

Sixty Years of IHEU History Preserved in the Netherlands

Ruurd Ouwehand*

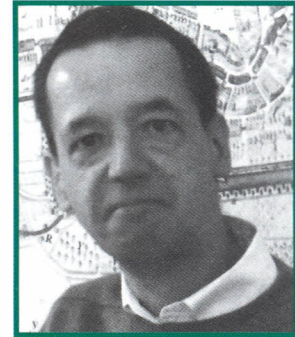
IHEU has had an inextricable relationship with the Netherlands ever since it was founded in August 1952. It was set up in the Netherlands; the founding took place in Amsterdam. The office was in the city of Utrecht for many years and its historical archive is still here in this city. With the exception of an interim period of eight years the organisation was under Dutch leadership from 1952 until 1998: Jaap van Praag, Piet Thoenes and Rob Tielman were its presidents. Many other internationally well-known Humanists, like Jan van den Ban, Theo Polet and Jan Bijleveld had links with IHEU. After 1952 no less than three World Congresses were held in the Netherlands, most recently in 2002. At the World Congress in Noordwijkerhout in 2002 a book about IHEU was presented, *International Humanist and Ethical Union 1952-2002, Past, present and future*. This book can be downloaded from the website of IHEU.

From September 2010 up to September 2012 I have been busy with the historical archive at the Het Humanistisch Historisch Centrum (HHC, Humanist

Historical Centre), in order to make an inventory. In this article I hope to present a small impression of the material I have been working with.

The IHEU archives were quite fragmented. A major part of them, covering the period 1952–1976, was deposited in 1981 at what is now called HET UTRECHTS ARCHIEF (HUA; The Utrecht Archives, formerly Rijksarchief Utrecht) as part of the Humanistisch Verbond (HV, Humanist Association) archives. Later, documents covering the period 1976–1989 were added. However, large parts of the archives still remained at the HV/IHEU Office. Moreover, one part was at the HHC, my normal working place.

It was already clear that the provisional numbering of the folders and the two-part inventory would no longer be adequate. All this made matters worse, even though the 2002 book was of great help.



*Ruurd F. Ouwehand (1965) is a historian. He has been an employee of the Humanistisch Historisch Centrum (Humanistic Historical Centre) since 2000. His main activities there include editing archives of Dutch Humanist organisations and Humanists, and helping researchers.

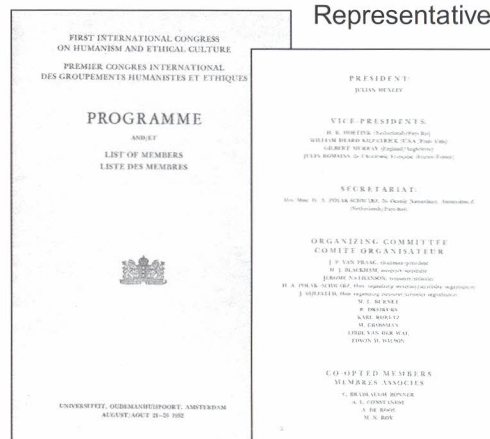
The ultimate aim was to integrate all IHEU archives into a single collection. Until then, researchers would have to make do with fragmented archives such as HV archives at the Rijksarchief Utrecht and personal IHEU archives of IHEU dignitaries or persons related to IHEU at the HCC. Now after a little more than two years of work all of this is no longer necessary. All archive sections have been integrated into one, and have one single inventory. The collection now contains more than double the original number of folders, which was exactly 550, and stretches about 20 meters. Some other figures: the general correspondence alone already contains 25 archive boxes. The oldest material is from 1947; the youngest is from 2006.

Though the archives do not contain material like original copies of annual reports of the organisation, budget estimates, statutes and regulations and the like, yet they have all documents that were necessary for the World Congresses (including the founding congress and the preparation of it!) and conferences up to 1992 are present. Also, the same is true regarding the yearly meetings of the management board (under varying names!), from the fifties until the nineties, and the obligatory annual reports from member organisations to the management board. Many documents are irreplaceable. Researchers interested in IHEU will be able to make excellent use of this material. For example, the meaning and influence of Van Praag upon the organisation can be researched. Most of the material is in English, but there is also a large part in other languages, mostly in Dutch. Many folders contain or are entirely made up of photographs, many unique.

Other documents that are unique in this archive concern the former Third World and worldwide human



rights activities. Here are some other examples of the documents that can be found in the archives: documents regarding activities of the Council of Europe and its Committees, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the IHEU



IHEU Congress 1955, Cover of 1952 programme, List of participants

Representative to the Council of Europe (1990-1996); a recording of the song 'Die Gedanken sind frei', at the 9th World Congress (1986); and clippings from the press reports on the 1st World Congress.

What is interesting to note is that the archives are a reflection of European and even world history. For instance, the breakdown of communism in Eastern Europe around 1990 resulted in a flow of contacts with Humanists in that part of the world. How they were formed and further developed can be traced here in the archive.

On Friday October 12th 2012 the archive was formally turned over to IHEU, together with archives of other Humanist organisations based in the Netherlands. Apart from a tiny section containing very personal data, the archive is now fully open to the public at the HUA, in Utrecht. The inventory, which is in English, can be found on the Internet at hetutrechtsarchief.nl.

Note:

Besides the normal work regarding the archives of Dutch Humanists and Humanist organisations the activities of the HHC include historical research as well as of the Humanist movement in the Netherlands from circa 1856 (the founding of the Dutch freethinker movement) onwards. It also serves as a documentation centre for it. Furthermore it helps journalists, researchers, and makers of TV and radio programmes on questions regarding the history of Dutch Humanism.



Building of the office of IHEU between 1957 and 1980