the last elections of 2012, even though the social democrats have joined the liberals in government. Liberal minister Blok has an agenda of radical decreasing the number of houses owned by social housing associations and an increase of rent unseen in the last fifteen years.

The government in 2011 announced a plan to cut the budget of housing allowance, a plan to raise the maximum rent of every rental house with € 123 and an agreement with the EU which forbade housing associations to rent affordable houses to households with an income exceeding the modal income (€ 34.000)

In 2012 government announced a law to introduce the right to buy for 75% of the social housing sector, a law to introduce an income-related rent rise and a huge landlord tax, based on the value of the homes owned by landlord in the social sector.

The main challenge that lies ahead of Dutch tenants and the Woonbond is to find a way to prevent the demolition of the housing system. The alliance we had forged with the organisation of social landlords has ended, due to an unexpected move by the landlords. They made a deal with the minister to accept a landlord tax. In exchange for their support, the landlord have been enabled to pass the tax to the tenants. For the years to come, we will continue our resistance against this law. Affordability and availability of social housing will continue to be our key priorities.

Our members, the local tenants organisations will have a great challenge to claim their position in negotiating local housing planning. The Woonbond has been developing a training program to support its members in this cause.

### Figures social/public housing

In the Netherlands there are about 7.2 million houses, of which 60% is owner occupied. About 75 % of the total rental stock is social housing, the other 25% is commercially rented. The social rented houses are provided by 346 social housing companies.

Tenants spend 25,5% of their income on the rent. The percentage of their income spent on 'housing and heating costs' is 36,4%.

Owners spend 17,2% of their income on mortgage payments. The percentage of their income spent on 'housing and heating costs' is 25,3%

### How to acquire social rental accommodation

Only households with a yearly income of up to € 34.229 are eligible for social housing.

The possibilities to acquire social rental accommodation are different per city. The city council may or may not make a 'huisvestingsverordening', a local regulation for the distribution of houses in the social stock. 25 % did so. The way access to this distribution is given, differs a lot, as well in cities as between cities. Most common is that someone who wants a house has to register and is facilitated to react on a supplied list. Most of the time priority is given to those who registered first. There are cities, where other criteria are use as well. For example large houses are preserved for large families and cheap houses for households with low income.

Waiting time for social housing is always several years. In very popular districts/areas it may even be 15 years.