



Editorial

PIGS and cattle

Bad economies don't happen due to laziness, excessive consumption and corrupt public servants. The economic instability in capitalism is an ever-present spectre (e.g., Great Depression, 1973 oil crisis). Since the 1980s widespread crises have happened around the world every few years; first Latin America, then East Asia and the US, then the whole West. In addition, the south of Europe is not alone in being in debt. In Japan and the US, public debts are currently higher than 200% and 100% of GDP, respectively. In terms of the total private and public debt, the Dutch are the fourth most indebted people in the world (344% of GDP). Many wealthy states, including the Netherlands, have adopted their own exploitative neoliberal austerity measures, often supported by social democrats, supposedly to counter economic uncertainty. In addition to this, unemployment is generally rising in the EU with recent data indicating that the percentage of Dutch population living below the poverty line could reach 10% in 2013.

The core-periphery relations between nation-states allow certain populations for a time to enjoy a rise in living standards and consumption levels through access to cheap credit, but even these times of 'plenty' don't last long in capitalism. Eventually and inevitably the circulation of capital slows down and profitability drops so low that workers are forced to compensate for the loss through the giving back of gains earned through previous labour struggles. Due to the neoliberal austerity measures implemented across the EU, the standard of living for most people is falling.

Profit-making of course hasn't stopped during the crisis, in the North or in the South. In fact, public assets are constantly up for grabs through rampant privatization. Simultaneously, in most advanced capitalist countries, austerity measures and cutbacks are rarely applied to infrastructure that facilitates the circulation of capital and generates profit, but to the arts and vital social services. And when it boils down to human lives (e.g., immigrants and refugees) the slogan remains: "we can't support any more..." but what's missing is "...people who aren't generating profits".

The truth is, austerity is neither necessary nor effective. And it is not irreversible. There are anti-austerity struggles taking place around the world, from student strikes in Canada (Quebec) to the cleaners' strikes, health care workers' fights and Vrije Universiteit employees here in the Netherlands. What is irreversible, however, is capitalism's vicious cycle of crises and recessions, with all their devastating effects. That is why we must resist being herded into austerity and think of alternatives, through solidarity, organizing and collective action.

Netherlands

New government, same old policies

Despite their supposed differences the parties that make up the Dutch government, the Labour Party (PvdA) and the liberal right-wing VVD, rapidly reached an agreement after the election. They know each other well. They were the main parties in the coalitions of the nineties and just like then they are intent on implementing neoliberal policies. What has changed is the rhetoric; neoliberal euphoria of the nineties has been replaced by threats of worsening economic conditions if austerity measures are not implemented.



VVD prime minister (left) is delighted with the support of Labour Party leader Diederik Samson

– Alex de Jong

The right-wing social-economic proposals contrast starkly with the 'social' profile the PvdA cultivated during the election-campaign but it is incorrect to say Labour capitulated to the Right. Both parties share the same fundamental beliefs. The differences are mainly in policies of immigration, culture and repression on which the PvdA takes a more lenient position. Recent predictions that Labour was returning to its social-democratic roots proved wrong. The party pays lip service to opposing neoliberalism but their alternative is an appeal to citizens to 'take responsibility for themselves and each other'. This soft communitarianism fits

easily alongside the destruction of collective services, since it makes social solidarity the responsibility of private individuals, not society as a whole. The PvdA's farewell to its Keynesian roots and its motto 'the boom, not the slump, is the time for austerity' could hardly be more clear.

For the PvdA, the crisis was not the result of contradictions in the economic system but was caused by people living above their means. Referring to the contrast between the economic prosperity of the nineties and the present, PvdA-leader Diederik Samson stated 'the party is over'. When the party talks about 'reforming' public services and looking forward to the future they mean cutting public expenses while

changes implemented with PvdA support, such as the lowering of the highest tax rate, are left untouched. The VVD, which sees the crisis as the result of too little power given to the magic of the market, agrees with Labour on what needs to be done.

Student grants and free public transport for students will be abolished. Development aid will be cut by one billion euros. Not only will there be almost 6 billion cuts in healthcare, insurance companies will be given more influence on the organization of care. This means less money will go to public services and more to private companies. Free home-care for the elderly and chronically ill will practically disappear and care-workers' wages are frozen.

Rent subsidies for people with low incomes are lowered, while the housing cooperatives that manage public housing increase rent. Such policies create a vicious circle of economic decline as consumer demand decreases, which then suggests the supposed need for even further austerity and further hardship. The crisis has not had an impact on the Dutch economy comparable to that on southern Europe or Ireland but there is negative growth. Austerity is driving the economy into the ground by taking money out of circulation and lowering demand. Real wages have stagnated since 2001, which coupled with inflation, means a further decrease of purchasing power and demand.

These policies are not well-meaning mistakes. International exports are growing and the Netherlands have a record trade surplus of 7 per cent of GDP. The majority of Dutch exports are to other European countries so a Dutch trade surplus implies a trade deficit for other European countries. This explains Dutch support for harsh austerity inside the EU to force countries to pay their external debts. The big winners of these policies are the large multinational companies that dominate foreign trade. The portion of the national income going to labour will shrink by 2.1 per cent vis-à-vis the income going to capital. In absolute figures, this means an increase in profits of over 12 billion euros – three quarters of the total value of cuts. Such are the calculations behind all the talk about 'preparing for the crisis' and 'sustaining Dutch competitiveness'.

Refugees in Amsterdam

The absurdity of fortress Europe

– Alex Merlo

During the recent parliamentary campaign, the PvdA (Labour Party, now in power in coalition with the VVD) presented itself as a defender of migrants rights using the slogan 'iedereen telt mee' ('everyone counts'). But on this issue as on others they seem willing to compromise their principles for the sake of "governability" before their principles. The current government plans to follow the path of the previous one: towards the classification of undocumented migrants and refugees as criminals.

The absurdity and arbitrariness of these repressive laws is obvious and the 100 refugees who now have occupied the St. Joseph Church in Bos en Lommer (Amsterdam West) since the 2 December are suffering the results. The Dutch justice system has denied them refugee status, formally asking them to leave the country while admitting that they cannot be sent back to Africa. They are thus left

in legal limbo, denied all social and civil rights.

And yet, this has not demoralised this group, who from the start have shown an impressive determination in collectively claiming their human and civil rights. Inspired by the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement, they affirm that collective action is the only way forward, refusing to be divided and struggling for visibility within Dutch society. With this aim, together with supporters, they have created a website (www.devluichtkerk.nl) in which they explain their case and propose ways for people to provide them with practical help.

Supporting migrants is key to fighting increasing racism and hatred of 'the other' in the Netherlands. Through their actions, the refugees have made protest against the inhuman immigration policies visible again. To achieve real results, they need collective solidarity. See you on the 23 March (see agenda).

What is borderless?

borderless is a radical bimonthly paper written in English for non-Dutch speakers interested in Dutch progressive politics. It provides news and commentary from an anti-capitalist perspective on Dutch politics and on events and social struggles in the Netherlands and around the world.

borderless is written and published by a collection of Dutch and non-Dutch activists living in Amsterdam. We consider ourselves socialists, feminists and ecologists and we seek anti-capitalist solutions to the many economic and ecological crises facing working people worldwide. We oppose capitalism, a political-economic system that is based on exploitation and whose increasingly frequent crises are devastating communities around the globe. We oppose all attacks on the civil and human rights of citizens, immigrants, workers, and minorities both inside and outside the Netherlands. We stand in solidarity with all people engaged in the struggle against exploitation and oppression.

borderless is a supplement to our sister magazine, Grenzeloos, published by SAP, the Dutch section of the Fourth International.

Join us!

If you are interested in what we do, feel free to contact us at borderless@grenzeloos.org and to like our [facebook page](#) (/borderless.nl). We appreciate comments on our articles, proposals or contributions for our next issue, and interesting events to add to our agenda!

We meet regularly to discuss current political issues, our involvement in social movements and how to put our ideas into practice. If you are interested you are welcome!

Quebec

Student struggle: why did they win?



– Anne G.

“I’ve got the impression that we were functioning in an individualist way and that Québec was passive. And now, I feel we have woken up” said a Quebecois student in May 2011, putting into his own words the surprise everyone felt in seeing the huge demonstrations that emerged and managed to stop a massive increase in university fees in Quebec last year.

These attacks, however, were not a first. In 1996 and 2005, successive governments announced increases in university tuition, but were forced to back down when thousands of people took to the streets. In 2011, the liberal government decided to increase fees by 75% in 5 years. Canadian students would have seen their tuition go from \$1668 Canadian dollars in 2007 to \$3793 per year by 2016-2017.

Indefinite strike and massive demonstrations

In February 2012, Canadian student associations voted in favor of an indefinite general strike and 300,000 participated in the first day of strike on 13 February. The government refused to negotiate resulting in a massive demonstration in Montreal on 22 March. Finally, after eleven weeks of strike, the government agreed to sit down with the student associations but after two days of discussion the government broke off the negotiations, saying that CLASSE (*Coalition large de l’Association pour une*

solidarité syndicale étudiante, a 100,000-member student association) had an ambiguous attitude towards the violent clashes that had taken place between students and police during the demonstrations in Montreal. By this point, the resistance of the students had won broad support among the Quebecois. A collective of teachers was formed at the very beginning of the movement and showed its support on student picket lines, while many unions and associations supported the students’ movement, and people across Quebec pinned red squares on their shirts as a sign of solidarity.

Harsh repression and student determination

The turning point in the struggle was the passage of the so-called ‘Law 78’ on 17 May. This law constituted a clear attack on student associations and established restrictions in the right to demonstrate. The law commanded teachers to hold their classes and forbade them from striking in support of students, it also forbade blockading classrooms or even gathering within a 50-meter perimeter around the university. On 22 May, the 100th day of strike, over 100,000 people participated in a demonstration in Montreal. In the following days, ‘casserole marches’ (a tactic imported from the Chilean students’ movements) multiplied linking student protesters with neighborhood assemblies born from Occupy, emerged and negotiations with the

government started again.

In August, under the pressure of street protests, the liberal government fell when Jean Charest announced the dissolution of Parliament and announced elections in September.

The electoral victory of the social-democratic Parti Québécois in September 2012 gave students total victory as the fees increase and the main dispositions of Law 78 were revoked.

In the course of the strike, a new generation of students showed extraordinary maturity and determination in standing up against actions that have become emblematic of neoliberal reforms all over the world.

As the Chilean movement was an inspiration for them, the Quebecois students may have, in turn, inspired Hungarian students who, after a massive demonstration on 19 December, forced the right-wing government reverse neoliberal reforms on education which included the suppression of the grant system.

During the struggle in Quebec, CLASSE refused the strategy of lobbying and trying to influence policy through the formal bureaucratic institutions. Right now in the Netherlands, there are also student groups which, like CLASSE, reject the line of the national student union and are organising independently to fight for their right to high quality, affordable education. We should all support these struggles in any way we can.

Netherlands

Labour Unrest at the Vrije Universiteit

– Michael Marchman

Last year the Executive Board of Vrije Universiteit (VU) in Amsterdam announced devastating cuts (33 million euros) to the university’s budget, resulting in the loss of 400+ jobs, the outsourcing of university services, and the merging of faculties, likely to lead to fewer courses, larger classes, and increased work loads for employees. The decisions by VU’s Executive Board reflect the broader trend of commercialisation and neoliberalisation in higher education, driven by a top-down management model.

But rather than taking this lying down, angry VU workers have organized and are fighting back. They formed Verontruste VUer’s (‘Concerned VUers’) to “put a halt to the implementation of a Strategic Plan that has recently been rejected by the Works Council, and a social plan that has been rejected by the Trade Unions”. Over the last year, they have organized a series of protest actions to draw attention to the issue and press their case. They began with an ‘Alternative Open Day’, organized with Abvakabo, the trade union representing university employees, and in May issued a manifesto entitled “Decolonize the VU”.

The manifesto states “It seems that the VU is colonized. The scientific culture is infiltrated by the management culture. The university is headed by directors who seem to have no heart for the university sector, education and research. They are remaking the university as an economic entity, turning it into a business [...] This course aims to reform the

university in a way that clearly runs counter to a long tradition of good employment and the pursuit of excellent quality in education and research. Staff and students have insufficient control over the proposed changes to their work and study environment”.

Protests at several meetings between the Executive Board and Works Council drew over one hundred rebellious employees who disrupted the meetings – from which the Executive Board reportedly fled. As they have continued to organize and agitate, *Concerned VUers* have gained increasing support from fellow employees, students and community members.

Despite their efforts to demand a say in the decisions that affect their working conditions, the Board continues to press ahead with its plans. In the process, the core mission of the university – to provide high quality education and research – is being subordinated to the market priorities of competition, flexibility and efficiency. VU, like many universities across the Netherlands, Europe and elsewhere, is being reorganized to produce as many graduates as possible at the lowest cost. The inevitable results: lower quality education and research, dissatisfied students and disgruntled employees.

Let’s hope the fighting spirit of the *Verontruste VUer’s* grows and encourages faculty, staff and students at universities across the Netherlands to stand up for high-quality, accessible higher education and a voice in the workplace.

Read more at: <http://verontrust.wordpress.com/>

What’s going on?

07 February 20:00

Real World Economics: The Financialized University in an Age of Crisis

Speakers: Prof. Henk Overbeek (International Political Economy, VU), Dr. Dimitris Pavlopoulos (Labour Economist, VU) and Dr. Rodrigo Fernandez (Financial Geographer, UvA)
CREA Theater, Nieuwe Achtergracht 170, 5€, Students free.

09 February 19:00

Borderless Dinner

A dinner to meet our friends, make new ones, eat and drink together and support our paper. The foodies of borderless will cook a nice 3 course vegetarian dinner. Price: 10€, 5€ for unemployed, 20€ for generous donors.
IIRE, Lombokstraat 40, Amsterdam.

12 February 20.00 (Doors open 19:30)

Documentary: Special Flight by Fernand Melgar

A documentary about the rejected asylum seekers and illegal migrants in Switzerland’s Frambois detention center.
OT301 Overtoom 301 1054 HW, € 5,-

12 February and 26 February 11:00

Dutch conversation lesson for beginners

Op de Valreep Polderweg 620 --- <http://valreep.org/>

16 February 19:00

Borderless reading group: “Race, Nation, Class” by E. Balibar and I. Wallerstein

We meet every other Sunday for a collective dinner and to discuss a chapter of the book. This first session will take place at the IIRE, Lombokstraat 40, Amsterdam. E-mail us at borderless@grenzeloos.org for more information!

21 February 19.30

Debate, Refugees Between Two Stools: Activists Report

Organized by the International Socialists Student Organization (ISSO) in collaboration with CREA Debate. Speakers: Klaas Jelle (lawyer socio-economic rights), a refugee from the ‘Flight Church’ and Sash Forests (UvA student and activist).
CREA Theater, Nieuwe Achtergracht 170, 5€, Students free.

08 March 20:00

International Women’s Day: Solidarity Meeting with Ecofeminist Activists from Across the World

IIRE, Lombokstraat 40, Amsterdam, Free entrance

13 and 14 March

Our Democracy Against their Austerity!

Call for actions, strikes and demonstrations all over Europe on the 13 March, and for a pan-European demonstration and creative actions in the city of Brussels on the 14 March against the EU Spring Summit.

23 March 13:00

National Demonstration in Solidarity with Refugees

De Vluchtkerk, St. Josephkerk, Erik de Roodestraat 16, Amsterdam.

Den Haag

17 year old unarmed shot by police

– E. Q.

In November 2012, 17-year-old Rishi Chandrikasing was shot dead by police on a platform at Hollands Spoor railway station in The Hague. Police received reports that an armed man had been seen in the station and had threatened another man with a gun. According to eyewitnesses, three police officers, one in plain clothes, rushed into the station with their weapons drawn.

Police said the boy reached for his midriff when ordered to put his hands in the air, prompting an officer to open fire. He was hit in the neck and died shortly afterwards.

Directly after the shooting, police stated the boy was armed and lived in a housing complex under the supervision of social workers and should not have been out at that time in the morning.

However, in December the public prosecutor’s office (OM) in The Hague confirmed that both statements were false: the teenager was not carrying a weapon and a restraining order against him had been lifted before he was killed.

On New Year’s Day, Rishi’s family released a photo showing the Rishi they want to remember. The family says that they were not only devastated by the killing, but also by the lies and slander of the police.

On Saturday 2 February, friends of Rishi commemorated his death by celebrating his 18th birthday on the platform where he was shot.

