

Dutch Labor Party collapses in provincial elections

Josh Varlin
10 April 2015

Last Wednesday's provincial elections in the Netherlands were a catastrophe for the ruling parties, particularly the Labor Party (PvdA, Party for the Workers). Amid mass abstention, the Liberal Party (VVD, People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) and PvdA both lost large shares of the vote, with the PvdA failing to win control of a single province.

The ex-Maoist Socialist Party (SP) gained more provincial seats than the PvdA, as well as control of Groningen province.

The pseudo-left GreenLeft (GroenLinks) group—an amalgamation of the Communist Party of the Netherlands, the Pacifist Socialist Party, the Political Party of Radicals, and the Evangelical People's Party—won only 5.3 percent of the vote. It is a member of the European Green Party within the European Parliament, where it is allied with such hardened parties of bourgeois rule as the German Greens.

Only 47 percent of the electorate went to the polls on March 18, down from 56 percent in the last provincial elections (2011) and 75 percent in the last general election (2012). General elections normally have a higher turnout than provincial elections.

The provincial elections determine the composition of the States-Provincial (provincial legislatures) in each of the country's 12 provinces. The States-Provincial then elect representatives to the Dutch Senate, the upper house of the States-General, or Parliament, in May. Within their respective provinces, the States-Provincial manage the provincial budget, including public transport, bicycle paths, cultural policy and some utilities.

The elections represented a massive loss for the “purple coalition” Rutte government of the VVD and PvdA, which already relies on opposition votes to get legislation through the Senate. Smaller parties,

including the PS, picked up large sections of the VVD and PvdA vote.

Dutch politics are now extremely fractured, with no party taking more than 16 percent of the vote. Six parties took between 10 and 16 percent of the vote, including the VVD at 15.8 percent, the PvdA at 10.1 percent, the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA-14.6 percent), Party for Freedom (PVV-11.7 percent), Democrats 66 (D66-12.3 percent), and the Socialist Party (SP-11.6 percent).

A handful of smaller single-issue parties also received increased support, including 50PLUS (focused on pensioners' rights) and Party for the Animals (PvdD), both of which received about four percent of the vote, compared to two percent in the previous provincial election in 2011.

With the ruling VVD-PvdA coalition receiving only 21 seats in a fractured 75-seat Senate, unusual political alliances and “rolling” coalitions in the upper house are likely.

VVD parliamentary leader Halbe Zijlstra alluded to this situation, saying that “The bottom line is that the country has to be governed.” That is, the VVD and PvdA will do their utmost to ensure that “necessary” austerity measures are carried through despite a divided Senate.

Mass abstention and the collapse of the PvdA vote testify to the broad social anger and alienation in the working class against the Dutch bourgeoisie's agenda of austerity. However, these sentiments find no expression in the political establishment, which offers only bourgeois parties of the far-right and pseudo-left varieties as alternatives to the PvdA and VVD.

Geert Wilders' far-right xenophobic PVV (Party for Freedom), known mostly for its anti-Islamic policies and Wilders' court battles over hate speech, will likely

take a small loss of one seat in the next Senate. As a result, some commentators have speculated that the rise of far-right parties in the Netherlands is no longer a major issue.

Whatever the short-term evolution of the electoral map in the Netherlands, such views are superficial and complacent. The rise of far-right or fascistic parties that exploit popular anger with bankrupt social-democratic parties is a well-documented phenomenon in European politics, most recently in France. (See: “New defeat for Socialist Party as neo-fascists rise in French local elections”)

As the ex-Maoist SP and the liberal-centrist D66 collaborate in austerity measures and orient themselves ever more openly to the agenda of the ruling parties, they are doing everything they can to block the development of opposition from the left, in the working class, to austerity. The PS is further integrating itself into the ruling establishment, having won control of Groningen province. It is being groomed to support government austerity policies in the Senate.

Following Syriza’s election victory in Greece, the SP issued a statement praising Syriza entitled “Hope writes history in Greece,” paraphrasing Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras’ victory speech. SP leader Emile Roemer sent congratulations to Tsipras on Syriza’s victory. However, Syriza has since capitulated to European Union demands for austerity and is imposing new cuts on the working class in Greece. (See: “The capitulation of Syriza and the lessons for the working class”)



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact