

Netherlands: Contradiction and struggle - On the death of Pim Fortuyn

Saturday 16 August 2008, by [CONWAY Terry](#), [DRUCKER Peter](#), [SAP/Grenzeloos \(Nederlands\)](#) (Date first published: June 2002).

The elections in the Netherlands on May 15, 2002 took place in an extraordinary context following the murder of right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn, whose party could emerge from the contest as the largest single party. Terry Conway from the British socialist newspaper Socialist Outlook talked to Peter Drucker of the Socialist Workers Party (SAP - Dutch section of the Fourth International) about the background to the election and how the events of the last week have played out. See also below the statement of the SAP on Fortuyn's murder.

Q How would you characterise Fortuyn?

It's not easy to characterise him politically because he was very contradictory. The most right wing policies he put forward were undoubtedly to the right of any other party in the Netherlands: he was for the abolition of the Geneva Convention so that not one single more refugee would get into Holland, for example. But then just before he died he called for an amnesty for "illegal" immigrants already in the country.

He said that health and education were in a dreadful state - which they are - and then said that his solution was not to spend a single euro more but to sack a whole load of managers. He was in favour of the abolition of the monarchy - but then used events like the recent Royal Wedding. He called for the army and the air force to be abolished because he said that the strength of the Netherlands was as a naval power - but then he said he would vote to buy the latest super fighter plane...

As a person he was also contradictory. He started out as being quite left wing and ended up on the right. He was ambitious - but he also came over as being rather lonely.

What is also clear is that while he had these ambivalences, this was not true of others at the top of his party - those who will now be left behind. If they form a coalition as they have done in Rotterdam with the Christian Democrats and the VVD (right wing secular party) following the recent municipal elections, we will end up with the most right-wing government we have had for more than 30 years.

Fortuyn was openly gay. How did this play?

I suppose it was a neutralising factor. People said, well he can't be that bad if he's gay... He also used his sexuality in a cynical way - saying he couldn't be racist because he liked Moroccan men!

Immediately after Fortuyn's death, there was a discussion about whether the election should be postponed. Was the decision to go ahead controversial?

Yes it certainly was - particularly with the current head of the Socialist Party. [1] But once Fortuyn's party said they wanted to go ahead the government felt it had no alternative - they feared that there would be riots otherwise.

Despite the contradictions of both Fortuyn and those that have mourned his death, there can be no doubt that his murder has already resulted in a shift to the right. A far right party has been out leafleting in Rotterdam calling for a ban on the far left. People, especially in the environmental movement, but also in the anti-racist movement and on the left have had death threats.

There has been quite a lot of coverage of the mobilisations in the wake of his death. What has it been like living through it?

I think it will take weeks, even months to fully untangle the different strands of the outpouring.

Part of it is a specifically Dutch phenomenon - these gatherings have been in the tradition of "marches against senseless violence". A number of times in recent years people, not famous people or politicians, just ordinary people, have been killed - usually on the streets late at night, sometimes after arguments.

Then there have been silent marches to protest - to say we don't want this sort of thing happening in our country. And some of this carried through into the Fortuyn situation.

On top of that it's been a cross between the aftermath of September 11 and the response to Princess Di's death. The mobilisations have been enormous, and very mixed politically and socially. I have seen and read about many people who came out who said that they didn't support his ideas, that they wouldn't vote for his party, but that he didn't deserve to die. But then there were people like the guy who said he had been going to vote for the Socialist Party, but now he was going to vote for Fortuyn's party. So there is no doubt that the right hope to capitalise on his death at the polls.

On the death of Pim Fortuyn

Statement

SAP (Netherlands)

We condemn the murder of Pim Fortuyn. An act of this kind can never be a contribution to achieving the society of solidarity and freedom that we are fighting for. Pim Fortuyn's ideas were far removed from our ideals. Fortuyn tried to mobilize people, not only on the basis of their - justified - discontent with the political establishment in The Hague, but also on the basis of irrational prejudices such as: the Netherlands is full and has no room left for immigrants, people on disability benefit are doing too well, and women should go back to the kitchen.

We have been hard at work in recent months opposing Fortuyn's ideas in words, in writing and on the streets. We strongly object to any insinuation that Fortuyn's - left-wing - opponents have contributed to creating an atmosphere that led to the murder. Fortuyn's programme and public statements made us, and many others, angry and determined to continue fighting for solidarity and against racism.

Efforts will be made to take advantage of his death, just as that occurred after the September 11 attacks. We have already seen the first examples. The conservative daily De Telegraaf is trying to criminalize the left. TV Rijnmond asked several young Moroccans to react to Fortuyn's death for the sole purpose of expressing disgust at the fact that they were not upset enough.

Now more than ever in the coming days and months, we must fight in large numbers and with renewed energy for a social, multicultural Netherlands - before, during and after the elections. Fortuyn's 'martyrdom' could well lead to an even greater lurch to the right. We call all the more urgently on everyone to vote for one of the left-wing parties: the Socialist Party or the Green Left.

Since the municipal elections in March we have been very active in mobilizing and organizing for the demonstration on May 11 in Rotterdam under the slogan, 'Not One Vote for Racism'. We support the decision of the organizing coalition Nederland Bekent Kleur to cancel this demonstration, because holding the demonstration as scheduled would be counterproductive and would not help build a broad movement against racism. The decision not to hold the demonstration does not mean that we are letting the far right, which had already announced a counter-demonstration, intimidate us. Nor does it mean that we think action for a multicultural society is no longer necessary. Now more than ever in the coming weeks and months we must continue fighting in large numbers and with renewed energy for a social, multicultural Netherlands.

** Socialist Alternative Politics (SAP)(formerly the Dutch Socialist Workers Party) is the section of the Fourth International in the Netherlands.*

P.S.

* From International Viewpoint Online magazine : IV # 341 - June 2002.

Footnotes

[1] The Socialist Party is a far left, ex-Maoist Party - currently in the government but well to the left of the Dutch Labour Party which is the largest party in the current Parliament.