

Radical left set for huge gains in Dutch election

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The Socialist Party of the Netherlands is not a social democratic or labour party, but the biggest radical left parliamentary party in Europe, with the exception of the Cypriot AKEL and, since the recent election, Greece's Syriza.

Unlike either of those otherwise worthy formations, however, the Dutch SP has a very clear critique of the European Union.

It has opposed each and every EU Treaty, as well as the euro, and successfully campaigned for a "no" vote in the referendum on the European Constitution.

Unfortunately the government responded to the electorate's landslide rejection of the constitutional treaty by refusing to allow a referendum when an almost identical treaty was presented shortly afterwards.

Parliament ratified the Lisbon Treaty, which contained virtually all the changes which the original text would have introduced, without putting the text to the people.

We Britons are used to such blatant disregard for democracy on the part of those who rule us, but to the Dutch this came as a shock, and has helped to discredit politics in general, principally until now to the benefit of the far right.

The Dutch government fell earlier in the year, well short of its full term, when that same far right - Geert Wilders' 'Party of Freedom' (PVV) - refused to continue with its agreement not to bring it down.

Fortunately, the PVV has been declining in the polls, and looks unlikely to maintain its current retinue of 24, or anything like it.

The SP, on the other hand, is soaring away to unbelievably high levels, and seems set to more than double the size of its existing 15-strong parliamentary team, replacing the Labour Party as the main party on the left of the political spectrum.

As in Britain, in the Netherlands a party can only form a government if it can command the support (or at least 'toleration') of a majority in parliament.

Unlike in Britain, however, there is virtually no chance of any single party ever finding itself with a majority of MPs.

Elections are always followed by negotiations between parties great and small in an attempt to find enough common ground to achieve the requisite majority, which means at least seventy-six members of the 150-strong 'Tweede Kamer', literally the Second Chamber, the equivalent to the House of Commons.

The system can produce a certain political instability, but until the SP came along this was not reflected on the wider stage, as there were few substantial differences between the parties policies, at least in recent decades.

With the rise of a real socialist movement, as active on the streets and in the workplaces as it is in elections and elected office, all this has changed.

Unfortunately the SP will, though it may well emerge as the biggest party, not of course be able to govern alone.

Its hope was to do so in a coalition with Labour and the Green Left, a party which until recently outpolled the SP but which, having shed any policies which reflected the latter half of its name, is currently dwindling from small to tiny.

Virtually all of the SP's votes are being won from one of these two parties, whose failure to mount any serious, sustained opposition to austerity policies or Dutch support for America's wars have seen their members and supporters decamp in droves.

The result is that there will not be a left-of-centre government.

The reality of forming a governing coalition would face the SP with having to deal with centre parties, some of which are opposed to aspects of austerity.

If the elections do reflect the polls and SP leader Emile Roemer finds himself leader of the biggest party in parliament, constitutional practice would mean that the Queen's representative would first ask him if he can form a government, after which he will be obliged to invite the other party leaders, in order of size, for negotiations.

My expectation is that no other party of anything like sufficient size to make up the requisite seventy-six MPs would agree to the SP's demands.

The party is certainly willing to negotiate, but has indicated that there are certain points on which it will not compromise.

He will not, Roemer has said, agree to any policy which will increase the growing social and economic divisions in his country, which until recently was about as egalitarian as it is possible for a capitalist society to be.

The most likely outcome is therefore a minority government with the SP as the biggest opposition party by some distance.

Happily, I also think this would be the best outcome for the SP and for the Dutch people.

He whom the gods would destroy first put into a coalition government, especially if he or she is a socialist.

The SP cannot, however, say before the election that it does not want to join a government, as this would be regarded by most Dutch people as not playing the game with serious intent.

They are fed up with lies, hypocrisy and attacks on the most vulnerable in favour of the rich.

But don't let that weekend in Amsterdam fool you.

This is a very conservative population.

The fact that what it wants to conserve is a functioning welfare state and democratic system is what has created such mass support for the SP.

The radical left in Britain tends to take more interest in elections in Latin America than it does of those just over the water.

This is understandable, given the way our movement and those of most of our neighbours have dwindled away depressingly, seeming to have no answers to the neoliberal economics and antidemocratic politics of right and centre-left alike. Presidents Chavez and Morales are inspiring characters.

Roemer is an able and attractive leader too, but Dutch people in general, left and right, are hardly noted for their flamboyance.

Yet while the exciting rhythms of Afro-Cuban dance music may be missing, the experiment being conducted by the Netherlands' left opposition is potentially as interesting as the Bolivarian Revolution, and more obviously applicable to our situation here in the UK.

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P.S.

* September 5, 2012 12:02: <http://www.spectrezine.org/radical-left-set-huge-gains-dutch-election>

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