

Netherlands: Nijmegen Radboud University students and faculty members walk out against the genocide in Gaza

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“If students and workers are united, they are perhaps one of the most powerful forces a society can bring together”—Charlie, student from Nijmegen

Amid the immense human tragedy unfolding in Gaza, students and faculty members at Nijmegen Radboud University in the Netherlands, one of the largest in the country, staged a walkout May 27. Hundreds of students and faculty members participated, carrying Palestinian flags and signs, chanting “Free Palestine,” “Cut the ties,” “Disclose, boycott, and divest” and “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

Following protest rallies and encampments at universities in Amsterdam, Leiden, Utrecht, Groningen, Eindhoven and Maastricht, students and faculty members at Nijmegen demanded an immediate end to the genocide in Gaza. They accused the university administration (CvB) of being directly complicit in the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by maintaining ties with Israeli institutions and defence industries.

Radboud University faculty members have written an open letter in support of the students’ demands. The letter, signed by over 400 staff, expresses political solidarity with the students camped in front of the Maria Montessori building on campus grounds since May 13.

On the other end of the barricade engaging in class war, the Dutch ruling class, under caretaker prime minister Mark Rutte, has consistently shown its political approval for the war crimes of the Netanyahu regime against Palestinians as an act of “self-defence.” The students and faculty members at the university are well aware that the terminology of “self-defence” is a political blank cheque for the fascist regime in Tel Aviv to carry out the “final solution” to the Palestinian question.

As tens of thousands march in the country against the genocide and the complicity of the Dutch ruling elite and its institutions, a coalition of Geert Wilder’s far-right Freedom Party (PVV), Pieter Omtzigt’s New Social Contract (NSC), Caroline van der Plas’ Peasant Citizens Movement (BBB) and the Liberals (People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy, VVD) of Mark Rutte has agreed on a new government. They are about to appoint Dick Schoof as the next prime minister.

Schoof, the 67-year-old former Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) member and alumnus of Nijmegen Radboud, currently holds the highest position at the Ministry of Justice and Security. Under previous Rutte governments he served as the head of the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), the Counterterrorism and Security Agency (NCTV) and the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND).

Appointing Schoof as the next prime minister, who has an infamous record for stomping on democratic rights, sends a serious political warning to the working class and protesting students. His appointment serves as a conclusion to the 26-page coalition agreement titled “Hope, Courage, Pride.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) has pointed out that the agreement is a “declaration of war on the working class and all forms of social and left-wing opposition.” The agreement has two central goals: the introduction of the “toughest asylum law ever” and the establishment of a police state. The events of the past few weeks have substantiated the analysis provided by the WSWS. As it stands currently, the Dutch bourgeoisie is in favour of appointing a former intelligence chief as the head of its new police state.

The WSWS spoke to the students at Monday’s protest, sharing a QR code linking to the statement: “The assault on Rafah and the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.”

Charlie, a student at Nijmegen Radboud University, stated:

Our university has direct ties with Israeli universities; they are part and parcel of Zionist ideology, which is that of ethnic cleansing and Judaization. The policy of Tel Aviv University, the Dahiya doctrine, states that unprecedented force can be used against Palestinian civilians as retaliation for the murder of Israeli citizens. This imbalance in the value of lives means we now have a situation in which 40,000 Gazans are being murdered in a genocide of retaliation. As students, when you know what your university is doing, when you watch that live, you have to take responsibility. You need to stand up and stand together.

For 76 years, the Netherlands has had close ties with Israel, 76 years since the Nakba, 76 years of murder, genocide and ethnic cleansing, and 76 years of Dutch complicity in genocide.

In April, Maikel Boon, a former Royal Dutch Army private and MP of Geert Wilders’ PVV, proposed a motion in the Tweede Kamer, the lower house of the Dutch Parliament, to ban the slogan “From the river to the sea” as “antisemitic” and as a “criminal incitement for violence.” On May 21 the motion was passed by 74 to 73 votes.

Charlie continued:

We don't use the slogan "From the river to the sea!" in terms of a Palestinian ethno-national state. We use the term and will continue to do so because it represents a future brighter than ethnic and religious divisions and an ethno-national state. Nationalism is exclusive and undemocratic, and it leads to ethnic cleansing as we can see now.

We have huge support from staff members—in 48 hours, we had over 400 signatures. We have massive support from the Nijmegen community. We saw the Belgian dockworkers blocking arms shipments to Israel, which gave us great inspiration and courage because you can see workers saying "No, we will not take part in it." If students and workers are united, they are perhaps one of the most powerful forces a society can bring together.

Aisha, another student at Radboud University, who preferred not to be photographed due to security concerns, is in daily contact with a friend in Gaza. She was deeply emotional and found it difficult to articulate her thoughts on the dire situation facing the Palestinian people.

I have a friend in Gaza and I have daily contact with him. He told me to keep the global movement going and educate people on what's going on in Palestine. Especially after last night, when we saw burnt babies, babies without heads, and burnt people in Rafah ...

What is happening in Gaza is now being normalized. When we saw the first hospital bombed, we were shocked. Now there are no hospitals left in Gaza; burning babies is being normalized, burning people alive is being normalized ... This should not be normalized.

Aisha rejected the narrative that the protesters were "antisemitic," adding, "There are a lot of Jewish people taking part in this protest and many of them are taking the lead as well. Therefore, calling the protests 'antisemitic' is outrageous."

According to a spokesperson for the protest, security guards at Radboud University forcefully pushed two protesting students to the ground and placed them in a neck-lock. The students were subsequently turned over to the police. By midnight, a large number of police entered the Erasmus building at the university grounds to end the occupation by 50 students on its second floor. The riot police broke the barricade and dragged the students out of the building.

On the same night, at Dam Square in Amsterdam, riot police encircled a large group of pro-Palestinian demonstrators and arrested 73 of them and laid draconian charges of "criminal offences."

The recent attacks on protests against genocide in the Netherlands and internationally highlight the link between imperialist foreign and domestic policies. These brazen attacks not only undermine core democratic rights, but also serve to justify war, mass murder and police-state measures.

As US President Joe Biden signed a record military budget of over \$825 billion to fund the US/NATO war in Ukraine, to arm Israel, target Iran and prepare for war in East Asia with China, the Dutch bourgeoisie is preparing its own battle plan for global war.

Thus far this year alone, Ukraine is set to receive an additional €400

million in military support from the Netherlands, in addition to the €2 billion already allocated for 2024. With seven months remaining in the year, the government has already allocated €1.5 billion for Ukraine for 2025.

In addition to the billions already allocated to Kiev, the 2024 defence budget is projected to increase by nearly 43 percent. This war budget is expected to rise annually, reaching an initial sum of €21.4 billion by 2030, which is approximately 2 percent of the Dutch GDP. This is proposed to be enshrined in the constitution to place Netherlands on a perpetual war footing.

On Wednesday, staff at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) established their first staff encampment in support of their students. One among them is Associate Professor Sruti Bala from the Faculty of Humanities and Theatre Studies. In her widely circulated Instagram clip from the staff encampment she insisted, "This is not a freak bunch of hysterical nutters who watch too much social media. But this is a movement of academics as public intellectuals, as people, who stand up for issues that matter in society."

The Dutch ruling class, as are its international counterparts, is particularly concerned that the student protests could incite the Dutch working class to engage a struggle against imperialist war, austerity and inequality. Already in many cities in the Netherlands, what initially started as a student protest is now gaining momentum and attracting a broader section of the working class to the anti-war and anti-genocide movement, starting from faculty members to workers in the immediate university encampment neighborhoods in the big cities.

Developments this week indicate that workers in industrial neighborhoods also have begun to organise themselves into independent networks, exclusively through social media with close ties with university encampments, to coordinate political activities, to rally broader support, especially in terms of appeals for safety against police crackdown, as well as for funding resources and expertise, and not less to promote an independent media coverage to cut across the official media campaign of slander against the anti-genocide protests.

Dutch students and workers must turn to the international working class and base themselves on a socialist perspective directed against police state measures at home, imperialist militarism abroad—of which the genocide in Gaza is a part—and against its source, the capitalist system.



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