

Right-wing, four-party government formed in the Netherlands

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Last week, after a record-breaking 209 days of coalition negotiations, Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the pro-business VVD party confirmed a successful agreement had been reached and that he will head the Dutch government for the third time. After the collapse of the Social Democratic party in last March's elections, Rutte was forced to piece together a new coalition.

When initial talks broke down between the VVD and the Green Party over the latter's immigration policy not being sufficiently right-wing, Rutte then cobbled together a coalition of four parties that represent some of the most backward and reactionary tendencies in Dutch politics. The right-wing Christian Democrats (CDA-19 seats) along with the even more socially conservative Christian Union (ChristienUnie-5 seats) have been lumped together with the staunchly pro-EU D66 party (19 seats) and Rutte's neoliberal VVD (33 seats).

Back in March, when Gert Wilders and his extreme right-wing Party for Freedom (PVV) were unable to win the largest number of votes, leaders across Europe lauded the results as a victory over the growing influence of the far right. However, as the WSWs pointed out just after the results came in this celebratory claim has turned out to be utterly farcical.

This coalition has a narrow 76-74 majority in a parliament which is divided among 13 parties. The nine parties in opposition run the gamut from the ultra-right PVV, with 20 seats, the second largest, to the three parties of the official "left" (Green Left, Socialist Party and Social Democrats, with 37 seats between them), with 17 seats divided among advocates of animal rights, senior citizens, Turkish immigrants, Dutch Reformed Church adherents and right-wing anti-EU activists.

Despite the fact that the fragile coalition, desperately put together more than six months after the election, is being headed by a party and individual considered part of the "center" or "establishment," its program mirrors

what, up until recently, would have been the purview of the far right.

Upon announcing the successful agreement for a coalition, the four parties released a 70-page policy proposal document highlighting their united drive to ramp up the assault on the working class and immigrants. Taken together, the outlook of the new government is to push for a stronger EU, boost security, and increase labour market flexibility, all code words for more exploitation and the crushing of dissent.

In keeping with the trend across Europe, such as the brutal crackdown of the G20 protests in Hamburg and the bashing of heads by the Spanish government in the Catalonia independence referendum, at the top of the agenda of this new government is the massive buildup of the police and security forces as well as the expansion of online surveillance powers of the intelligence agencies.

The government proposes pumping in €267 million to fund community police officers and detectives. The budgets for these security forces were once tied to the collection of fees and fines, but now they will be able to rely on regular funding from the state.

Significantly, the coalition will also allocate €95 million specifically designated for fighting "cybercrime." Moreover, a new law is being planned that will allow the MIVD and AIVD (Military and General Intelligence Services, respectively) to collect vast amounts of data on Internet traffic. What this really amounts to is a ramping up of online surveillance and monitoring.

The buildup of police-state methods of repression is a preparatory action to establish the ability for the state to smash any and all opposition to the parallel austerity and ultra-exploitative economic policies proposed by the new government. As the *Financial Times* notes, the government is likely to continue its close partnership with Germany, especially regarding policies related to EU reform, such as "stressing the need for budgetary

discipline, structural reforms and clear rules in the single currency area”, i.e., rabid austerity.

On the domestic front, in the name of increasing “flexibility,” the coalition partners have set forth a series of labour reforms that will make it easier for firms to fire workers and make use of fixed-term employment by increasing the time allowed for companies to hire employees on temporary contracts.

As part of the promotion of the so-called “gig economy,” there are also plans to promote freelance work with a measly increase in the minimum wage for such workers. Instead of protecting those in this sector, these policies will only promote the precariousness and super-exploitation of workers trying to piece together mini-contracts just to get by.

The new government also aims to dismantle the pension system by making individuals responsible for saving for their own pensions by 2020.

In combination with these reactionary labour market policies, the government seeks to implement a series of tax reforms, which will ultimately place greater burdens on the working class. The proposed reduction of the number of tax brackets from four down to only two will have the worst effects on the lowest income families, who will now pay the same tax rate as more privileged sections of the middle class, while the highest earners will see an overall reduction in their tax rate. This will all be paid for by an increased VAT tax, which will raise the cost of basic necessities such as groceries and energy.

To enhance the “investment climate,” the corporate tax will also be reduced from 25 percent to 21 percent, and the dividend tax will be abolished altogether.

Furthermore, taking the cue from the far right, the government is actively promoting nationalism through policies such as requiring primary schools to recite the national anthem. Beyond this, the coalition seeks to expand the attacks on the social rights of foreigners.

The government plans to cut the time that refugees can keep a residency permit from five years down to three. And, significantly, immigrants who are currently on residence permits will no longer “be able to claim welfare benefits, such as [the] healthcare allowance or rent allowance, for the first two years of their stay” according to the expat website, iamexpat.nl.

The *euobserver* documents that the coalition says it supports and looks forward to more deals with respect to asylum seekers like the one set up between the EU and Turkey, a deal which saw refugees fleeing war in Syria and Iraq forced to stay in Turkey rather than being

permitted to reach Europe. It also backed the European Commission’s suggestion to member states “to be more effective in returning migrants whose asylum procedure has failed.”

Throughout the long months of negotiation, the main press outlets across Europe seemed hardly worried about the crawling negotiations. This occurred for two primary reasons. First, during this time, the financial markets in the Netherlands experienced consistent growth. This market confidence, though, was ultimately a reflection of the second reason: The ruling elites knew that no matter which coalition agreement was struck, their interests would be staunchly defended by the new government.

But all is not so quiet. As the politics of austerity and exploitation continue, they will be met by a resurgence of working class struggle, as seen by the bitter anger towards the arrogance of French President Macron and his labour reforms implemented by decree. In response to this resentment, which is beginning to boil, the capitalist governments of Europe are preparing for the coming clashes.

To do so, on the one hand, the bourgeois political parties are stoking nationalism and xenophobia to divide the working class, as evidenced by, for example, the elevation and praise of Austria’s likely new chancellor Sebastian Kurz and his probable coalition partner, the anti-immigrant far-right Freedom Party. On the other hand, the governments are creating massive police state apparatuses to monitor, censor, and violently crush any opposition to the implementation of the ruling elite’s will.

The urgent task is the creation of an independent mass working class movement uniting workers across Europe in a struggle to defend democratic rights for both citizens and immigrants and to fight the capitalist politics of austerity, exploitation, and state violence. This fight is a fight for socialism, led and guided by Marxist principles. Building that leadership is the task of the ICFI.



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