Dutch neo-fascists incite riots against anti-pandemic curfew

Alex Lantier
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After a night-time curfew ordered by Prime Minister Mark Rutte's right-wing government went into effect on January 23, riots broke out across the Netherlands. While small numbers of Moroccan immigrants have reportedly joined in, these riots are incited and orchestrated above all by Dutch neo-fascists.

The curfew was voted as divisions mounted in the Dutch government over what to do about the spread of the more deadly British variant of COVID-19. Rutte, who refused lockdowns or curfews last year, said the curfew had "to do with the British variant and the big worries we all have." Besides Rutte's government, the Maoist Socialist Party (SP), the Labour Party (PvdA), the Green Left and the 50Plus pensioners' party voted for the curfew; the far-right Party for Freedom (PVV) and Forum for Democracy (FvD) opposed it.

On January 18, before the curfew was voted, far-right groups organized a protest against social distancing measures in Amsterdam. This protest also involved members of the far-right Pegida ("Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West") movement who came from neighbouring Germany or from its local Dutch sympathizing group.

As the curfew went into effect, the neo-fascists began organizing riots against social distancing measures. As riots continued, they denounced alleged Moroccan participation in the riots and joined the Rutte government in calls for a major police or military deployment, supposedly to restore order. They also issued repeated calls to vote for far-right parties in the upcoming March 17 elections.

On Saturday morning, a COVID-19 testing centre was burned down and protesters fired fireworks at police in the seaside town of Urk. The PVV branch in Urk reportedly led the riot, after posting a statement online that it would "do everything in its power to ensure [the curfew] is not enforced in Urk." Riots involving hundreds of people ensued in Amsterdam, The Hague, Eindhoven, Enschede, Venlo and other cities. Rioters in Eindhoven looted the city's main train station, and tried to break into Enschede's Medisch Spectrum Twente hospital.

Police said the rioters included football hooligans, drug addicts, and people "genuinely angry at the government," apparently meaning the far right. One police spokesman said: "You can see that some of them are really well prepared with special clothing and weapons, including blackjacks, knives or Molotov cocktails. Others come to the party unprepared."

The neo-fascists hail the rioters as defenders of liberty against health restrictions. The Forum for Democracy tweeted its support for the rioters: "This is the second night that Rutte has locked up the Netherlands. #FvD continues to resist. We will stay up every night against this unacceptable restriction on our freedom." They added: "More and more people are turning against the #curfew. We will only get our freedom back if we work together. Vote FvD on March 17."

The PVV of Geert Wilders declared: "People who peacefully protest against curfews are quite right." At the same time, while broadcasting videos it claimed were of immigrant rioters, it called them "scum" who "must be dealt with very hard."

Commenting on the riots, Green Left Party leader Jesse Klaver said Dutch neo-fascists are imitating former US President Donald Trump: "First you try to discredit the news and science, then you call on people to disregard the rules, and finally you blame other people. The PVV and FvD are working off Donald Trump's playbook. This type of rioting and vandalism is exactly the result of such behaviour."

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Klaver impotently appealed to Wilders to intervene and criticize the very riot Wilders was busy inciting: “Do not forget that PVV Urk incited this violence. Unacceptable, undemocratic, and downright dangerous. Intervene, Geert Wilders!”

Predictably, Klaver’s appeal to the PVV to act only encouraged Wilders. He denounced Klaver’s remarks as “far left incitement” and called on PVV supporters to “deal with him politically on March 17,” that is, in the upcoming elections.

The Dutch neo-fascists are in fact imitating Trump’s policy on both COVID-19 and elections. Trump pursued a murderous “herd immunity” policy on COVID-19 and launched an attempted fascist coup on January 6 aiming to seize the Capitol, block the certification of Biden’s victory in the 2020 US presidential elections, and dictate terms to the Democrats. The Democrats’ feeble response—they have appealed for “unity” with Republican backers of the coup and downplayed the coup’s significance—is now emboldening neo-fascists in Europe.

The Dutch neo-fascists are inciting riots to impose the most hard-line version of the European Union’s (EU) “herd immunity” policy and boost their vote on March 17. They are manifestly calculating that, if the election campaign is carried out against the backdrop of riots and heavy police deployments, their appeals to law-and-order and anti-immigrant hatred will win broader support. Above all, they are counting on the political complicity of the Rutte government and the bankruptcy of middle-class parties like the SP and Green Left.

Anger is mounting in the European working class at the EU’s politically criminal handling of the pandemic, and polls show that 58 percent of the Dutch public do not trust Rutte or his curfew policy. Rutte has kept workers at work including in non-essential industries and students at school throughout the pandemic. As a result, the virus has continued to spread even when Rutte applied limited social distancing measures, including the current curfew.

Comparisons circulating online between the EU and the Netherlands, on the one hand, and China and Taiwan on the other, utterly expose the EU’s “herd immunity” policy. Aggressive confinement and social distancing measures in the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan’s effective contact tracing system limited the contagion and prevented the economic collapse caused by EU “herd immunity” policies.

While the People’s Republic of China confirmed 89,326 cases and 4,636 deaths, Europe—with less than half the population—has had 30 million confirmed cases and will pass 700,000 deaths this weekend. Over 100,000 Europeans die of COVID-19 every three weeks. Taiwan, population 23.5 million, has seen 895 cases and seven deaths. In comparison, the Netherlands, population 17.3 million, has seen just under 1 million cases and 13,816 deaths. Ten times more people die of COVID-19 *each day* in the Netherlands than have died in Taiwan during the entire pandemic.

The entire Dutch political establishment is committed to the EU’s policy of keeping non-essential production industries and schools open, so profits never stop pouring into the banks. From the Rutte government to the SP—which has opposed calls for lockdowns and instead proposed to weaken the curfew by starting it an hour later—all treat the far right with kid gloves, impotently lecturing them while Wilders whips up riots. They are afraid, above all, of growing anger in the working class.

And so, even though riots have only involved a few hundred individuals in each city, Dutch officials are calling for a major police build-up, requesting that German and Belgian riot police deploy to the Netherlands. Wilders replied on Twitter by calling to deploy the army against the population: “Stop this and intervene before it turns into a partial civil war. Deploy the army. Now.”

There is deep and powerful opposition in the working class internationally to the catastrophe imperialist governments have created during the pandemic. The only progressive way to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic is to mobilize the working class internationally, independently of the entire capitalist state machine, in struggle for a scientifically-guided policy. This also necessarily entails opposing and exposing the accelerating turn toward authoritarian and fascist rule in a struggle to transfer state power to the working class on a socialist perspective.

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