

6 'The *Unie*, then, was from the start not allowed to have an uncertain or shifting profile. What is the most interesting is that these historical assessments of the movement, faced with – at the very least – an ambiguity in the nature of the evidence, still chose to define the *Unie* as having belonged categorically *and from the very beginning* to one or other of the poles represented by collaboration and resistance. That they should have done so testifies to a natural unwillingness in post-war society to blur the history of occupation before either its memory had been come to terms with or its consequences fully understood. It also indicates the need to put the history of the *Unie* within the mainstream of Dutch and European post-war aspirations in which there reigned the determination to construct the basis of a better society and politics than that which had nurtured and fallen prey to fascism. This would only be achieved if the absolute distinction between fascism and its opponents was recognised and kept alive. But, above all, it reveals the unsuitability of the concepts of collaboration and resistance to encompass the history of the largest political movement ever known in the Netherlands. For the polarity of the terms prevented consideration of confused aims, of the passage from one to the other, and demanded, instead, consistency. Once the early judgements had defined their lines of battle it was not possible to argue that the history of the *Unie* was perhaps one characterised by change; that the membership, who in any case may have had many reasons for joining, had undergone some kind of conversion of attitude that took them from being willing supporters of collaboration to being equally convinced resisters. This would have been to undermine, indeed to make meaningless, the very categories used and necessary to distinguish the false from the true and to justify and define the rejection of fascism after the war. So too, it would have offended the belief, fundamental to reconstruction, in the essential good health of the national past as witnessed by its immunity from the temptations of fascism and demonstrated further by its triumphant and painless return to a democratic order after the occupation.

For these reasons historians unwittingly became prisoners of the very terms in which they try to make sense of the past. The logic of a collaborationist case led to the conclusion that close to a million Dutch people had been sympathisers with fascism. To rebut this obviously unacceptable charge could, however, be done, in only two ways. Either by abandoning the framework altogether or to face it head on and create an equal and counter resistance pedigree. But to construct a convincing lineage in this dimension required accepting that what were apparently two incompatible intentions – to work within the German occupation structure and to oppose it – were in reality one. Since it could not be claimed that there had been a change of mind as circumstances altered, it had to be proved that the *Unie* had behaved consistently. In short, the integrity of the counter case depended on the making the *Unie's* history fall *in toto* within