

The new Dutch coalition government: A minority war cabinet in the service of capital

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The coalition agreement for a future Dutch government unveiled on January 30 is no “national compromise,” as hailed by the bourgeois press, but a calibrated document by the Dutch ruling elite declaring class war following last October’s snap elections. It is the Dutch expression of a continent-wide reorganisation of capitalist rule around permanent war, authoritarianism and a frontal assault on the working class.

It is the outcome of nearly 100 days of post-election maneuvering. The Democrats 66 (D66), the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and the People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) have cobbled together a right-wing minority cabinet commanding just 66 of 150 seats in the Tweede Kamer. The future government rests not on popular support but on the backing of finance capital, big business and the imperialist alliances that determine Dutch foreign and domestic policy.

Under the title “Getting to Work—Building a Better Netherlands,” the 67-page pact binds Dutch capitalism more tightly to NATO’s global war drive and the European Union’s accelerating rearmament, while at the same time enshrining a domestic programme of austerity measures and state repression.

Central to the agreement is the so-called Vrijheidsbijdrage, the “freedom contribution”—a euphemism for a war tax imposed on the working population. Marketed as a “shared national effort,” the levy on incomes is expected to fund roughly €5 billion annually, each euro earmarked specifically for military and security spending, pressing ahead with the course of the previous government of Dick Schoof. Defence expenditure is expected to climb from around 2 percent of GDP to nearly 3 percent by 2030, reaching approximately 3.5 percent by 2035 in line with NATO and EU directives.

This escalation mirrors the remilitarisation sweeping across Europe. Under the NATO “Defence Investment Pledge” and EU structures, such as PESCO and the European Defence Fund, every member state is binding its budgetary policy to the requirements of war. Just days ago, the German Chancellor Friedrich Merz declared that Europe must “learn to speak the language of power politics,” a formula also embraced by The Hague as it transforms the Netherlands into an indispensable node of the European military machine.

The primary beneficiaries of this vast transfer of public wealth are the major arms consortiums—Rheinmetall, Thales, Lockheed Martin and their Dutch equivalents and subcontractors—while the working class foots the bill through social cuts and regressive taxation.

D66 leader and incoming Prime Minister Rob Jetten, who was swept to power by a surprise win, celebrates this as a “new direction” and an investment in “freedom.” In fact, it is a transfer of social wealth to imperialist war preparations under an Orwellian slogan that forces workers to pay for the “freedom” of capital to wage wars abroad and suppress dissent at home.

The economic core of the new coalition agreement is defined by a new 2 percent of GDP deficit ceiling—stricter than the EU’s Maastricht criterion—promoted as ensuing “predictability for investors.” This

self-imposed straitjacket institutionalises a permanent regime of austerity.

Key suggested measures include the shortening of unemployment benefits from two years to one, pushing the jobless into cheap, insecure temporary job contracts, currently filled by half by non-EU migrant labour.

Also, the statutory pension age (AOW) is expected to rise further and from 2033 be automatically tied to life expectancy, forcing aging workers to remain in often grueling jobs regardless of declining health.

Furthermore, the healthcare deductible (eigen risico) is to rise from €385 to €460 by 2027, while targeted allowances are abolished, shifting the burden of medical costs onto working class households. These are not technical adjustments but deliberate instruments of austerity aimed at transferring social wealth to capital, expanding the reserve army of precarious labour and intimidating potential resistance.

The same class logic governs the coalition’s much-trumpeted “investment” in education and research. In the wake of student protests last December against the planned €1.2 billion cuts to higher education, the redirection of an almost equivalent sum is portrayed as proof that the government is “investing in the future.”

In fact, the money is tightly ring-fenced for universities and research institutes tasked with bolstering the “knowledge economy” in sectors the agreement designates as “strategic technologies”: artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, semiconductors and data infrastructure. These fields are intimately bound up with surveillance, trade and technology wars, military logistics and weapons systems.

Dutch universities and tech firms were exposed for their involvement in projects linked to the genocide in Gaza, drawing thousands to last year’s “Red Line” demonstrations in The Hague and Amsterdam. The coalition openly defines digitalisation as a “strategic instrument” that directly shapes “national security, economic strength and the democratic rule of law” and calls for the rapid implementation of EU cybersecurity rules, stronger central governance of cyber policy, an expansion of offensive and defensive cyber capabilities and a broadened legal framework for data sharing between state and private actors under the pretext of “early threat detection.”

In practice, this means integrating universities, tech companies and communications providers ever more deeply into an intelligence-security complex in which “digital resilience” and “cyber defence” serve as pretexts for mass surveillance, data collection and repression.

On the burning issues confronting the Dutch working class—above all, the housing crisis and the rising cost of living—the coalition offers only empty phrases and inducements to capital. In fact, it rejects social housing construction, refuses rent caps and shields rent sharks. Developers are granted incentives to build where returns are highest, perpetuating chronic shortages in affordable housing (currently at 400,000 housing units) resulting in soaring rents that are already driving broad layers of youth and workers out of the major cities.

Parallel to this, the agreement places “economic resilience” and

“competitiveness” at its centre, signalling further deregulation, weakened labour protections and an even more “flexible” labour market. This dovetails with the restructuring strategies of corporations across Europe, including mass layoffs and accelerated automation in logistics, manufacturing and services, as seen in the wave of industrial job cuts in Germany over the winter months.

On migration, the coalition refrains from adopting the full arsenal of openly racist measures demanded by Geert Wilders’ far-right Party of Freedom (PVV), whose calculated move over asylum policy helped precipitate the previous government’s collapse. Yet, the new programme continues and deepens the repressive trajectory of recent years. Migration is framed not as a question of war, poverty and imperialist plunder driving people from their homes but as a problem of “order,” “capacity” and “control” within Fortress Europe.

The agreement calls for tougher procedures, stricter conditions and expanded powers for border and immigration authorities, presented as unavoidable measures to safeguard social cohesion. In reality, this normalises the far right’s criminalisation of refugees through supposedly “centrist” language, while the true causes of social crisis—decades of austerity, housing speculation and the diversion of resources to military spending—are concealed.

In this backdrop, the scapegoating of refugees and migrant workers will continue to serve as a crucial political function in diverting popular discontent away from the capitalist system itself and seeking to fracture the class unity of Dutch and immigrant workers, the latter comprising 30 percent of the nearly 10 million-strong workforce.

The reaction of the official “left” and the trade union bureaucracies demonstrates that no genuine opposition to this right-wing agenda exists within the existing parliamentary framework. The leadership of the newly merged GroenLinks–PvdA issued ritual criticisms of the coalition’s social cuts and its inadequate climate policy, promising to “fight for a more social and greener Netherlands” in parliament but accepting without question the 2 percent deficit ceiling, the integration of the Netherlands into NATO’s war plans and the subordination of all social needs to “fiscal sustainability.”

The Socialist Party (SP) denounces the “freedom contribution” as unfair to “ordinary people” and condemns the shortening of unemployment benefits, yet offers no perspective beyond appeals to protect purchasing power within the parameters laid down by big business and the state.

The trade union confederations FNV and CNV, for their part, respond with carefully worded statements of concern about pensions, health costs and working conditions, coupled with calls for “dialogue” and “fair burden-sharing” with the government that is imposing them. They explicitly reject any serious political mobilisation against the war budget and austerity, remaining wedded to their cooperationist role as partners in “consultation” with the government and employers.

These positions replicate the role played by pseudo-left parties and union bureaucracies across Europe and internationally that channel popular anger into parliamentary avenues, legitimising the rearmament and austerity programmes of their own ruling classes and paving the way for the fascistic far right.

The course of the new Dutch coalition government forms one link in the global chain of imperialist reaction. In Germany, the ruling coalition has allocated over a trillion euros for armament and military infrastructure and has taken preliminary measures to reintroduce conscription. In a similar process the incoming Dutch government wants to increase the strength of the Dutch army from 70,000 to 122,000.

Britain and France’s record military spending is likewise fused with attacks on pensions, wages and democratic rights. In the US the Trump administration has escalated war preparations against Russia, China and Iran alongside mass layoffs coupled with autocratic measures across major US cities. Thus, Dutch developments closely follow the imperialist agenda

of Berlin, Paris and London.

The minority character of the new cabinet, its dependence on fragile parliamentary alliances testify to the advanced crisis of bourgeois rule. With democratic institutions hollowed out, austerity weaponised, and militarism normalised, the Dutch “model” is collapsing under the same contradictions afflicting the entire European order.

No appeal to the coalition parties, to GroenLinks–PvdA, the SP or the union bureaucracy will alter this downward trajectory. All of these forces accept the inviolability of private property, the nation-state system and the imperialist alliances that generate war, austerity and genocide. Their collaboration has opened the door for the far right and prepared the conditions for deeper authoritarian reaction and social counter revolution.

The only viable way forward lies in the conscious, independent and international mobilisation of the working class – within the Netherlands, across Europe and worldwide – on the basis of a socialist programme that links the fight against war, austerity and authoritarianism to the abolition of capitalist property relations.

This requires the building of rank-and-file committees in workplaces, schools and neighborhoods to coordinate upcoming strikes and mass protests against the ruling class that has declared intensified class war, unifying Dutch and migrant workers in a common struggle. It demands the forging of international links with workers resisting the same attacks across the border in Germany, France and beyond.

Above all, it necessitates the construction of a new revolutionary leadership, based on the programme of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), to arm the emerging movement of the working class with a clear perspective: the fight for workers’ power and a socialist reorganisation of society, redirecting the vast resources now squandered on militarism and profit into housing, healthcare, education, culture and the protection of democratic rights.

Only in this way can the working class in the Netherlands and internationally put an end to the war policies, austerity and authoritarianism embodied in the new Dutch coalition and open the road to genuine equality and human emancipation.



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