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Netherlands

A New Step in the Radicalisation of the Far Right in the Netherlands

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It's always risky to make predictions, but we may well look back on the riots in The Hague on 20 September 2024 [following protests against plans for a new asylum seeker centre in the Schilderswijk neighbourhood,] as merely the beginning. Here and there it now seems to be dawning even on parliamentary left parties that the far right cannot be brought to reason through civilised exchange of opinions. But an adequate response is still far off.

On 20 September the Nazi mob carried Prince's flags [The Prince's flag (Prinsenvlag) is an orange-white-blue flag historically associated with the Dutch Republic but now used by far-right groups as a nationalist symbol with the logo of the VOC (Dutch East India Company), since adopted by far-right groups as a symbol glorifying Dutch colonial history

Of course, the riots didn't come out of the blue. Much has already been said about how a stream of propaganda from parties such as FvD, [1] PVV [2] and BBB [3] incites the far right's urge towards violence. In the Netherlands, the far right has now become mainstream. Racism cannot be ignored; Dutch far-right forces have their own means of spreading their worldview. The PVV is the country's largest party and its talking points are eagerly repeated by supposed centre-right forces, whether it's the VVD [4] or *De Telegraaf*. [5]

Far-right violence is nothing new in the Netherlands. The first riots against 'guest workers' took place as early as the early 1970s. And more recently we saw, for example, attacks on anti-racists during protests against Zwarte Piet [(Black Pete) is a blackface character in Dutch Christmas traditions, which has been the subject of sustained anti-racist protests since 2011] The far right was also very active in the riots during the coronavirus period.

What was new was that on 20 September violent far-right activists—fascists, that is—not only reacted but chose the moment themselves and did so under their own flag. This marks the increased self-confidence of these people. The white-power flags and Nazi salute are no longer limited to internal parties. When the far right attacks (Black) anti-racists, that's hardly news. When it also turned against the police and politicians on 20 September, that still came as a surprise to some.

The refusal of the left parties to sign the so-called declaration against far-right violence was the right choice. The only effect of such a declaration, arising from the CU's [6] urge to profile itself as morally superior, is that the far-right parties who sign it get an alibi. Meanwhile they continue unabated spewing civil war rhetoric and dehumanising entire groups.

What doesn't help, however, is that the SP [7] as the only left party supported a motion submitted by this same far right. The letter of the motion for 'the right of every Dutch citizen to non-violently resist the arrival of an AZC (Asielzoekerscentrum â€” Asylum Seeker Centre) is pointless; that right already exists and is certainly not in danger of being banned. The cabinet would rather ban left-wing organisations. The spirit of this motion is, of course, to encourage racist protests. In addition, it is a way for parliamentary far-right forces to show, after they had signed the CU declaration, that they have no substantive disagreement with the rioters, but merely a tactical disagreement about the use of violence.

Van der Plas's [8] motion to introduce an asylum freeze through emergency legislation shows that she wants the BBB to be seen as the party that accommodates fascists. The indignation about this motion was widespread, but also rather hypocritical. Van der Plas's argument that the violence is actually caused by the presence of refugees is, after all, nothing new. And left parties too assume that racism is a 'natural' and inevitable response to the arrival of

migrants, and that this response should be contained by limiting migration. Sometimes this reasoning is dressed up by talking about how the 'support base in society' shouldn't be overburdened, but the reasoning is the same.

Quite apart from the question of why migrants should have to pay for the racism that confronts them, it is hopelessly naïve to think that the far right could be 'taken down a peg' in this way. Whether 100,000, 1,000 or 10 migrants enter the country, for the far right it will always be too many. With the cooperation of parliamentary left forces, provisions for asylum seekers have been so dismantled that any increase, however small or temporary, can be declared a 'crisis' and a 'flood' with the help of *De Telegraaf's* screaming headlines.

A similar naivety was evident in much of the commentary that former minister Marjolein Faber [9] received from the liberal-left corner. 'The minister achieved nothing' was often the tenor. Was Faber's biggest problem then that she wasn't effective enough in making it impossible for refugees to find safe refuge and respectful treatment? What Faber did do was create a continuous crisis atmosphere and hammer home that refugees are the Netherlands' misfortune. The 'mass migration' that the far right rails against is a phantom, and the last thing the far right wants is to break the grip that such illusions have.

The rise and further radicalisation of the far right is, of course, not unique to the Netherlands; it is a worldwide pattern. Looking back, the first election of Donald Trump was a key moment. Trump's success also came as a surprise to many of his supporters. And for the far right, this success held several lessons. The first lesson was that it is not necessary to strongly moderate one's own propaganda for electoral success. The number of right-wing voters who withdraw their support because of open racism and sexism is very limited and is compensated for by the energy of the true believers. Second lesson: once Trump was in power, liberals limited themselves to much fuss about his tone and coarse manners, but practically speaking what they did was mainly wait in the hope that after the elections things would return to 'normal'. Amidst a historic disaster like the pandemic this was enough for the Democrats, but four years later Harris went down ignominiously.

About twenty years ago, one of the differences between the Netherlands, compared with countries like France with the Front National, [10] Belgium with Vlaams Blok, [11] or Austria with the FPÖ, [12] was that the most right-wing parties here had no ties to historical fascism. Groups in the 1980s and 1990s whose members did have such ties, such as CP86 [13] and Hans Janmaat's CD, [14] remained marginal partly for this reason. Geert Wilders and before him Pim Fortuyn [15] were precisely bourgeois-right politicians radicalising to the right. At the beginning of his career, Wilders still distanced himself from the Front National. Today he is one of the greatest allies of the party renamed Rassemblement National.

The history of such parties is a contradictory process of radicalisation and adaptation to bourgeois right forces. In an important respect, such parties adapted to prevailing conditions. The classical fascist ideal of the one-party state was abandoned. Instead came the choice for the form but not the content of parliamentary democracy. An essential characteristic of democracy is that the group that is still the minority today can, through organisation and persuasion, strive to be the majority tomorrow. The classical left critique of this ideal picture is well known. Some groups have far more resources than others, and the extra-parliamentary power of capital, whether exercised through text messages to the prime minister or threats of capital flight, pays little heed to parliamentary majorities.

But parliamentary relations are not entirely meaningless either. And that is precisely what contemporary far-right forces want to change. Their aim is a state with the form of a parliamentary democracy in which elections no longer make a difference. Instead of banning all opposition parties, they want to make their work impossible. Instead of abolishing freedom of expression by law, unanimity is enforced in cooperation with well-funded media enterprises. To know what this strategy looks like, one need only look at Turkey or Hungary. And soon the United States? There is no reason to think the Netherlands would be immune to this.

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Far-right parties are, in short, not normal parties, with at most an extra dose of racism. They want to fundamentally change the frameworks within which politics is possible.

It won't stop with 20 September, that much is clear. In Doetinchem there were protests against an Asylum Seeker Centre complete with Nazi salutes; in Den Bosch dozens of right-wing extremists gathered for a planned storming of another Asylum Seeker Centre. Such a movement cannot be persuaded, and a strategy of giving in only encourages such movements. Such a movement can only be rendered harmless if it loses hope that its goal is achievable.

30 September 2025

Translated for [ESSF](#) by Adam Novak from [Greenzeloos](#).

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[1] Forum for Democracy (Forum voor Democratie), a nationalist far-right party founded in 2016 by Thierry Baudet

[2] Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid), Geert Wilders' anti-Islam party founded in 2006, which became the largest party in the 2023 elections

[3] Farmer-Citizen Movement (BoerBurgerBeweging), an agrarian populist party founded in 2019

[4] People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie), the main conservative-liberal party

[5] *De Telegraaf* is the Netherlands' largest tabloid newspaper, known for its right-wing populist editorial line

[6] ChristenUnie (Christian Union), a Christian democratic party

[7] Socialist Party (Socialistische Partij), a left-wing party that originated in Maoist politics but has moved towards social democracy

[8] Caroline van der Plas, leader of the BBB party

[9] Marjolein Faber of the PVV served as Minister of Asylum and Migration from July to September 2024, resigning after her controversial policies

[10] Front National, now renamed Rassemblement National (National Rally), is France's main far-right party founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen

[11] Vlaams Blok (Flemish Block), a Flemish nationalist and far-right party in Belgium, banned in 2004 and succeeded by Vlaams Belang

[12] Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs), a nationalist far-right party with historical ties to former Nazis

[13] Centrum Party '86 (Centrumpartij '86), a far-right party active in the 1980s with explicit neo-Nazi connections

[14] Centre Democrats (Centrumdemocraten), founded by Hans Janmaat as a splinter from the Centrum Party

[15] Pim Fortuyn, charismatic right-wing populist politician who was assassinated in 2002, nine days before parliamentary elections