

Protest march on October 2 in the Netherlands

# The fight against public sector cutbacks requires a socialist perspective

The European Editorial Board of the WSW  
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*This statement is being distributed by supporters of the World Socialist Web Site at today's demonstration in the Dutch capital, The Hague.*

The *World Socialist Web Site* supports today's march in The Hague, in which thousands employed in the public sector, health and education will participate. The demonstration is part of a struggle for higher wages and better working conditions and against the years of cuts that have benefited the corporations and the rich.

The protest is part of the growing opposition to such attacks around the world. Since the beginning of the year, tens of thousands of teachers in different states have been on strike in the US. On 15 August, almost 30,000 teachers in New Zealand held their first national strike since 1994. Other teachers' strikes, sometimes involving several hundred thousand participants, have taken place in Mexico, Argentina, Bangladesh and India.

Resistance is also growing in other sections of the working class. Last Friday, cabin crews and pilots went on strike in six European countries against the low-wage policy of Ryanair. In the first half of the year, there have been strikes by metalworkers in Germany, railway workers in France, university lecturers in Britain and Amazon workers in Germany, Spain and Poland.

Since the beginning of the year in the Netherlands, strikes are at the highest level since 1989. Most of those taking action have been primary school teachers who have repeatedly struck in their thousands against miserable wages and mounting work pressures.

## **Break with the trade unions and build independent Committees of Action!**

There is an enormous gulf between workers and the organizations and unions mounting today's protest. While workers are determined to fight for an improvement in their wages and standard of living, the trade unions sell out these struggles and divert them into a nationalist dead end.

A joint call from an alliance of 22 organisations and unions proclaims, "We jointly appeal to the cabinet to choose the police, defence, health care and education instead of foreign investors".

Among the various groups involved are the various "in Actie" initiatives, the social democratic union alliance FNV, the military union ODB and the police union Malieveld 2.0.

The claims by the unions that the liberal-conservative government of Prime Minister Mark Rutte (VVD) can be pressured to change its ways through protests is fundamentally false. The government's abolition of dividend tax for financial institutions and large companies, while raising consumer taxes on medicine and food, shows that the ruling class intends to ram through its pro-corporate policies at the expense of working people.

The Netherlands is already one of the most socially unequal countries in Western Europe. There are 112,000 millionaires among Holland's 4.8 million households containing two or more people. The richest 10 percent of the population control 68 percent of all wealth, or 726 billion euros, while the poorest 10 percent have debts of 65 billion euros. More than one million people are officially living in poverty in the Netherlands. Real wages are stagnating or falling.

The unions are not opponents of this process but its pioneers. All the social cuts, job slashing and rotten labour contracts over the last decade were organised with their help. For example, the new collective agreement for primary school teachers provides an insulting increase of 2.5 percent and a single payment of 750 euros, which really amounts to a loss in real wages. The unions ignored the demands by primary school teachers for a wage increase of up to 30 percent and an improvement in working conditions.

The new contract has also revealed the nature of the "in Actie" initiatives. They helped negotiate the sell-out and celebrate it as a success. After the dirty work was done, the leaders of "PO in Actie", Thijs Roovers and Jan van de Ven, announced their resignations on October 1. Neither of them represents the interests of ordinary teachers, but those of the trade unions and the government. Roovers has close ties to the FNV and the Christian Trade Union Confederation CNV and Van de Ven is a member of the governing party D66.

Those who want to seriously fight against social devastation and for higher wages and better working conditions should form rank-and-file action committees, which are independent of the unions and the capitalist political parties they are aligned with. The committees, democratically controlled by and accountable to the

rank and file, should establish contact with other sections of the working class in the Netherlands and internationally and organize strikes, protests and demonstrations against the assault of the global corporations and banks.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, the online publication of the Fourth International, is published daily in 20 languages and offers its support in organizing resistance internationally.

### **Fight for a socialist program!**

The fight for jobs, higher wages and better working conditions demands a broad political mobilisation of working people based on a revolutionary socialist program.

The enrichment of a tiny minority, while millions of workers and their families go hungry, is the clearest evidence of the failure of capitalism. This is not only the case for the Netherlands. Worldwide, eight billionaires possess as much as the poorest half of the world's population, some 3.67 billion people.

Protectionism, economic nationalism and militarism dominate world politics. Everywhere, the ruling class is encouraging extreme right-wing forces to push through its policy of militarism, increased state powers and social cutbacks against the resistance of the population.

Under such conditions, those who claim that social achievements can be defended within the framework of capitalism, as do the unions and their political supporters, are lying. The fight for higher wages and better working conditions requires a socialist program that has as its aim the expropriation of the banks and corporations and their transformation into democratically controlled socialised property.

The claim by the Rutte government that there is no money for social spending and education is an outright lie. On September 18, so-called "Prinsjesdag", when the King presented the government's program and budget for the coming year to parliament, a massive increase in military spending was proposed. The total budget for 2018-2019 of 10 billion Euros corresponds to approximately 1.3 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Since the Netherlands, like all members of NATO, has committed itself to spending at least 2 percent of GDP on the military by 2024, defence spending will rise by another six billion in the coming years.

### **Workers need their own party!**

Throughout Europe and internationally, the social democrats, Greens and official "left" parties have become an integral part of the bourgeois political set up. The Social Democratic PvdA has distinguished itself by pushing through social cuts over the last few years. In the wake of the international financial crisis in 2008, then party leader and Finance Minister Wouter Bos, handed more than 85 billion euros to the Dutch banks. The working class has

been made to pay for this bailout through an orgy of cuts.

The Social Democrats, whose vote collapsed in the last elections—losing 29 of their 38 parliamentary mandates—have played an active role in this social counter-revolution as a governing party. The last Rutte government contained six PvdA ministers, including Finance Minister Jeroen Dijsselbloem, who as chair of the Euro Group was responsible for organising the savage austerity measures imposed on Greece and throughout Europe.

While the working class is moving to the left to find a way out of this morass, the entire political establishment is moving further to the right. This includes the Greens of GroenLinks, which held coalition talks with Rutte following the 2017 elections, and the ex-Maoist Socialist Party (SP), which increasingly orients itself to the nationalist and xenophobic extreme right.

As in every country, the fight against social and political reaction demands one thing above all: the building of a new, independent socialist and internationalist party of the working class, a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). We stand in the tradition of the Left Opposition, which, under the leadership of Leon Trotsky, defended Marxism and socialist internationalism against the betrayals of Stalinism. 200 years after the birth of Karl Marx and 80 years after the founding of the Fourth International, only the world Trotskyist movement fights for a socialist program that unites the international working class in the struggle against social inequality, war and capitalism.

We call on all workers, youth and progressive intellectuals to read the *World Socialist Web Site* and study the history of the Fourth International. Make contact with the European sections of the ICFI in Germany, Britain and France, and take up the fight to build a Socialist Equality Party in the Netherlands!

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To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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