

Ex-Maoist Socialist Party backs “herd immunity,” austerity in Dutch elections

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16 March 2021

Right-wing Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte is reopening schools as COVID-19 surges in Europe, after a decade of leading governments of austerity and war. Rutte’s Freedom and Democracy Party (VVD) has nevertheless dominated Dutch elections, which end today, thanks to the reactionary policies of the middle-class parties that the bourgeoisie has passed off as the “left.” This includes prominently the ex-Maoist Socialist Party (SP) of the Netherlands.

Rutte rejected even the limited lockdowns adopted in other European countries and only this year imposed a curfew, forcing non-essential workers to stay on the job throughout the pandemic. As a result, over 1.1 million people have contracted the virus and over 16,000 have died in a country of only 17.3 million. The SP made clear its support for this general policy in a recent election interview with SP parliamentary leader Lilian Marijnissen, where she emphasized that she was looking to enter into any coalition that would agree to include her party.

“Our engagement is for a coalition government,” Marijnissen said. Asked if she would consider a coalition the VVD, which is set to decisively win the elections, she said: “Let the voters decide.” She added that the VVD is “at the bottom of my list.” Marijnissen declared, however, that she is open to cooperation with any party that “wants to make the Netherlands fairer.”

In an interview with students, posted on YouTube on February 15, Marijnissen reaffirmed her party’s commitment to “herd-immunity” policies for reopening schools. “Think about quick-tests, think about class-groups split in half,” she said. A motion put forward by the SP “demands” the government “investigate how to reopen education safely.”

The SP has run a campaign based on accepting the herd immunity policy imposed by the bourgeoisie across Europe, and instead dividing the working class by relentlessly targeting Muslims and immigrants with police-state measures. Its election programme, titled “Make an Act,” combines hollow phrases and invocations of activism with the party’s trademark criticisms of Muslims and calls for

building up the police forces.

The programme denounces unidentified “groups of extreme Salafists who raise children in hatred for our freedom and democracy,” calling to ban “hate preachers” and to “legally regulate the right of residence of children rooted in our country.” To make clear their support for deporting children or other immigrants who do not meet the SP’s criteria, they add immediately afterwards: “People who are not entitled to a residence permit must return to their country of origin.”

Under the title “A safer country,” the SP writes: “Due to the shortages in the police, more extraordinary investigating officers are being appointed in municipalities. We want more agents. If local enforcers nevertheless have to perform police tasks, they must also become police officers, with police training and adapted armament. These enforcers should be part of the police organisation, so that good cooperation is assured. In this way the police also get extra ears and eyes in the neighbourhoods.”

Since the last elections, the SP has dropped its ritualistic calls for the Netherlands to leave the EU or NATO, instead calling for a more aggressive Dutch military policy, including with more “peace-keeping” military missions abroad. In a cynical nod to mass anti-war sentiment, the PS criticizes “the nonsensical strategy of ‘permanent war.’” The SP tries to excuse itself by claiming that it only agreed to give “non-lethal” support to the NATO military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The SP’s amorphous calls for “unity,” its criticisms of divisions “based on colour, gender or class,” and its occasional invocations of “socialism” are so much dust thrown into voters’ eyes to obscure its reactionary politics. The SP official website even seeks to reassure big business that they are no threat, declaring, “we are not against wealth, but we are against poverty.”

The SP arose in 1972 out of a multitude of “Marxist-Leninist” Maoist groups, most prominently the *Kommunistische Eenheidsbeweging Nederland* (KEN, or Communist Unity Movement of the Netherlands), which

maintained connections with China's Maoist regime. It maintained the extreme nationalist orientation common among European Maoist parties. In 1983 it published a xenophobic pamphlet, titled "Foreign Labour and Capital," that demanded that immigrant workers adopt the Dutch language and values or else leave.

The SP gave up its "flirtation with Maoism" in 1986, under the leadership of Jan Marijnissen, the father of Ms. Marijnissen, stripping references to Lenin and Marx from the party programme, and calling instead for a "breakthrough in parliament." The SP leadership now blushes about its empty references to Marxism in earlier eras, instead focusing exclusively on "practical" realpolitik within and outside the trade union confederations and the Dutch state machine.

The privileged middle-class operatives of this party have profited, as trade unions, corporations and successive governments "negotiated" massive wage cuts, slashed labour rights and social benefits, and systematically strangled strikes. This allowed for a massive transfer of wealth to the top of Dutch society.

This constant redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top increasingly discredited the Labour Party (PvdA) and the trade union apparatuses. Instead, far-right populist organizations like the Party for Freedom (PVV) of Geert Wilders sought to capitalize on deep social anger at this corrupt framework with appeals to anti-Muslim and xenophobic hatreds. The SP, for its part, drove mass anger in the working class to the political establishment into a dead end, allowing the far right to grow.

During the pandemic, it has sought to stifle any action, however limited, that it feared might trigger broader opposition in the working class.

Last November, the SP came into open conflict with its youth movement, ROOD (meaning "red"). The SP leadership expelled several leading ROOD members for alleged dual-membership in the Communist Platform, a Stalinist outfit on the periphery of the SP and the union apparatus. The SP branded them as "study room-communists" that say "very scary things," adding: "They want to arm the population to start a civil war."

The SP thus effectively cut ties with and disbanded its own youth movement at the end of last year, amid a mass upsurge of COVID-19 deaths in the Netherlands and across Europe. Its claims about the Communist Platform's alleged radicalism are absurd, moreover, as this Stalinist outfit works to paint the SP's reactionary parliamentary activities in false "revolutionary" colours, and demoralize and disorient youth who seek an alternative to the SP on its left.

While admitting that the SP is "complicit in oppression by the state and by capital," the Communist Platform writes:

"We nevertheless appeal for a vote for the SP. The SP has the greatest potential to develop into a working class, communist party. Despite these aforementioned problems, the SP has proven itself to be the most coherent party against neo-liberalism and imperialism compared to other 'left' parties in the parliament."

The elections were called shortly after the expulsion of ROOD members, as a mounting political crisis engulfed the Rutte government and virtually the entire political establishment. Investigations confirmed that Dutch officials falsely and vindictively accused immigrant families of child benefit fraud, forcing them to repay the benefits they had received and ruining thousands of families. While the SP posed as concerned by the families' complaints, they had previously played a central role in creating a political climate favourable to vicious targeting of Muslims and immigrants.

Nonetheless, the SP has the unflinching support of a broader layer of middle-class, pseudo-left groups that justify its every twist and turn with claims that nothing else can be done. Socialistisch Alternatief (SA), the Dutch section of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), downplays and covers up the SP's political objectives, writing: "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 politics of the SP and its political satellites are completely rotten. Like the German Left Party, the Spanish Podemos and the Greek Syriza, the Dutch SP mouths a few empty phrases while backing the Dutch state apparatus as the ruling class manoeuvres to bring Rutte back to power for an agenda of more austerity and more deaths from COVID-19.

The SP must be exposed for what it is: a sinister political trap, aiming to prevent the working class from fighting independently against herd immunity, austerity and war based on an independent, internationalist and socialist programme, and instead tying it to the established parties.



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