

Country Report Netherlands for the World Women's Conference 2016

On the situation and struggle of the women in the Netherlands

This report is put together by the Platform World Women from the Netherlands



8 March in Amsterdam - on the banner:
*For a different future - a better existence
No more war - women in front!*



25 November in Rotterdam - on the banner:
Solidarity in the struggle of women worldwide!

Platform Wereldvrouwen/Platform World Women

Our group consists of about 50 active women (more than two hundred and seventy women receive invitations and the newsletter and sometimes take part in activities). It is our goal to expand the militant women's movement in the Netherlands in the process of the World Women's Conference of grass-root women and to organize it more firmly. The network of contacts with organizations and non-organized women is constantly expanding in this process. A new step we took the past years is the publication of a newsletter. In everyday life we are active in the struggle of the cleaners, the fight of the care workers and in organizing the struggle against the shifting of the burden of the crisis on the common people.

The activities of the Platform Wereldvrouwen include the preparation of 8 March, the day against violence against women (25th of November) and May 1st. These international days of struggle are not generally known or celebrated by the working class of the Netherlands. Seven years ago we started in Rotterdam with a demonstration on the 8th of March and in Amsterdam with a manifestation on the Dam. Meanwhile, on International Women's day every year a demonstration and manifestation are organised in Amsterdam where more than 500 women (and some men) participate. The Day against Violence against Women started about six years ago with a picket-line in Rotterdam, since then we also organise a demonstration every year, but in Rotterdam. During the last celebration the support for the autonomy in Rojava and solidarity with the struggle of the Kurdish people against on the one hand the Syrian regime and ISIS and on the other hand the terror of the Turkish state against the Kurdish people were the central themes. The victory in Kobane over ISIS is not only the liberation of a city, but it also strengthens the progressive forces against the reactionary forces in the world. The Platform Wereldvrouwen actively supports the strikes of the cleaners and the actions of the care workers in the Netherlands.



We are active in the preparation of the World Women's Conference and we organized two benefit concerts: a benefit concert in 2014 for the Greek World Women, to support the struggle of the cleaning women, the women of Aspropirgos and the European Conference and one this January to collect money for the Conference and to make it possible that women come to Nepal for the WWC. The platform have a Facebook page and a website (recently renewed) and publishes a newsletter regularly.

Invitation 8 March

Newsletter with call for WWC 2016

The Netherlands

The Netherlands is a country in Europe, which is bordered to the west and north by the North Sea, to the east with Germany and to the south by Belgium. The capital is Amsterdam. It is a small country (41,526 km²) with a population of almost 17 million people. The language is Nederlands (Dutch). The Netherlands is a multicultural country with 3.6 million people from more than 100 different countries, i.a. from Indonesia, Surinam, the Antilles, Turkey, Morocco, China, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Poland and Somalia.

Economy

The Netherlands is an imperialist country with major monopolies like Shell, Unilever, Akzo Nobel, DSM and financial institutions like ING, but there is a lot of poverty and especially poverty among children and single women is growing rapidly.

The present government is shifting the burden of 57 billion Euros on the ordinary people. In the Netherlands, the shifting of the burden of the crisis is increasingly tangible for the whole working class. With this crisis policy the state organizes massive impoverishment - according to the CBS in 2014, 10 % of all families, 734.000 families, were poor, that means that 1.4 million people are poor. Among them there are 460,000 children. Among the poor there also is an increase of working poor with low pay, with just a small job or those who are forced to work for free.

More than 500.000 persons have to have two jobs to earn a living wage. The impoverishment deepens the crisis, but most monopolies don't care that the buying power of the ordinary people decreased by 1,1% in 2013, because they sell only on exports markets. At the same time the Netherlands is a tax paradise for national and international monopolies. The 50 richest families in the Netherlands own a total of 45,2 billion Euros.

The income gap is still growing. In most sectors of the economy the capitalists have used the overproduction crisis to sack people or to change the working conditions and the con-

tracts of the workers. The working class works under increasingly flexible labor conditions.

According to official figures unemployment is 8.6% and among young people under the age of 25 this is more than double. But these figures are very creative. Other figures say that the unemployment rate is about 13.3%.

In reality unemployment is much higher, but if you work a few hours a week the statistics say you are employed, although you can't live on your wages. The last years many people were laid off especially in the care sector, banks, construction and in retail. Apart from this there are now hundreds of thousands of self-employed workers (hired ad hoc, without any certainty about future working hours and pay, without social security for unemployment, illness, pension) who can get no job or only part-time jobs. Also the number of home workers is increasing. The redistribution of national income (wealth) towards the companies has increased by 10%.

Rents rose the last two years with an average of 9.2%. Who moves to another house, has to pay 22% extra rent. But wages and benefits decrease.

In 2013, there were 7,000 evictions. 60,000 people are homeless and 1854 people committed suicide. The increase in the number of suicides can be blamed on the crisis and the cuts in the health care.

Work and care

In 1969 only 31% of the women had a job. In 2013 61% of the women have paid work. But sometimes only a small job with a few hours a week, 73% of the working women have a part-time job. More than 52 % of the women are not economically independent. In the Netherlands it is still mostly the women who take care of the children, so this hasn't changed. Usually women do the housework, though they spend less time doing this then in the last century. Also women take care of the elderly and handicapped relatives. On average women earn 18% less than men. There are as many men as women in the Netherlands, but paid work and care are not evenly distributed.

In the present crisis many suffer from declining working hours. Families having small children suffer hard from the strong reduction of subsidies for day care. Many of them cannot afford day care anymore. Often mothers reduce then their working hours. Out of a work force of about 9 million people only 4,9 million have a stable job, 1,2 million have a flexible contract and more than 1,1 million are independent workers.



Anger and distrust

There is a general disgust and anger among the working population towards the politics of the government. For the government it is getting more and more difficult to suppress the anger through media and the reformist course of the union leadership. Enormous propaganda is made by government and media to organise chauvinism and racism to divide the people. The state uses racism as a policy of divide and rule and the racist and semi fascist party PVV gets maximum attention in the media.

But the continuing destruction of the rights and welfare of people evokes (independent) resistance. This happens especially in the care system. Because of the destruction of the right to care at home and the closing of retirement homes hundreds of thousands of people lose care and more than 100,000 carers lose their jobs. For the main part the family has to care for their elderly, demented, disabled relatives themselves. The greatest burden is put on the shoulders of women. This way the government wants to save 7.2 billion Euros, but at the same time it transforms the care system into a profit-factory. By privatization the care becomes too expensive for common people. At the same making profits

become the highest goal for the health and care insurance companies, the producers, hospitals and care institutions.

Strikes and protest in care

This is the fourth year that there are protests in the whole country against the demolition of the home care and the closing of retirement homes, against the mass layoffs and the reduction of wages. The last years the protests have spread to ever more cities and there are local committees 'Wij zijn de thuiszorg' (= 'We are the home care') in many towns. The independent organization of these care workers has led to actions and striking days. Early 2013 the independent committee 'We are the care' has been founded. As of now the women are in the forefront of the class struggle in the Netherlands, mostly in independent committees who have to form the germs of a national network of active resistance against the shifting of the burden of the crisis on the workers. They organize signature actions, demonstrations, strikes and tent camps. The committees 'We are the home care' and 'We are the care' involve clients, family members and the public in the protests. With persistence directors and care directors and council members are being targeted. There also are results. In the home care the number of redundancies is reduced. Also 150 additional care institutions remain open. The wage cuts have been made to stop. We encourage contacts with the workers in other sectors in national campaigns and with the dockworkers of Rotterdam.



The Hague: Demonstration of care workers

One of the care workers said the first time she took part in an action: *"To go inside with 200 women - you really feel like you're a power. It is also multicultural with all those women of all cultures and ages and backgrounds. You're all together and see what you can achieve together. Not at once, but step by step. What I also like is that I got to know colleagues from all neighbourhoods and people who help and support us. With the work we do, you really have to have a heart for people. The tasks are difficult, but it shows you how important your work is. Without us and without the cleaners nothing happens in the Netherlands. They should know better than to look down on us. Without the people who do the work, nothing happens."*

Cleaning Women

The cleaners were also very active with strikes the last years. Many of them are cleaning women and one of them says: *"In 2009 the cleaners started their struggle and strikes for a rise in pay, for respect and for the appreciation of our work. Now we are more visible than ever. But our bosses continue to punish us by paying low wages and treating the cleaners with disrespect. 69% of the cleaners live in poverty. Therefore, we are going onto the streets again and again, as often as necessary. We have fought hard. By stand-*

ing up for each other, by joining forces and by keeping fighting, we have won a few fights. It's all step by step. But we woke up and we will never be silent anymore. We will keep fighting!"

Actions of cleaners - (left) demonstration in Utrecht and (right) solidarity with Greek cleaning women



Young women

For young women the crisis especially has the effect that it is harder to make a living, to build an existence. More than half of young people have a flexible job. Almost a quarter is unemployed. The basic grant for students has been replaced by a loan system, because of which young people are indebted for many years. Young people are faced with skyrocketing housing expenses.

Because for the working class child care has become too expensive, grandmothers are asked to look after their grandchildren besides doing their own jobs. The crisis of the bourgeois family deepens. Many young people also are active in the protests of the care workers. And young people fought against the abolition of the basic grants for students, but could not develop enough independent power to continue their actions. During the mass protests against the bombing of Gaza by the Israeli government and in the actions to support the struggle of the Kurdish people the youth was amply represented.

World Women's Conference

At the World Women's Conference we will be very interested to hear from 'woman to woman' what is happening in the other countries of the world. How the governments act, but also how struggles are organized. To learn, to be inspired and to be able to use the experiences to form more firmly and to develop the militant women's movement in the Netherlands. A militant women's organization that is connected with the daily lives of the women and the struggle and that organizes for the complete liberation of women, in Europe and the world!

