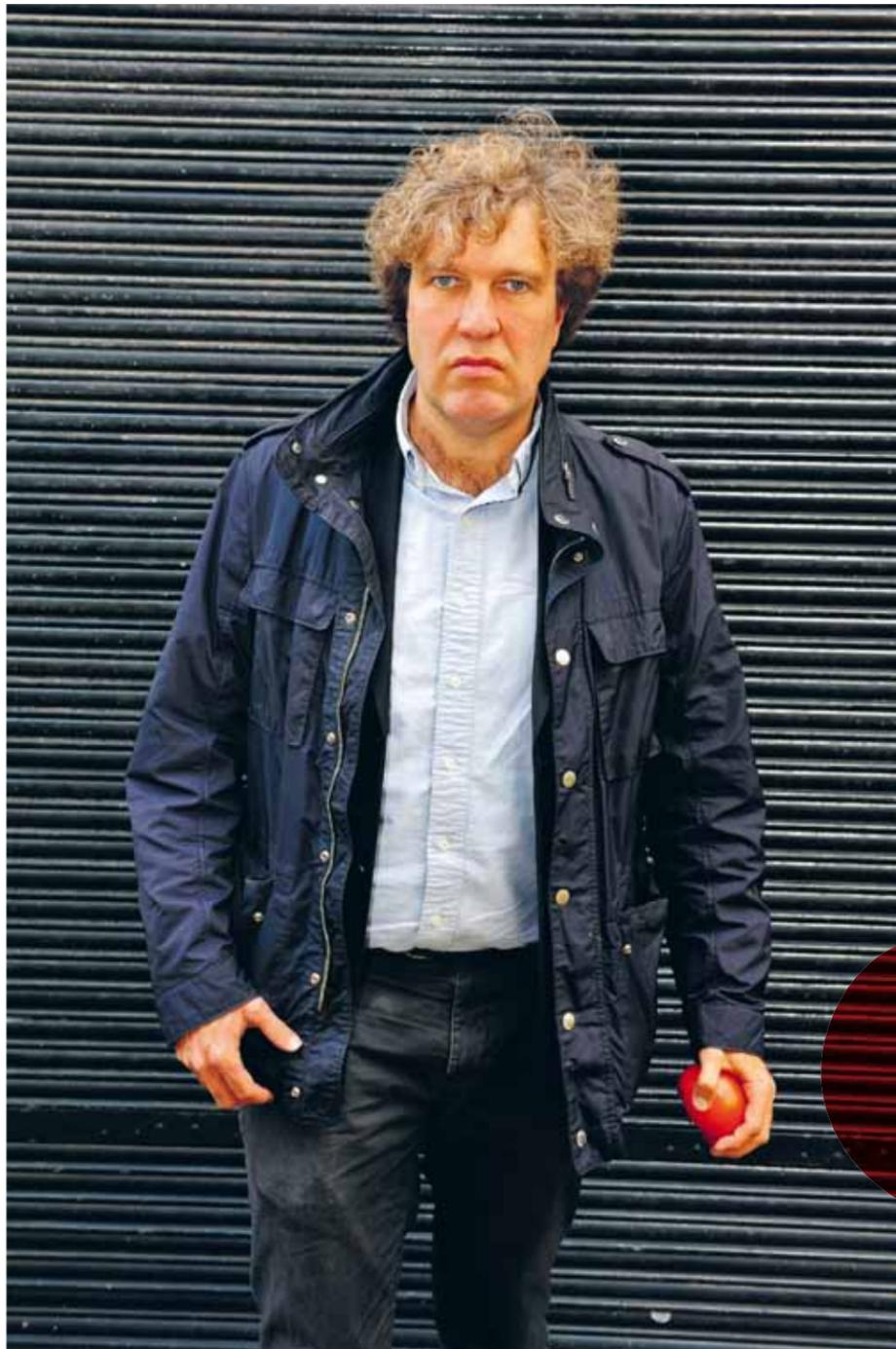


# Our man in City Hall



For each edition of The Heart we interview an Amsterdam politician. Each of them are asked ten similar questions. In this edition, Socialist Party city councilor Tiers Bakker explains what he thinks is best for Amsterdam:

Text: Dionijs de Hoog  
Image: Piet Hermans

*Dear Tiers, what do you see as the three most serious challenges for the inner city of Amsterdam?*

For me, first of all, it's about keeping the housing market healthy. I think it is important that mixed neighborhoods can continue to exist in Amsterdam. So not only rich people but also poor people can live in the neighbourhoods. From that comes the necessity, I think, to focus on reducing the influence of 'big business' - the problem is that the city is currently being bought by all kinds of investors. Fortunately, you also see a counter-movement of the city through semi-municipal housing corporations NV Zeedijk and 1012 Inc. who are now buying houses to be able to decide who comes to live in the city. Furthermore, we must stop selling social housing so that people with a lower salary can also live in the city. Third, it is important

that we keep the city livable by reducing mass tourism.

*What steps do you want to take to ensure the livability in the city?*

I already said it - we have to do something about mass tourism. Because mass tourism is, of course, also a result of 'big business'. We do this by ensuring that tourist shops do not determine the function of a street. We are currently working on a sectoring solution so that we're not only stuck with Nutella stores. It is beautiful that parties like D66 and the VVD finally see that something needs to be done.

*So - do you think that a complete ban on AirBNB is a good idea?... and is it feasible?*

AirBnB is actually a new form of capitalism. Our SP-Alderman Laurens Ivens has managed to make arrangements with them. And we have been able to discipline this form of 'sharing econo-

my' - which is really the wrong term for it. Ous is a revolutionary approach and it's really great that we've managed to do this. We have managed to get the council to agree to fines for illegal rental that are so high that people will think twice before they rent out their homes illegally.

... and if 60 days of legal rent still turns out to be too much, then legislation must

*'Amsterdam moet socialer, dat is echt de oplossing'*

change on a national level. A motion has been passed in the House of Representatives that makes it possible to investigate what should be done further. Nevertheless, we have pioneered in this respect in Amsterdam and so far our approach has proven to be effective.

*Are there any 'real Amsterdam' neighborhoods left in the city center?*

Well, as long as there is social housing, the city is accessible to everyone, then there are also real Amsterdam residents. That means also artists, students and immigrants can all live here. As soon as that is no longer the case, the city is really closed and becomes a *compound*. So it is important to build a lot of social housing and to ensure that the city remains affordable for everyone - that's really crucial.

*Do the residents of those neighborhoods need to be protected?*

The problem of protecting public housing is a problem that needs to be addressed on a national level. In particular, this concerns the landlord tax (landlords who own more than ten social housing homes have to pay a landlord levy on the value of the rented homes, *red.*) - which has to be abolished because that measure will make social housing more expensive.

*Do you think that the residential function in the city should be defended?*

Certainly - and that living function benefits most from a varied populace. Therefore, much more housing needs to be built. That's already happening

- we're already setting a new record where it comes to quantity and speed in construction. And we should do even more than this to ensure a sound and balanced construction market. In addition, this coalition has ensured - and that is a deviation from the trend in the Netherlands - that in all newly built neighborhoods (think of the Sluisbuurt) there will be a distribution of 40% social housing, 40% housing for the middle income and 20% private property. That's really unique.

*Do you believe in the effectiveness of trying to spread tourists out in the city?*  
No - and that discussion is a thing of the past now, I think. In the beginning, it was said that that had to be a solution, but soon many people realized that it did not work. For example, tourists almost always want to go to the Red Light District for example. Nevertheless, the cruise terminal is likely to be moved, only ... which is certainly not a solution for mass tourism.

*All these developments seem to have changed the atmosphere here in the inner city. Do you think 'tolerant Amsterdam' still exist?*

I always think that is a difficult concept ... because the question is: who tolerates whom? Who is the one who sets the rules for tolerance? ...but also here, I will refer to housing. The current city council has actually set up "flexible rules", with which it has terminated the sale of social housing. Tolerant rules - because this way, you are very tolerant towards those who need a backing.

*Can you describe your ideal Amsterdam for us? - what sort of Amsterdam should we long for?*

I really want a social Amsterdam - a city that offers opportunities for everyone, where you can live a healthy life... Amsterdam just needs to be more social, that's really the solution!

*What makes you happy in Amsterdam?*

Well - it's just like I said ... diversity wasn't developing too well for some time, but I feel things are getting a bit better now... the city is for all of us again. The city is open to all kinds of people, so you get a kind of cross pollination of those different kinds of people. That wasn't really very visible before in Amsterdam, but now it seems to have come back a bit ... I'm happy about that!