

Netherlands: Crackdown after police kill immigrant worker

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An estimated 200 people were arrested in the course of four nights of protests last week in The Hague. The disturbances began after the death a week ago of a visitor from the Caribbean, Mitch Henriquez, at the hands of police. Henriquez, the 42-year-old father of three children, had been visiting relatives in the Dutch capital and was assaulted by police after leaving a rock concert in the city's Zuiderpark.

According to police, when stopped, Henriquez claimed to have a gun and resisted arrest, but official sources later confirmed he was unarmed. An initial statement by the Dutch prosecution service also claimed Henriquez had fallen ill in a police van and officers had tried to revive him. Just hours later, however, videos circulated social networks showing Henriquez to be unconscious as three officers lifted him into the police vehicle.

One witness wrote on Facebook that Henriquez had been assaulted by six police officers, one of them beating his head and legs with a baton. At least one of the officers had held the struggling victim in a chokehold. A post-mortem examination by the Dutch prosecution service confirmed that Henriquez had died of asphyxiation.

The day after the killing, angry crowds gathered in front of the city's main police station to demand an end to police harassment of youth and immigrants. Police moved against the protesters, who responded by throwing stones and fireworks. In the next days, the protests intensified and were concentrated in the inner-city district of Schilderswijk.

The protests and demonstrations are a direct response to the poverty, miserable living conditions and years of police harassment which prevail in impoverished regions and cities in the Netherlands. The district of Schilderswijk contains three of the 10 poorest

postcodes in the Netherlands and around 85 percent of the population is made up of first- or second-generation migrants.

The city mayor, Jozias Van Aartsen, was quick to dismiss comparisons between the police brutality in The Hague and similar killings that have taken place on a much more frequent scale in the US. In a number of respects, however, the Dutch government, a coalition of the right-wing People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the Labour Party (PvdA), has sought to utilise US tactics of state repression to contain growing social opposition to the its policy of social cuts and unrelenting austerity.

Dutch police operate a US-style zero-tolerance policy in poor areas such as Schilderswijk, and Mayor Van Aartsen's first response to the riots was to declare a partial state of emergency, with a ban on all gatherings.

In addition to a zero-tolerance policy by police in working class and migrant neighbourhoods, the Dutch government has deliberately incited and encouraged racist and anti-Muslim sentiments in order to divide the opposition to its austerity policies.

Prior to forming a coalition with the Labour Party, the current prime minister, Mark Rutte, led a minority government that remained in power until 2012 via support from Geert Wilders' far-right PVV (Party for Freedom). The PVV is notorious for its relentless campaign of race baiting, in particular directed against the Muslim community in the Netherlands.

In May, Wilders was the main speaker at an exhibition of cartoons vilifying Islamism and the prophet Mohammed held in Texas and organized by the right-wing, rabidly anti-Muslim and pro-Zionist American Freedom Defense Initiative (AFDI). The exhibition sought to cash in on the anti-Muslim campaign whipped up over the terrorist attack on the

offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris last January. Two armed protesters were shot by police protecting the exhibition, which was heavily defended by security and state forces.

In a demonstration of his continuing influence within the Dutch establishment, Wilders was able to show some of the same caricatures from the Texas exhibition on Dutch television towards the end of last month. The showing of the cartoons was deliberately aimed at further exacerbating racial tensions in the Netherlands.

In its most recent provocation, the PVV has been allowed to set up a hotline that purportedly permits Dutch citizens to register complaints and spread racist poison against workers from Central and Eastern Europe.

Making clear his own complete contempt for the plight of those condemned to live in communities such as Schilderswijk, Prime Minister Rutte denounced last week's riots and declared he had no intention of visiting the district. "I'm not planning to go in person to every neighbourhood where backward lilies are stirring up trouble," he told journalists.

While permitting Wilders to propagate his racist filth in the Dutch media, the current government is determined to continue and intensify its attacks on the social gains of the working class. One of the main areas in which the government has slashed funding is for programs aimed at integrating immigrant workers into Dutch society. Overseeing the cuts is the finance minister in the Rutte cabinet, Jeroen Dijsselbloem. Dijsselbloem is a leading member of the Dutch Labour Party and, as head of the Eurogroup, has been one of the fiercest advocates of stringent austerity policies in Greece and throughout Europe.



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