

Press Release

Racism in the Netherlands Reaches Farther than just a Folk Tradition

The death of African American George Floyd as the result of American police brutality has initiated a worldwide movement against racism. The uprisings were not limited to the United States, protests against racism also occurred in several major cities in the Netherlands. It is without doubt that several politicians, media-outlets, directors and even multinationals sensed the pressure from society and as a result, immediately voiced their sympathies towards the anti-racism movements.

In the Netherlands, Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, made a statement regarding the recent protests and racism in general. He acknowledged that he himself has begun thinking differently about Black Pete and the children's feast, whereby the Prime Minister stated earlier that Black Pete "just happens to be black". After a conversation with people of color, he developed a deeper understanding about their emotional experience regarding the children's feast.

The statement of the Prime Minister is most remarkable as he stated earlier that he had no problem at all dismissing the critique towards racism. In the previous campaign, Mark Rutte, in a letter to "all Dutch citizens", wrote that people with an immigration background should "behave normally or leave otherwise". Moreover, the Prime Minister stated about discrimination in the job market that one should fight for their place in society.

It is not surprising of course that now the Prime Minister acknowledges the racism in The Netherlands considering the current situation in the world. However, as it seems from follow-up questions posed to Mark Rutte that critique towards institutional racism apparently cannot be wholeheartedly confirmed without startling "a part of the Netherlands" by unjustly calling them racist. This means that despite the nice words, we still need to take into the account the emotions of white Dutch citizens who do not agree with this.

The words of the Prime Minister confirm the power of public opinion and shows how politicians allow themselves to be coerced to swallow their own emphatic statements. But his words also show that virtually nothing in terms of policies will change. By focusing his statements solely on the racism surrounding Black Pete, the Prime Minister effectively evaded the essence of racism; that is, that it is deeply embedded in the secular capitalist system.

It is not only racism in a cultural folk festivity that forms an issue for society, it is the way of thinking that the government forces upon minorities. Just as it shows in the government's integration policy whereby dissidents and Muslims especially are forced to adopt Dutch norms and values. If the Muslims do not comply, they are labeled radical or extremist. And this is while its own people have not solved the issue of structural and institutionalized racism, as was admitted by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands.

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