

Corporate Netherlands mounts anti-immigrant witch-hunt

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Representatives of Dutch business have been emboldened by the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the Netherlands' political parties to mount their own racist witch-hunt to divert blame for deepening social and economic problems onto the most oppressed layers.

According to *Het Financieele Dagblaad*, Jaap Blokker announced in the annual report of Blokker Holdings that the "entire asylum and illegal immigrants industry" were responsible for most of the armed robbery in the Netherlands. Shop work, claimed Blokker, meant having "a good chance of having a pistol pushed into your face or a knife held to your throat" and most robberies were carried out by Antilleans, Moroccans or East Europeans, encouraged by politically correct and over indulgent politicians. Blokker is co-owner of the Blokker Holdings retail empire, which controls 2,400 high street shops including Intertoys, Xenos, Bart Smith, Leen Baaker, Casa and Markamer.

Blokker's comments were endorsed by MKB Nederland, an employers' federation and political lobby group that claims to represent some 125,000 small and medium sized businesses in the Netherlands. According to the *Guardian*, MKB Nederland agreed with Blokker that immigrants were committing too much crime and the government should impose longer prison sentences on those caught shoplifting. MKB Nederland claimed that the problem was particularly acute in Rotterdam, which has a high concentration of immigrants and where the far right Lisjt Pim Fortuyn (LPF) first came to prominence early this year, when it won a dominant position on the city council. An unnamed police source told the *Guardian* that ninety percent of street crime in Rotterdam was committed by immigrants, but said this was not surprising since almost half of the city's population was of "foreign

extraction."

Simultaneous with Blokker's and MKB Nederland's remarks, according to *Het Parool*, Dutch TNC Royal Philips Electronics announced that it was no longer going to offer work to unemployed migrant workers in the Netherlands on account of their inability to speak Dutch. Philips, one of the world's leading consumer electronics companies operates in 60 countries, few of whose first language is Dutch. The company has been savaging its own workforce, after suffering its largest ever losses in 2001. 12,000 of the company's 188,600 workers have been informed they will be sacked.

Besides Philips, other leading Dutch companies and financial institutions are in trouble and intensified hounding of immigrants is a predictable device for diverting attention from the stringent economic measures intended to reduce state welfare spending and defend profit margins. The Amsterdam stock exchange has been volatile, with financial giant Aegon reporting profits down 77 percent and leading bank ABN Amro recording a 60 percent fall for the first two quarters of 2002. According to the Central Planning Bureau, unemployment is expected to rise to 385,000, while the state budget deficit is expected to be four times greater than anticipated. Economic growth expectations have been reduced from 2.25 percent to 1.5 percent, triggering calls for deeper cuts in social spending than those already planned by the incoming government.

Anti-immigrant rhetoric dominated the general election and reached an unprecedented pitch after the assassination of Pim Fortuyn. Fortuyn's oft-repeated election slogan was that "the boat is full". This stance was shared by all the major parties, all of which hoped to stampede the population into accepting a wide range of anti-democratic measures on the pretext that a clampdown on immigrants would ameliorate the decay

of social conditions. Taking up where the preceding “Purple Coalition” led by the Dutch Labour Party (PvDA) left off, the new LPF/Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA)/Liberal (VVD) government has announced border patrols and increased policing to track down and deport asylum seekers and “illegal” immigrants. Whole regions will be designated danger areas, with police authorised to conduct stop and search sweeps for illegal migrants.

The Netherlands remains a wealthy country, with an economy that in 2000 was the 15th largest in the world, bigger than that of the entire Russian Federation. Its 16.2 million population is only slowly increasing. According to the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), in 2001 a mere 27,000 people successfully sought asylum in the Netherlands. Increasing numbers of those came from the former Soviet Union, Angola, Sierra Leone, and the Sudan, while claims from Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq declined. This already rather small number is falling, due to an Aliens Act introduced by the Kok government. According to the ANP news agency, one third of all asylum claims are now immediately rejected, while the rights of asylum seekers to appeal a rejection of their claim have been curtailed.

The PvDA’s clampdown on asylum rights has inevitably led to increasing numbers of migrants with no legal status whatsoever. In these conditions a rise in petty crime reflects the state of desperation to which sections of the population have been reduced. Even here, though, the numbers are small. It is estimated that between 46,000 and 110,000 people, fleeing from poverty, war and social disaster, entered the Netherlands unofficially in 2001. A report from Rotterdam’s Erasmus University noted that thousands of rejected asylum seekers exist entirely on charity handouts from social and religious organisations. The report warned that if these groups ended their support, then thousands of people would be forced onto the streets. In The Hague alone, 25 organisations are devoted to supporting rejected asylum seekers, while 40 percent of local municipalities provide no support whatsoever. In April, the city hall in the Hague was occupied by 20 rejected asylum seekers who had been evicted by the Hague council from their temporary accommodation. For its part, shortly before its collapse the PvDA government commissioned research from the

Catholic University of Brabant into methods of deporting failed asylum seekers to their country of origin.

Migrant workers who manage to retain legal status form some of the most oppressed sections of the working population. Infant mortality amongst non-Western migrants is 30 percent higher than the rest of the Dutch population, a statistic attributed to stress and poverty. Child mortality to teenage migrant mothers is 60 percent above the average. A report from the Verwey Jonker Institute reported that twice as many Turkish workers, and one and a half times as many Moroccans were “completely job disabled” and dependent on the job disability scheme (WAO). The report cited “stress of the migrants’ existence”, “persistently lower educational level” and physically more dangerous work as explanation for the statistics. In all 920,000 people were registered on the disability scheme, 20 percent of whom were migrants. The new government aims to reduce those eligible for the WAO by 40 percent.



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