

New government coalition in the Netherlands

Dietmar Henning
9 October 2010

The right-wing populist and racist politician Geert Wilders is to play a major role in determining government policy in the Netherlands.

Four months after parliamentary elections, the right wing, pro-market People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) have agreed on the formation of a new government. Wilders' party will support a minority government consisting of the VVD and the Christian Democrats.

Following the announcement by the Freedom Party that they were ready to support a coalition government, two-thirds of the 5,000 delegates at a Christian Democratic congress voted in favour of the coalition proposal last Tuesday; on Saturday the CDA's 21 parliamentary deputies also voted in favour.

Although Wilders party is not directly represented in the government, it will exert considerable influence on its policies. Together the VVD and Christian Democrats have just 52 of the 150 seats in the Netherlands parliament. The additional 24 deputies of the PVV are necessary for the coalition to achieve a majority. In every policy vote the government will be dependant on the support of all Wilders' deputies.

Wilders is the answer of the ruling class to the social polarisation in the Netherlands. Before founding the extreme right-wing, anti-Islamic Party of Freedom in 2006, Wilders was a long time member of the VVD. His party has been given a warm reception by the state and the media. As the only member of his organisation, Wilders chooses candidates and delegates for the regional provincial and local councils, and for the national parliament.

Wilders' hallmark is rabid agitation against Muslims and immigrants. He denies that Islam is a religion, describes it as an ideology and has compared the Koran to Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Last Monday he appeared in court accused of inciting racial hatred and

discrimination against Muslims. The public prosecutor's office, which only brought charges following a host of private indictments, accuses him of incitement to hatred.

The program of the new government combines the strict neo-liberal economic policy of the probable head of government Mark Rutte (VVD), with Wilders' Islamophobia. The 43-year-old Rutte is calling for a "small and compact state" and drastic spending cuts, while Wilders has the job of diverting growing social tensions into xenophobic campaigns.

Immigration and domestic policy in the coalition's 46-point program and 20-page "toleration" pact are largely adapted to Wilders' policies. He has expressed his "pride" in the coalition agreement and called the contract "historic".

The contract envisages a ban on the wearing of the burqa and other face-covering articles of clothing in public buildings--a reactionary measure already instituted in France. Immigrants who fail the existing naturalisation test are to be automatically denied a residency permit. Refugees from specially designated areas will no longer be automatically accepted. The possibilities for reuniting immigrant families are also to be limited.

The new coalition also plans to tighten the country's criminal law. Police powers to search for and monitor persons without any concrete suspicion are to be expanded, along with the use of closed circuit television in public places. Penalties for the "use of force against policemen, fire fighters or emergency doctors" are to be significantly increased and a new stricter form of detention introduced for young people between 15 and 23 years old.

The country's existing liberal policy with regard to drugs such as marijuana is to be abolished. Coffee shops are to be converted into closed clubs, with admittance only on the basis of a special pass.

To implement the planned measures and “reforms” in the sphere of internal security, the right-wing coalition intends to appoint more judges, public prosecutors and investigators. For the first time since the country’s occupation by the Nazis, the government plans to set up a national police force, with 3,000 new posts envisioned.

Those sections of the coalition contract dealing with the economy and financial policy have clearly been drafted by the “pro-market” VVD.

Eighteen billion euros are to be eliminated from the budget, with seven billion coming from cuts to jobs in the public service. Development aid and health insurance are both to be cut by around a billion euros, together with payments made by the Netherlands to the European Union. Further cuts affect public broadcasting and culture.

The working life is to be increased from 65 to 66 years. In the election campaign Rutte had demanded an increase to 67 years, while Wilders had demagogically opposed any increase of the pension age. Social welfare assistance is also to be reduced in several stages up to the year 2020.

The contract is favourable to business interests with a number of concessions made to energy concerns. Nuclear power production is to be expanded in the densely populated country.

The indirect participation of Wilders in the Netherlands government marks a swing to the right in European politics. When the Austrian Christian Democrats formed a government pact with the right-wing extremist Jörg Haider ten years ago, the European Union reacted with sanctions. Since then extreme right-wing parties have taken part, directly or indirectly, in the governments of several European countries (the Northern League in Italy and the Danish People’s Party in Denmark), without evoking any official European reaction.

In other European countries, such as France and Germany, sections of the ruling class are deliberately whipping up agitation against Islam. Evoking the 1930’s, Muslims are now to take the place of Jews as scapegoats for increasing social tensions.

In Germany Chancellor Angela Merkel expressed her regret at the co-operation of her Dutch fellow party members with Wilders. At the same time, however, she stressed that the formation of new cabinets by

sovereign states should not lead to the termination of European co-operation.

The alliance with Wilders also has international support. The German daily *Die Welt* published a sympathetic interview with the conservative Dutch historian and politician Arend Jan Boekestijn, who defended both the new government in the Netherlands and the anti-Islamic tirades of Thilo Sarrazin. Boekestijn welcomed measures to expel foreigners who had committed an offence and described the plans to halve immigration “historic”. He regretted merely “that protection against dismissal is not being loosened.

Boekestijn maintained that the only way to restrain Wilders politically was to co-operate with him. The same argument is used by the VVD and Christian Democrats who declare that the integration of Wilders into government and the adoption of his racist program will serve to moderate him. The opposite is the case. The pact with Wilders is entirely to his benefit. The VVD and CDA are dependant upon him, but freed of direct responsibility for the conservative government alliance, Wilders can operate as he sees fit.

Wilders has also undertaken a number of trips abroad to peddle his racist filth, appearing in recent weeks in the US, Australia, and last Saturday in Berlin. Invited by the former Berlin Christian Deputy Union (CDU) deputy René Stadtkewitz, Wilders warned a select audience about the dangers of the “Islamisation of Germany”. Stadtkewitz, is a member of the executive of the anti-Islamic movement “Pax Europe” and resigned from the CDU in the autumn of 2009 to form his own “Freedom Party”, modelled on Wilders’ Dutch organisation.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact