

Socialist Party advocates nationalist and xenophobic programme in Dutch elections

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The Socialist Party (SP) is one of the 28 parties competing for the 150 seats in parliament in today's Dutch elections. With 10 percent support in the polls, the SP is only just behind the right-wing Liberal Party (VVD) of Prime Minister Mark Rutte, but ahead of the governing social democratic PvdA, which at 7.4 percent is expected to suffer an historic defeat.

The SP's explicit nationalism demonstrates that, contrary to its name, the party has nothing to do with socialism. The SP uncritically supports the anti-Turkish campaign with which Rutte has sought to outdo the vehemently xenophobic PVV of Geert Wilders from the right on the eve of the elections. Rutte issued a ban on Turkey's Foreign Minister entering the country and deported the Families Minister to prevent her from campaigning for the upcoming constitutional referendum at a meeting of Turkish citizens at the Turkish consulate.

Emile Roemer, the lead candidate for the SP, declared in a press statement that there was "no place in the Netherlands for the propaganda circus of sultan Erdogan." He called on the Rutte government to suspend further talks on Turkey joining the European Union (EU).

Roemer continued, "Recent days have shown that it is not possible to reach reliable agreements with the Turkish government. The Turkish government should not be allowed to intervene in our domestic affairs. The current situation reveals what the SP has been saying for years, that we have to fully and completely oppose the influencing of Dutch citizens by Ankara."

The SP thereby joined the chorus of anti-Muslim agitation which is legitimising the attack on democratic rights. Roemer's declarations are virtually indistinguishable from the tirades of Wilders, who raged against the Turkish ministers, "Go away, this is

our country!" and added, "I say to all Turks in the Netherlands who agree with Erdogan: go to Turkey and don't come back again!"

The closeness to Wilders illustrates just how right-wing the SP's programme in fact is. While it attempts to confuse young people and workers with "left" rhetoric and activism, and spreads illusions in the reformability of capitalism, the SP at the same time promotes a strong state and the sealing of the borders against immigrants and refugees. With its right-wing, xenophobic demagogy, the SP is jointly responsible for the rise of Wilders.

The SP was founded in 1972 as a Maoist group, but quickly gave up its "flirtation with Maoism," as the party itself describes its founding phase, and focused exclusively on "practical" campaigns within the environs of the trade unions and building local alliances. When Jan Marijnessen became SP leader in 1986, he excised all references of Lenin and Marx from the party programme and initiated a "breakthrough in parliament."

In the 1990s, the SP managed to secure two deputies in the second chamber. The party profited from the catastrophic social consequences of the Polder model, which established the framework within which the trade unions and business organisations have cooperated closely with governments since the early 1980s to drastically cut wages and social spending.

Under the social democratic government of Wim Kok (PvdA), the Polder model was accelerated in the mid 1990s. As a result, social inequality rose dramatically. Poverty increased, minorities were excluded and rent prices in the cities exploded.

The constant redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top ultimately destabilised the political system. The social democrats and trade unions were discredited.

Right-wing populist organisations benefited from the sharp social tensions in the formerly relatively egalitarian Netherlands. Meanwhile the SP rose to be the third largest party in terms of members. They spent considerable time leading the polls ahead of the 2012 election, but ultimately wound up only in fourth place.

The SP's official programme is hardly distinguishable from those of right-wing, social democratic parties. Since 2006, the party has abandoned any demands it deemed "too radical." Since then, they neither call for leaving NATO, nor the abolition of the monarchy. The SP has encouraged prejudices against immigrants and defends Dutch membership in the EU. Its social criticism is limited to a few cosmetic changes in social welfare benefits.

The SP's "socialism" restricts itself to paying lip service to "respect for human dignity, equality and solidarity." These "values," according to the SP's charter, have "proven to be essential elements of human civilisation and progress over centuries."

In its current election programme, the SP represents openly nationalist standpoints. The party calls for the ending of the free movement of labour within the EU. At the beginning of the election campaign, lead candidate Roemer demanded a halt to "unregulated mass migration" adding, "There must once again be a system of work permits by which people are permitted to come here to look for work. This would put the Netherlands in a position to win back control over who comes here to work and to determine the economic sectors in which we require people."

In 1983, the party published a xenophobic pamphlet entitled "Foreign labour and capital," which demanded that foreign workers had to either adapt to the language and values of the country or leave.

The SP demands that Dutch workers be given preferential treatment over immigrants and calls for limits on the entry of migrants into the EU. It advocates the concentration of refugees in detention centres close to the border, and the creation of registration centres outside the EU.

The SP also calls for a vast expansion of the domestic repressive powers of the state and backs military interventions. A visible police presence is necessary "to make our neighbourhoods safe, strengthen social obligations and identify early signs of radicalisation. This is why we want more police officers," declared the

SP.

The SP would participate in UN-mandated interventions without reservation, if they "are effective and appropriate and do not come into conflict with international law." Cooperation with military allies is always possible for the SP, as long as the Dutch government retains control over its own soldiers.

In 2005, the SP campaigned against the EU constitution, which was subsequently defeated by a wide margin in a referendum. It now no longer questions the Netherlands' EU membership and criticises the EU from the right by urging a stronger role for nation-states.

Even a governing coalition with the right-wing liberal VVD appears possible, despite the fact that Roemer excluded it in the lead-up to the elections. In six of the 12 provincial governments, the SP has cooperated for years with all other parties, with the exception of Wilders' PVV. In Amsterdam and Brabant, they share government with the VVD and the left liberal D66.

The SP is offering itself to the ruling class under conditions of general social and political instability as a force capable of saving Dutch capitalism. But the party is stagnating in the polls. The SP is only expected to secure between 12 and 14 seats in parliament, at the last election it won 15 seats.

The support of pseudo-left organisations, which justify every shift to the right by the SP, has failed to benefit the latter. As Socialistisch Alternatief, the Dutch section of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), wrote, "Since there is no mass workers party, which represents the independent political interests of the working class in the election, the Socialist Party can be seen as the best voting option for many workers."

The SP and its pseudo-left satellites base themselves on members of the privileged middle class, academics and trade union officials. To defend the interests of these well-heeled sections of the middle class, the SP is moving ever further to the right.



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