

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article362>



Migration Dossier

Holland: Asylum policy dead and buried

- IV Online magazine - 2002 - IV343 - September 2002 -

Publication date: Thursday 12 September 2002

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

Supposedly, the idea behind policies towards asylum seekers is some small, even token degree of compassion towards those forced to leave their countries because of circumstances beyond their control. But the new right-wing Balkenende government in the Netherlands (made up of Christian Democrats, Liberals and right-wing populists) is taking the existing asylum policy, which was already in intensive care and carrying it to its grave.

Under the previous government (made up Social Democrats, liberals and Social Liberals) asylum policy was already directed towards kicking people out. They were proud that the number of asylum requests fell drastically (from 44,000 in 2000 to 33,000 in 2001, according to the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics in January 2002). The legislation had become stricter and stricter over the years and reached a temporary nadir in 2001 with the new Foreigners Law.

Anyone who thought that it couldn't get worse has now been disappointed. The new plans defy the imagination. In the run-up to the May 15, 2002 parliamentary elections, there was already a competition under way among the various parties about who had the strictest asylum policy.

This was particularly the responsibility of the Pim Fortuyn List, which made crime, immigrants and refugees the focus of the election. Fortuyn himself wanted to close the Dutch borders to new refugees. Everyone was just supposed to get asylum in their own region.... However, he also said that those who have already been in the Netherlands for years but have not yet got asylum status could hypothetically count on a general amnesty and thus be legalized.

When the negotiations to form the new government took place and "Pim's heirs" brought this up, there was a little hope among asylum seekers and the organizations that defend them. However, it soon became clear that this was a vain hope.

For it was the first part of Fortuyn's proposals that were taken up: refugees must be taken care of in their own region. And that's what's there, in black and white, in the Strategic Accord that was agreed as the basis for the new coalition government.

What it says is that Asylum seekers without papers must prove their identity immediately and also explain why they didn't apply for asylum somewhere else. If you arrive at Schiphol (the airport for Amsterdam) without papers, then you can just forget it. Of course, people who are fleeing from persecution don't first collect their papers and then go take their seats on a plane.

The previous rule, according to which asylum seekers got residence permits after waiting three years for their applications to be processed, is being abolished. Appeals after rejection of an asylum application are also a thing of the past.

Being illegal is being made punishable, and expelling 'illegals' is to be accelerated. The next step may be to go after people and organizations who defend 'illegals' as well, because in principle you are then complicit in a criminal offence. The government agreement already says that municipalities may not offer any compensatory housing for asylum seekers who have exhausted their appeals, although no punishment for doing so is indicated so far.

'Illegals' are thus to be repatriated to their country of origin. Governments that refuse to take them back will be ineligible for development aid - a proposal that was made at the Seville summit by Aznar for European wide

Holland: Asylum policy dead and buried

application but not agreed this time round at least.

For the Netherlands, however, this blackmail tactic is not so effective, since Dutch development aid has been limited to about 20 countries and many refugees come from places that aren't even considered for development aid.

So there are hard times ahead for refugees who come to the Netherlands and for organizations that defend their interests. And the right-wing government is going on the offensive in other areas too: immigrants, the environment, employment schemes, development aid...

Fortunately, it is dawning on organizations that are active in these areas that it is necessary to act together against the government's plans. A coalition called 'Turn the Tide' has been established in which social organizations and a number of opposition parties have come together. Discussion days and rallies are taking shape. The first important appointment is Budget Day (September 17), the day on which the government announces its budget plans.