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Turkey/Netherlands

In the Netherlands and Turkey: solidarity and resistance to the right-wing campaigns

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This joint statement on the Dutch government's ban on Turkish ministers holding meetings in the Netherlands and what is at stake in this conflict was issued by the Turkish and Dutch sections of the Fourth International on 14 March 2017.

On 16 April 2017, Turkey will hold a referendum on proposed amendments to the constitution. In particular, the amendments would establish an executive presidency and change the structure of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors, resulting in a concentration of power in the hands of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Since the Gezi movement in 2013, the end that same year of prospects for peace talks with the Kurdish movement, and the escalation of violence by the Turkish state against the Kurds, and more recently the failed coup attempt, the Turkish government has become increasingly authoritarian. The AKP regime has been arresting and sacking thousands of critics, including many journalists, teachers and academics. It has been imprisoning the Kurdish movement's leaders and parliamentarians of the opposition party HDP on fake charges of 'supporting terrorism'. It is banning demonstrations and violating human rights. Yet now the regime is supposedly upset about the actions of the Dutch police and is championing the freedom to hold political meetings.

The Netherlands' right-wing prime minister, Mark Rutte, is in the final days of the campaign for the Dutch national elections on 15 March 2017. His party, the VVD, is competing with the far-right, Islamophobic PVV of Geert Wilders. The VVD is a neoliberal party that uses Dutch nationalism as a tool to build support for its austerity agenda. By preventing AKP meetings and declaring Turkish family minister Fatma Betül Sayan Kaya persona non grata, Rutte wants to present himself as a defender of liberal democracy and a strong leader, who will not be bullied by the Islamist AKP or its Turkish-Dutch supporters. But these steps are not motivated by concern about the restrictions on democracy in Turkey; rather, Rutte is trying to win over potential PVV voters. The Dutch authorities' actions are in fact helping Erdoğan. For Rutte, his election campaign is more important than really trying to avoid the further strengthening of authoritarianism in Turkey.

Thanks to Rutte, Erdoğan can now more easily present himself to his religious-nationalist base as somebody who is taking a stand against 'the West', while diverting attention from developments inside Turkey. The AKP is using scaremongering about international conspiracies against Turkey to rally support. Meanwhile, Turkish migrants and their families in the Netherlands have long been victims of racism and prejudice. The Dutch right is using the fact that a significant part of this community supports the AKP as an argument for the claim that Dutch citizens of Turkish origin do not really belong in Dutch society, and to attack the Turkish-Dutch community as a whole. Turkish nationalists and Dutch nationalists like Wilders and Rutte have the same message for those who oppose their vision of society: 'agree with us or leave the country'.

The actions of the Dutch and Turkish right are full of hypocrisy. The Dutch government has no problem allying itself with a repressive, racist government like that of Israel's Netanyahu – but in the case of Turkey, it is suddenly pretending to be deeply concerned about democracy. If the Dutch government were really concerned about democratic rights in Turkey, it could show this by supporting the Turkish democratic opposition and the Kurdish right to self-determination. But as we see with the refugee issue, the ruling forces of the two countries are able to work together smoothly to oppress refugees and strengthen Fortress Europe.

The left needs to oppose the campaigns of the Dutch and Turkish right and build the struggle against them. We call for a 'NO' in the Turkish referendum, for organizing resistance to Erdoğan's increasingly authoritarian regime, and for defending secularism. We call for a vote against Islamophobia and racism in the Netherlands, and for building movements against racism in the streets and in our workplaces. To defend democratic rights and popular interests, working people in Turkey and the Netherlands cannot rely on their countries' right-wing governments. Instead they

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should defend their shared interests in a common struggle against neoliberalism and against all forms of oppression.

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