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International response to George Floyd killing

Minneapolis sparks BLM protest in Amsterdam

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On Monday June 1, a large crowd rallied in the Dutch capital to express solidarity with the protests in the US and take a stand against racism in the Netherlands. The size of the crowd surprised many. With only a few days of mobilizing, the rally drew over 5000 people to a protest that felt very different from many previous ones.

This protest was significantly larger than several national protests that benefited from a much longer preparation time. And the energy was also different. A stationary rally is not the most lively form of protest, and yet the crowd felt more determined, more angry than usual. Many of the protesters were young, and a majority of them were people of color. Many of the protesters carried handmade signs - a good indicator of the grass roots character of the rally.

Obviously the dramatic images coming from the United States of the racist police violence and protests and uprisings against it motivated many in Amsterdam to come out and show solidarity. But this day was not only about what is happening in the U.S. In their call for the rally, the organizers pointed to Dutch examples of racism and police violence against Black people. Recently it came out that the tax office for years violated the law by ethnically profiling and penalizing suspected fraudsters, thereby pushing entire families into financial hardship. This Monday was clearly also a protest against such institutional racism in the Netherlands and against the persistent refusal of the political establishment to even acknowledge it as an issue.

Sylvana Simons, an Amsterdam city council-member and candidate for the anti-racist party Bij1 ('Together') made the connections in a piece published on Monday. Simons pointed out the historical Dutch involvement in "dehumanising, trafficking and exploiting black people..." She continued to explain "that black Dutch people identify with the suffering inflicted upon Afro-Americans because, throughout history, black people have been deliberately and rigorously separated from each other. It is for this reason that a shared nationality is not needed to create such feelings. That is why people in Amsterdam are completely devastated by what is happening in Minneapolis right now." The Amsterdam city council is discussing the introduction of preventive searches in a part of the city with a large Black community, "a population that is tired of everyday, structural, and institutional racism. In Amsterdam, too, powerlessness is looking for a way to express itself... Rebellion is inevitable if, instead of addressing social issues, again and again, repression is chosen... rebellion is the language of the unheard."

That so many people came out on the streets was made possible by the networks and awareness created by years of anti-racist mobilisations in the Netherlands, often driven by Black organisations. Especially recent protests against blackface which created the conditions needed for a protest like the one on June 1. The anti-blackface protests achieved a significant shift in popular consciousness, what was until some years ago a widely accepted Dutch tradition, is now heavily contested and looks like it is (finally) on its way out. This campaign also made widely visible how deeply ingrained racism is in the Netherlands as the protests have been met with a violent backlash.

Even when protests succeed in drawing significant numbers, they don't necessarily create the kind of organisation that can sustain a movement between mobilisations. The Bij1 party is an attempt to build a lasting movement but is for now only represented in the Amsterdam city council.

Much of the Dutch left is weak on the issue of anti-racism and it was as good as invisible on Monday. Building on, and sustaining, the anti-racist potential in the Netherlands remains a major challenge.

Protesting in the context of a pandemic of course raises difficult questions. The organizers made an effort to ensure safe conditions, calling on people to wear face-masks and indicating on the pavement the distances people should

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keep from each-other. In the end, the turn-out was so much greater than expected that this was impossible, and people had to choose to go home to protect their health. Now, the same right-wing parties that have destroying public health care, neglected the danger of the pandemic, and are itching to remove all remaining health-measures are suddenly worried by the health risks posed by this large gathering. Regardless of their hypocrisy, how to organize future protests in a way that is safe and allows everybody to participate is a valid question. It will be a question we need to address all the more because Monday did not feel like it would be the last time.

2 June 2020

Source [No Borders News](#).

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