

Holland: Pim Fortuyn List leads new government's right-wing assault

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The Pim Fortuyn List (LPF) has generated most of the headline policies emanating from the new Dutch government. Aware of their party's instability, the LPF's more experienced figures are losing no time in floating a raft of anti-democratic policies intended to extend the right-wing programme already agreed by the new Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) led coalition. Leading this is Hilbrand Nawijn, Minister for Immigration and Integration.

Following May elections won by the CDA, Peoples Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the LPF, the coalition adopted a policy framework outlining attacks on social spending and welfare, along with new law-and-order and anti-immigrant measures. This programme and other recently announced policies represent a sharp break with the consensus politics that dominated the Netherlands for most of the 20th century.

To date, most of the government's focus has been directed against migrants. On August 16, LPF member Hilbrand Nawijn, proposed that "illegal" immigrants should be locked up in army barracks or "departure centres" and their social support cut by 90 percent, pending deportation. Nawijn particularly targeted migrants from North Africa and Turkey and said the new government would be as "tough as possible." Scapegoating migrants for the lack of affordable housing in Dutch cities, Nawijn told Nova TV "there are lots illegal immigrants in the larger cities living in housing intended for use by Dutch people and legal foreigners..." Legislation should be introduced to this end within six months.

Next Nawijn proposed that companies found hiring "illegal" workers should be fined up to 1,800 euros. This is double the current figure and it generated a howl of protest from MKB, the medium-sized business federation. Days later, Nawijn proposed the deportation of Dutch citizens of Moroccan descent found guilty of criminal offences.

In response, Prime Minister Peter van Balkenende said that these measures were contrary to the Dutch constitution and he would speak to Nawijn about his provocative comments. Balkenende confirmed, however, that he had no problem

deporting people found guilty of crimes who were without passports or permanent residency. Van Vroonhoven, a Lower House CDA representative, also warned Nawijn about stigmatising Moroccans but insisted that his party was happy to discuss new measures against migrants convicted of crimes.

Nawijn responded to his critics by targeting Muslim cleric Khalid El Moumni, who should, according to Nawijn, be forced to leave the country because he opposed "Dutch principles". Nawijn told the *Algemeen Dagblad*: "If he breaks the law, he should be chased down, prosecuted, and sent out of the country... That counts for all criminals."

The government has initiated an "anti-terror" investigation into Holland's 800,000 Muslims and last week arrested seven men accused of connections with Al Qaeda. Nawijn later told the *Volkskrant* that he was looking at whether targeted individuals could be deprived of citizenship prior to deportation. This can be done, he claimed, on the basis of threats to national security.

Nawijn has also announced new measures to reject between 80 percent and 90 percent of all claims for political asylum. There were, he insisted, too many "fortune hunters". A new Homeland Information System containing detailed topographical information from any designated country will be developed to interrogate asylum seekers over details of their claims.

Slashing successful asylum claims (about 50 percent are currently accepted) would close numerous reception centres and hostels and cut hundreds of civil service jobs—a measure agreed in the coalition manifesto.

Civil service trade unions appear to have been mollified by reassurances from Nawijn that job losses would occur in accordance with the declining number of hostel and reception centre residents. To date, they have not issued a squeak of protest about the general thrust of Nawijn's proposals.

To stiffen up his policy on deportation, Nawijn told the *Volkskrant* that he would force local authorities to cooperate in the roundup and deportation of "illegal" migrants.

Currently, local authorities have some room for manoeuvre in their policy on people without legal status in the country. He boasted, “I will tell them: why are you spending money on illegal immigrants and rejected asylum seekers, while there are other people who need shelter.”

According to Dutch news agency, ANP, Nawijn intends to call for the removal of 30,000 Afghan refugees at a cabinet meeting on September 6. Nawijn believes that devastated Afghanistan is sufficiently safe, and Afghan refugees within the Netherlands will have to present individual asylum claims.

Hilbrand Nawijn is no mere armchair demagogue propelled into office by the sudden emergence of the LPF. He is a lawyer and former head of the Asylum Division of the Alien Affairs Department, which in 1994 became the Immigration and Naturalisation Service. Nawijn served as the leading civil servant with responsibility over immigration policy under Ruud Lubbers’ CDA government and, for a time, the recently replaced Social Democratic-led “Purple Coalition” of Wim Kok. In 1996, Nawijn became a director of KPMG management services and established his own law firm and an immigration advice centre in 2001.

His rise to prominence indicates the sharpness of the political situation in the Netherlands. It points to the recklessness of the new government as it searches for scapegoats to blame for the demolition of social gains and democratic rights demanded by Dutch business. The most telling comments against Nawijn have come from his predecessor, former Integration Policy Minister Roger van Boxtel, who warned in an interview with *Vrij Nederland*, that Nawijn’s policies could create a “Wild West democracy that disrupts society... I am concerned about the rougher climate, the cheap solutions, the polarisation.”

But the “Purple Coalition” government in which Van Boxtel served, and which was humiliated in the May elections, laid the basis for Nawijn, through lowering living standards for most of the population, slashing state welfare spending and targeting migrants.

While Nawijn has dominated the news other LPF figures have adopted an identical approach—staking out the most right-wing territory to set the terms of debate within the Balkenende government. Early August, LPF Finance Secretary Steven Van Eijck proposed to release money from a government “save-as-you-earn” scheme to give the illusion of wage increases. LPF Economics Affairs Minister Herman Heinsbroek called for tax cuts to business, lower fuel charges and housing tax cuts to be implemented earlier than agreed in the coalition manifesto, on top of 11 billion euros in cuts already agreed. As the VVD and CDA were debating the introduction of mobile courts for public order offences at football matches, Jim Janssen, an LPF MP,

called for army style boot camps for young football hooligans, who could then be recruited into the army. The LPF have also called for mandatory life sentences for child murderers and for the victims of crime to be encouraged to make court statements.

Heinsbroek also called for an advertising campaign to promote Dutch values. This should enforce respect for the family doctor, the teacher, the police and the elderly, and encourage immigrants to learn the “rules” of Dutch life, he claimed. Heinsbroek cited the media campaign carried out by US President George W. Bush in support of the “war on terror” as an example to follow.

In response, Balkenende agreed to set up a commission to defend Dutch values but called for Heinsbroek to air his differences with coalition policy within the cabinet. Heinsbroek told *Forum*, an employers’ magazine: “If he is annoyed by this, that is his problem. If I want to fly a kite, I will do that...”

Notwithstanding their prominence, the LPF are in deep and continual crisis, having recently selected their third leader in four months. They have only survived this long because the CDA and VVD rely on them.

Defence Ministry official Mat Herben, who replaced Fortuyn, resigned in early August, describing himself as “tired and worn out” and happy to have resigned. Herben had been criticised within the LPF for being pushed around during negotiations over the coalition government’s agenda. He was also attacked for supporting a Dutch government purchase of the new Joint Strike Fighter aircraft, which was opposed by Fortuyn himself, who preferred more emphasis on resurrecting Dutch imperialist naval traditions.

With opinion polls suggesting that the LPF has already lost much of its support—one poll suggested that they would now only win eight Lower House seats, compared to the 26 they currently hold—the LPF are gambling on political unknown, Harry Wijnschenk, a former motorcycle and watch magazine publisher. Thirty-eight-year-old Wijnschenk was chosen by 16 of 21 LPF MPs, in preference to former VVD alderman, Gerard van As. Wijnschenk, a former member of the Liberals, described himself as “contrary, solid, target directed, a winner and a bad loser”.



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