

I'm an alien, I'm a legal alien

by Saskia van der Linden

Red tape. After living in England for eight years, I'd almost forgotten it existed.

You can't start living in The Netherlands just like that; you need to be registered first. Once an official has confirmed you're the person you claim to be, you can start in a job. Once an employer has confirmed you're employed, you can apply for your National Insurance number. Once you have your N.I. number, you can register with a GP and dentist. And so on and so on. So, you have a big problem if you can't be registered in the first place. And I can't.

As it turns out, it's not so easy to register when you've lived abroad for a number of years. I'm surprised to hear a council worker say this when I show him my passport and proof of address. He refers me to the Immigration Service. Some friends from Oz who also live here are in hysterics: 'Now you know how we felt when we arrived!'

The Immigration Service can be brief about it. 'We can't register you here, you'll need to go back to the council.' Just like everyone else who's Dutch. For I've never given up my passport or nationality.

Yet the council refers me back to... etc.

After a couple of months of being referred backwards and forwards between both departments I'm fed up. 'Can you give me a letter in which you confirm that I'm not allowed to register with you-' I ask them both. And I add that I can then at least contact a lawyer.

The threat's effective. For the first time the departments are able to

communicate. One of them even admits to being in the wrong. I can finally be registered! It's still a shock to hear I really need to go to the Immigration Service.

And suddenly, within minutes, my registration's completed. I don't even have to sing the national anthem (which is a good thing, for I only know the first four lines...) or sum up everything that's available in coffeeshops. There's no more doubt that I'm Dutch — I'm Undutchable now, so to speak!

