

The Netherlands: decisive “no” vote on European constitution

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Voters in the Netherlands have overwhelmingly rejected the proposed European Union constitution. Initial projections based on more than half the ballots cast in the June 1 referendum indicate that at least 62 percent voted against the treaty, with turnout also as high as 62 to 63 percent of the electorate.

Coming just three days after France voted massively against the constitution, the “no” vote in Holland delivers yet another blow to the plans of the European bourgeoisie to consolidate the political union of the continent—based on a document that enshrines the profit drive of the major corporations as a constitutional principle.

Indeed, it was opposition to the insistence on creating “a highly competitive social market economy” that was the main reason for the popular rejection of the constitution. Fears that European legislation would be less liberal than that of the Netherlands on many social questions—a concern raised by both right-wing and left-wing opponents of the constitution—were combined with anger at rising prices since the adoption of the euro currency and general hostility to a government that has imposed major social attacks and supported the US-led war against Iraq.

The “no” vote is a rebuff not only to the governing right-wing coalition led by Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, but to the main opposition parties who also called for a “yes” vote.

The “yes” camp comprised the ruling Christian Democrats (CDA), plus coalition partners, the Freedom and Democracy Party (VVD) and Democrats 66 (D66), as well as the opposition Social Democratic Labour Party (PvdA) and the Stalinist-led Green Left. These constituted fully 80 percent—128 of the 150 Dutch parliamentary deputies.

Opposition to the constitution and to the government

was exploited by the right-wing Pim Fortuyn List (LPF) and Geert Wilders, a former member of the VVD, who is seeking to establish a rival populist organisation based on a xenophobic stance similar to that of the LPF. The LPF dresses up its anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim stance as a defence of the liberal social traditions of the Netherlands. For his part, Wilders made anti-Muslim sentiment against Turkey becoming an EU member state central to his attacks on the constitution. Both stressed that the key issue was to preserve the national sovereignty of the Netherlands.

On this issue they were united with the former Maoists of the Socialist Party (SP), who also stressed their opposition to what they described as the constitution’s neo-liberal economic agenda and the project of creating an imperialist European militarism.

However, the “no” vote was much broader and larger than the combined political influence of all these parties could have produced. As such, it must have been more strongly influenced by fears regarding the impact of yet more liberal market reforms on living standards than would be suggested by the prominence within the official “no” campaign of the LPF and VVD—particularly given the anger generated by the already severe cuts imposed by the governing coalition.

The referendum was non-binding and could still be ignored by parliament when it meets today to discuss the results. The government had promised that it would respect the result of the referendum if turnout was above 30 percent—which was more than doubled on the day. But immediately following the ballot, Balkenende said he was personally “very disappointed” and that the ratification process should continue in other countries.

The Netherlands, with a population of 16 million, was one of the six founding members of the European Common Market and has been a bedrock of the

European Union project ever since. That it votes “nee” is perhaps not as dramatic as the “non” registered in France. But it confirms the widening gulf between the mass of European workers and the ruling elites in every country, which has thrown their plans for political union, economic counter-reform and military build-up into disarray.

German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder has also called for the ratification process to continue, but the constitution cannot come into effect unless it is ratified by all 25 EU members. A summit meeting of the European Council is due to be held on June 16-17 to discuss what to do following the votes in France and the Netherlands, and whether to abandon the constitutional treaty.

The *World Socialist Web Site* will publish a more detailed analysis of the Dutch referendum result tomorrow.



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