

# Programme of the new Dutch government: xenophobia, welfare cuts and a stronger state

**Wolfgang Weber****10 July 2002**

Six weeks after parliamentary elections in the Netherlands, the two winning parties, the “Christian Democratic Appeal” (CDA) and the right-wing populist “List Pim Fortuyn” (LPF), have agreed on the foundations of their future government policies with the right-wing liberal People’s Party for Liberty and Democracy (VVD).

The agreement was discussed in the Dutch parliament in The Hague on July 4. New government ministers are to be appointed in the next few days. It is expected that the new government will take up office in July.

The ““fight against the inflow of immigrants”” takes pride of place in their joint programme. It is to be made even harder in future for asylum—seekers and immigrants to “penetrate into the Netherlands”. In addition, strict border controls involving the need to produce identification at all border crossings are being introduced. Incoming refugees without identification documents will no longer have any right to lodge an application for asylum, a ruling that clearly breaches human rights conventions.

Moreover, a change in the law will make illegal residency a criminal offence. A special mobile police or army unit is being formed, in order to seize and deport foreigners or rejected asylum-seekers living illegally in the country.

For those foreigners already currently residing illegally in the Netherlands—their number is estimated at approximately 100,000—there will be no amnesty and no pardon. Although many Dutch large-scale flower and vegetable growers or cleaning companies gladly rely on such cheap labour, they are to be rigorously deported.

The ability of refugee families to be united will also be made substantially more difficult, if not impossible. Immigrants who want to bring other family members to Holland must prove that they earn 30 percent above the legal minimum wage. Only children aged 12 or under

may come and join their families.

Only the wealthy, if at all, are to have the chance of setting foot in the Netherlands as immigrants or asylum-seekers. In future, every immigrant must put up 6,600 euros in cash “for the costs of their integration into Dutch society” if they want to acquire legal status and not be deported. Half of this will be refunded later, if they successfully complete the mandatory language course.

Almost 11 billion euros are to be slashed from the national budget by drastic cuts in health insurance and disability pensions, as well as by cutting staff employed in the public services.

The system of universal health insurance is being converted into a basic insurance scheme. Under this new system, every family—whether poor or rich—pays the same contribution, about 200 euros a month. At the same time, however, expensive operations and lengthy treatments are being deleted from the services that can be claimed. In future, these procedures must be paid for out of a person’s own funds or by additional private insurance. As a result, good health and a long life become the privilege of the wealthy.

A new law will regulate the disability work pension (WAO), enabling the new government to reduce the number of those eligible, currently standing at one million, by 40 percent within only three years. White and blue-collar workers whose doctors say they are unable to work will be forced to take on other jobs if they are able to perform inferior tasks. In future, psychological or nervous illnesses will not be accepted as grounds for an inability to work.

Whoever refuses to work according to the new WAO law will lose his or her right to a pension and only receive welfare assistance, which is extremely low in the Netherlands.

With unemployment currently rising and the planned reduction in the public services, it is unlikely that

somebody could return to his or her old job at the old wage rate. This new law, which is to free up 1.1 billion euros for other budget costs, will lead to the rapid impoverishment of hundreds of thousands of today's pension claimants.

After cuts imposed on hospitals and universities, another important project of the future government consists of forcing primary and secondary schools to embrace their so-called "independence". This envisages the school management being able to control their own budgets and arrange, for example, the payment of teachers according to market conditions.

In the universities and hospitals, similar measures have already led to a large number of jobs held by highly qualified scientists and specialists being transformed into temporary posts. Now schools are no longer to be organised on the basis of overall social and educational policy criteria, but according to the rules of the market.

Finally, a substantial cut in jobs and salaries in the public service is planned in the name of the "fight against the bureaucracy". The same slogan is also being employed to abolish taxes on large fortunes, while Christmas bonuses paid to employees is to be taxed or abolished and the last remaining work-creation schemes for the unemployed are being eliminated.

The worsening economic situation and the deficits this threatens to expose in the state budget will mean aggravated attacks on pensioners, unemployed persons and the poor.

After ending their discussions, the three parliamentary group leaders and negotiators—Jan Peter Balkenende (CDA), Mat Herben (LPF) and Gerrit Zalm (VVD)—said now was the time for "savings", "the time of spending" is over and the next years would be "“very hard for the Dutch”". In view of the economic situation, and threatening budgetary deficits, "unpopular measures" must be carried out.

High priority will be given to "public security" over the next years, according to the coalition agreement. How else should the witch-hunting of immigrants and the sharp welfare cuts be implemented?

The only point of argument between the three representatives was about how and when such polices should be implemented. The LPF favoured the formation and use of new army units for domestic operations against immigrants. The other parties, however, regarded a substantially stronger police as a more effective alternative. The VVD called for 5,000 new police officers, the CDA for 10,000. They finally agreed on 8,000, plus

special training programs and new equipment.

Additionally, a series of legal changes will be initiated, giving more authority to the police and increasing punishments for criminal offences.

In order to lose no time, one of these legal changes is being carried out now, under the outgoing coalition. A CDA-sponsored amendment to a legislative initiative of the present Interior and Justice ministers—both of whom belong to the social-democratic PvdA—is being pushed through parliament. Accordingly, local mayors, with agreement of the town council, can in future declare whole boroughs to be "danger areas". In these areas the police are then automatically authorised to conduct personal searches for 24 hours without requiring any concrete suspicion.

The agreement struck by the three future coalition partners unmistakably carries the signature of the recently deceased right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn, who was murdered shortly before the elections. Although the LPF, named after Fortuyn, was only formed a few weeks before the elections, it won so many votes at the first attempt that it became the second-strongest grouping, with 26 of 150 seats in parliament.

Pim Fortuyn's election campaign consisted mainly of appearing in television talk shows, in which he employed extreme xenophobic demagogic, under the slogan "the boat is full", seeking to direct popular anger over increasing social misery into racist channels. Calling for a stronger state, greater "public security" for the "ordinary citizen", and with violent attacks on the "omnipotence of the bureaucracy" and the "consolidation of the consent society", Fortuyn presented himself as the "people's spokesman" against "those at the top sitting in The Hague".

Now his slogans have become the platform of a government in The Hague which has announced to the very same "ordinary citizens of Holland" that it is prepared to use the iron hand of the state to enforce years of "“blood, sweat and tears".



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