

**"I SAY WHAT I MEAN AND DO WHAT I SAY": PIM FORTUYN AND THE VICTORY OF THE
FAR RIGHT IN THE MAY 2002 DUTCH GENERAL ELECTIONS**

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Nashville, TN
27-29 March 2003**

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INTRODUCTION

On May 15, 2002, 17% of the Dutch electorate shocked the rest of the country by voting for a far-right populist party which had no name only a few months earlier. The victory of the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) made it the second largest party in the *Tweede Kamer* (Second Chamber) or lower house of parliament. It became part of the governing coalition, much to the consternation of many domestic and foreign observers who compared the party to Austria's Freedom Party and France's National Front. However the experiment did not last long. The LPF imploded through infighting and inexperience. On October 16, 2002, Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, of the CDA (Christian democrats), took advantage of the LPF's instability to call new elections in January 2003. This was the briefest coalition in post-war Dutch history.

But what caused almost a fifth of the famously tolerant people of the Netherlands to elect an unknown right-wing populist party? Is it the result of some far-right *Zeitgeist* of the post-Cold War period which is devoid of comforting iron curtains and suffers from the alienation of post-industrial globalization? Perhaps it was a purely local event stemming from disenchantment with existing parties or the unfulfilled promises of the social welfare state. Maybe it was the personalities involved.

The purpose of this paper is to look at how the LPF became the second largest party in the Dutch lower house if for only a short time by identifying six primary causes: pre – September 11, 2001 malaise; the aftermath of September 11th; the local elections in Rotterdam in March 2002; the personality of Pim Fortuyn; the failings of the major parties; and Fortuyn's assassination. I will also look at how the coalition collapsed and why the LPF was routed in the recent parliamentary elections on January 23, 2003. I conclude by examining the possible future of rightist populism in the Netherlands. I begin with a brief history of the LPF.

HISTORY OF THE LIST PIM FORTUYN

The LPF is the institutionalized cult of personality surrounding the party's deceased leader Pim Fortuyn, an openly gay populist from the port city of Rotterdam. Fortuyn formed the party directly before the May 2002 elections after being forced to step down as leader of the *Leefbaar Nederland* party because of his comment that, "Islam is a backward culture."

Ideologically the LPF is a hodge-podge of local gripes and middle-class angst flavored with a nostalgia for the imagined halcyon days of the 1950s. According to Gerrit Boerman, the head of the Document Center for Dutch Political Parties at the Royal University of Groningen, Fortuyn's ideology was a "cocktail of elements stemming from different directions."¹ Boerman identifies several "streams" of thought: there was the conservative, communitarian stream with Fortuyn's campaign to restore "norms and values" of the 1950's. There is the liberal stream which pushes to trim excesses in social welfare programs, especially disability payments under the WAO or *Wet Arbeidsongeschiktheid* (Law on Work Disability).² Unlike other Dutch politicians, Fortuyn conceded that the social welfare system cannot be perfect and that some people may "fall out of the boat," or slip through social safety net. By the communitarian standards of Dutch society this was an unusually harsh statement, but one that attracted a disgruntled group of voters convinced that welfare cheats were running amuck.

Fortuyn's thought also possessed a nationalistic element, which again, is unusual for Dutch politics. The Dutch tend to eschew open appeals to national pride as being unsophisticated and crass. The attractiveness of Fortuyn's ideas seems to lie in his claim that immigrants are betraying core Dutch principles of inclusiveness, consensus, and egalitarianism. That by wishing to retain their native customs in the face of mass Dutch culture, immigrants are refusing to integrate and are therefore pose a threat.

Finally, there is a libertarian stream in Fortuyn's thought encouraging sexual freedom and the broader distribution of soft and hard drugs. This attitude never quite translated into party policy for two main reasons: not only does such tolerance run counter to a retro-1950s nostalgia for imagined social stability and probity, hard drugs came to be connected with perfidious dark-skinned immigrants from Muslim countries. Drugs were evidence of the dangers of immigration.

¹ Quoted in Raymond van den Boogaard, "De LPF mist organisatie and ideologie," *NRC Handelsblad* (5 October 2002).

² It is very difficult to fire someone in the Dutch system of employment. One way around this is to declare an unwanted employee "disabled" mentally or otherwise. The person then becomes eligible for generous disability benefits and is removed from the company's payroll. After a while, the WAO became an inexpensive (for the firm) and socially acceptable way to fire people. It became a public secret that the WAO was becoming a place to hide the unemployed. In the 1990s then Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers attempted reform by tightening up the eligibility criteria, but powerful interests in maintaining the status quo limited any serious change. The LPF, believing that people should take responsibility for their own lives, wanted to undertake reform yet again. See Han van der Horst, *The Low Sky: Understanding the Dutch* (The Hague: Scriptum/Nuffic, 1996): 82.

In short, Fortuyn's ideology, and by extension his LPF, was less than coherent. The grab-bag nature of ideas had two results: first, Fortuyn could be many things to many people. His smorgasbord set of ideas allowed for a la carte support from disparate members of society who might otherwise have nothing in common. This is why he received support from all sectors of Dutch society in the May 2002 elections, though he drew heaviest from unhappy supporters of the PvdA (labor party) and VVD (liberals).³ Conductors of opinion polls, and the political parties who often sponsored them, distressed that they could not identify an "average" Fortuyn voter which made competing for their votes very difficult.⁴

The second effect ideological incoherence had was that once the LPF was in office, its alliances with other parties tended to be issue-based and short-lived. The party simply did not fit comfortably on the left-right political spectrum and so there were no "natural" allies. The party developed a reputation of being fickle and untrustworthy. This, in addition to feuding within the LPF, led to the end of the governing coalition and the calling of new elections in January 2003.

Paradoxically, the very thing that helped the LPF into office, the numerous and often contradictory set of political and social ideas, dispatched it into obscurity within a few short months. But this may be doing the LPF a disservice. After all, its sole purpose was to provide temporary life-support for Fortuyn's national political ambitions which after his assassination left the party without its original rudder. The party was an ad hoc solution to the exigencies of the pending May 2002 elections and so much so that Fortuyn did not have time to give it a real name. Had Fortuyn survived, the party might have morphed into something more tenable and capable of surviving its charismatic leader. Today, party supporters state that the goal of the LPF is to defend and further Pim's *gedachtgoed* or set of ideas. But without the author to further define them and provide coherence, there is little for the party to do.

SIX REASONS FOR THE LPF'S VICTORY IN MAY 2002

1. Pre-September 11, 2001 malaise

³ Syp Wynia, "De demontage: door het kabinet nu te laten struikelen, neemt Zalm een groot risico," *Elsevier* (17 October 2002).

⁴ Joroen van der Kris, "Polls zijn glazen bol geworden," *NRC Handelsblad* (16 March 2002).

Prior to the terrorist attacks in the United States in September of 2001, a slow but observable change in the public's attitude toward the government, the European Union, immigrants, and the invasiveness of American popular culture was becoming apparent. On 6 July 2002 the newspaper of record in the Netherlands, the *NRC Handelsblad*, published a special section exploring the growing discontentment in the population. Entitled, "Behind the Dikes there's Bitterness Amongst the Tulips," the collection of articles highlighted the increased sense of insecurity and apprehension felt among the Dutch population. Even though crime and immigration are down numerically, the Dutch feel just the opposite to be true.⁵ The general sense of anxiety has led many to pin blame of the government for not "fixing" what is wrong – ranging from reigning in imagined increases in crime and numbers of "new comers" or immigrants, to reforming the cumbersome institutions of the social welfare state.

Such feelings of malaise may well exist in other European countries and may be part of some post-Cold War *Zeitgeist*. It might have something to do with some alienating process beyond the state such as globalization, American cultural hegemony, or the mongrelization of national identities through Europeanization. Perhaps the challenges come from within via immigration and the attendant problems of assimilating people from different cultures. It is also possible that the social welfare state has not lived up to its promises and so the post-World War II social compact is now in need of renegotiation. But whatever the reason, the Dutch public was in a foul mood before the events of 11 September 2001.

2. *The Aftermath of 11 September 2001.*

The terrorist attacks on the United States had a profound effect on the attitudes of the Dutch public. The effect was not to create a sense of insecurity, which was already in place as noted above, but the attacks did sharpen and deepen such feelings as well as give them a focus. The nebulous feeling of insecurity and apprehension existing before 9/11 now crystallized around Muslims, in general, and Arabs in particular. Immediately following the attacks, racist or xenophobic incidents toward Muslims sharply

⁵ For information on the decreasing levels of immigration see the *Statistics Netherlands Press Release* PB02-219 (29 October 2002). For crime figures see "A Restoration of Norms and Values," *NRC Handelsblad* (6-7 July 2002): 47.

increased.⁶ The Muslim population responded by withdrawing into their own enclaves and began to radicalize in response.⁷ Muslim youth who had been trying to reform their parent's culture to conform to that of the larger population stopped doing so and embraced more traditional Muslim ways. People who rarely went to the mosque suddenly became daily visitors. The process of integration came to a stop. And perhaps not unexpectedly, Muslim youth in turn "kicked their own dog" by directing their fury toward the epitome of Dutch moral laxity – homosexuals. In the first country in the world to allow same-sex marriages, there was large increase in anti-gay violence by Muslim youth following the attacks on Muslims after September 11.⁸

The Dutch public found itself in quite a dilemma: on one hand the Netherlands prided itself on being tolerant and inclusive, even if more in word than in deed. The big western cities have always been more cosmopolitan than the rest of the country. Now, the newly identified sources of insecurity, Muslims, were the very people the Dutch had been trying to assimilate. Was the fox being invited into the hen house? It was in this climate that local elections were held in Rotterdam and ones which would provide Pim Fortuyn with the spring-board to propel him and his ideas onto the national scene.

3. Rotterdam Local Elections of 5 March 2002

Pim Fortuyn began as a member of the PvdA (labor party). He later switched to a reformist party called *Leefbaar Rotterdam* (Livable Rotterdam) where he quickly became its head. The surprising victory of his party in the March 2002 elections made him electorally viable at the national level. This first success was critical in moving his national prospects forward.

Leefbaar Rotterdam is part of a grass-roots political phenomenon – I hesitate to call it a movement. Close to 140 cities and towns have "*Leefbaar*" parties besides Rotterdam. There is also a national party,

⁶ "Anti-Islamic reactions in the EU after the terrorist acts against the USA," Dutch Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia as part of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (23 May 2002).

⁷ Ahmet Olgun, "Geen zin meer in Nederland: de aanslagen in the VS hebben he dagelijks leven voor moslims in Nederland beïnvloed," *NRC Handelsblad* (4 September 2002).

⁸ "Annual Report 2001: an overview of records and cases of discrimination," National Federation of Anti-Discrimination Bureaus and Hotlines. (21 March 2002).

Leefbaar Nederland, which Fortuyn led for a short time, but it is not the national body for the local Leefbaar parties. It is independent, though local parties try to ride its coattails when its electoral prospects are good. As with many grass-roots movements, the Leefbaar parties are not closely linked. Political issues are largely of local concern which makes the formation of a nation-wide political platform very difficult. About the only policy issue these parties share is their criticism of the major parties which have dominated Dutch politics since the WWII.

Leefbaar Rotterdam in March of 2002 reflected the social and political realities of the gritty port city. Rotterdam is home to large numbers of immigrants from northern Africa and the former Dutch empire. It is a blue-collar city with wealthy suburbs. The dominant party had been the PvdA (labor party) and VVD (liberals) until Pim Fortuyn came along. Fortuyn's ideology as outlined above appealed to many segments of the Rotterdam electorate. The electoral results of the March 2002 elections illustrate just how dramatic Leefbaar Rotterdam's win was and from which parties it drew supporters most heavily:

	March 2002	Previous
Leefbaar Nederland	17	
VVD (liberals)	4	9
PvdA (labor)	11	15
SP (socialists)	1	4
CDA (Christian democrats)	5	6

The party's platform was reformist: changes in the healthcare system, lessening government bureaucracy, and taking people off of the social welfare rolls who should not be on them. The party also exploited post-September 11 fears of Muslims by claiming that Dutch "normen en waarden" (norms and values) were being resisted by immigrants. Fortuyn painted a picture of ungrateful asylum seekers who would willingly take from Dutch society but would refuse to even learn its language. Fortuyn proclaimed that Islam was "achterlijk" (backward) and still had its head stuck in the Middle Ages. There was opposition to his comments, some called him the Dutch Haider. He responded that he was only saying what everyone

else was afraid to say – that the Netherlands was the most densely populated country in Europe and was full.

Fortuyn's arguments resonated with many segments of the population, but perhaps most interestingly, most of his support came from the upper middle-class in wealthier districts throughout Rotterdam with few immigrants and little of the problems of the big city.⁹ Tellingly, the same thing happened to the LPF during the general elections in May 2002. In Rotterdam, as with the rest of the country, the LPF's support came from wealthier "white" districts with few immigrants and low crime rates. Why the "law and order" vote should emanate from areas of the country least affected by those problems is unclear, but the vote brought Fortuyn into the national spot-light.

4. Pim's Personality

Like many other populists, Fortuyn was smart, sexy, and media savvy. He was openly gay which would have been a liability in most political cultures, but not in the Netherlands. In a country where tolerance is a virtue, being gay may have been an asset in that it provided ethical cover for supporters of his overtly racist and xenophobic attitudes. Supporting a gay candidate surely proves one's tolerance for others, and tolerance is most Dutch.

Unlike any other politician in the Netherlands, he was commonly referred to by his first name. Pim was empathetic, reasonable, brave, and honest. He operated where reason and emotion intersect. Most importantly, he knew how to please. Whether in front of notables or the common person, Pim tailored his message to fit. With businessmen he arrived in a chauffer driven Mercedes; with the average voter he rode his bicycle, which also very Dutch. His style was a revolutionary challenge to the staid, party apparatchik images of most Dutch politicians. Whereas most politicians would prefer to retire to a dimly lit neighborhood bar to sip a beer and quietly negotiate political deals, Pim sought out the voters to shake hands and kiss babies.

⁹ "LPF kreeg vooral steun in blanke buurten Rotterdam," *Nederlands Dagblad* (18 May 2002).

He also understood the politics of parties born of grass roots action and which were jealous of their autonomy, especially in a political culture where the norm is top-down direction from the Hague. In an appearance at the Vereniging van Plaatselijke Politieke Groeperingen (Association of Local Political Groups) in 26 January 2002 in Utrecht, Pim was confronted by a member of a local party with the statement that, "we will not let you (Leefbaar Nederland) annex us. Hands of local parties!" Pim responded by flashing his common-man credentials: "I was born in a villege up the road from Velsen. I was a clean-cut Catholic boy who attended a respectable Catholic school. My partents were upstanding small business owners. And my party has not the slightest interest in grabbing control of the local (party) administration."¹⁰ With this, he won over voters of local political parties who were distrusting of the bigger, more hierarchical political parties. Fortuyn provided parties of local interest the means for making their desire for political independence felt at the national level. He gave them a voice.

Pim was a media event. He stuck his finger in the eye of the establishment and attracted the protest vote. He asked questions, but did not answer them. He railed against the state bureaucracy, the issue of social mobility and multiculturalism but left defining these issues up to the individual voter. Pim's ideas could be all things to all people.

5. Failings of the Major Parties

The three major parties in the Netherlands since the war are the Christian democrats (CDA), the liberals (VVD) and labor or social democrats (PvdA). There are also a group of smaller parties which rotate in and out of parliament but are usually more successful at the local level. The success of the LPF took the big parties by surprise. They completely underestimated the electorate's anger and frustration toward the political establishment. The March Rotterdam elections were dismissed as a localized apparition. When the May election results came in, the PvdA and the VVD realized that they had seriously miscalculated.

In an open letter to the PvdA membership immediately following the May elections, the new parliamentary faction leader Jeltje van Nieuwenhoven and party leader Ruud Koole admitted that they had

¹⁰ Jutta Chorus, "Ontembaar medium," *NRC Handelsblad* (16 February 2002).

lost the trust of many of their voters: "The voters have spoken. The PvdA has suffered a dramatic loss. After 6 March and 15 May we have established that a break in trust has occurred between our voters and the party."¹¹

A month later another letter went out from the deputy faction leader Adri Duivesteijn explaining how that mistrust came about – they underestimated the impact the attacks on 11 September had on the electorate. "The attacks have negatively affected the feeling of safety of many voters. They are therefore going to vote more conservatively," Duivesteijn believed that the effect of September 11 was to strengthen the voters' feelings that not enough had been done to improve healthcare, education, and public security, though he pointed out that the coalition had done much in these areas.¹² Wouter Bos, leader of the PvdA, suggested that the problem had been that "we did not sufficiently understand the signal sent by Pim Fortuyn's popularity. Because we tended to be dismissive of him many felt the party was ignoring their concerns and were driven away."¹³

PvdA responded by forming a "vernieuwingscommissie" (commission for renewal) to consider the party's organization and platform. One result was to change the method of selecting the party's leader. Traditionally high ranking party members elect a leader behind closed doors. Their decision was later ratified by a party congress convened with much fanfare. The congress in fact rubber-stamped the earlier decision which led some to liken the process to a coronation. The new system recommended by the commission was to institute an American-style closed primary where the rank and file were permitted to vote.

The party's platform was also changed to address several of the issues the LPF had made popular. Afraid of being marginalized, parliamentary faction leader Jeltje van Nieuwenhoven made it clear to all that security and immigration were issues of concern for the social democrats. "We can not ignore themes taken up by the 'right'. If we do that, the voter is going to leave us on the 'left.' And justly so."¹⁴ It remains to be

¹¹ "Brief van Ruud Koole and Jeltje van Nieuwenhoven". www.pvda.nl (17 May 2002).

¹² "Duivesteijn: de invloed van 11-9 is onderschat" www.pvda.nl (13 June 2002).

¹³ Raymond van den Boogaard, "PvdA'ers lopen zich warm," *NRC Handelsblad* (21 September 2002).

¹⁴ "Van Nieuwenhoven: Veiligheid en immigratie zijn sociaal-democratische thema's." www.pvda.nl (3 June 2002).

seen just how this will translate into policy now that the PvdA is in coalition with the CDA (Christian democrats). Already there are signs of discontent.

Another important if not deciding factor in explaining the massive electoral losses of the PvdA and the VVD is that they were the incumbent parties in the government nicknamed the Purple Coalition due to the 'red' of labor and the 'blue' of the liberals. People looked to the government to reform the cumbersome bureaucracy, root out those who cheated the social welfare system, and reign in crime and immigration. The additional apprehension brought on by the September 11th attacks only put more pressure on the government.

The beneficiaries of the voters' discontent were the CDA (Christian democrats), and most importantly for this paper, the LPF. The LPF, even without its leader, provided an alternative message because its appeals to xenophobia and nationalism provided someone to blame for the voters' anxiety and by reconfirming the nation's, and by extension, the voters' existential superiority. Finding a victim responsible and feeling oneself superior in the face of nebulous fears has always been an unfortunate tendency in human society. The modern Netherlands, it appears, is no different.

6. Pim's Assassination

The Netherlands does not possess a tradition of violence in politics. Violence has historically been studiously avoided by building social pillars and eschewing potentially conflictual majoritarian politics for consensus decision making. Individualism is permitted, even encouraged, as long as the social fabric remains intact. A common admonishment to a willful child unwilling to play with others is that he or she not be so *asociaal* or "a-social". Seeing a Dutch politician gunned-down in the streets, even one with such controversial views, violated this sense of order.

What followed was the "razendsnel" or lightening speed with which Fortuyn moved from racist to martyr, from Le Pen to Kennedy. The myth-making of Fortuyn was truly amazing. Before his assassination Pim was said to have the intelligence of Hitler and the charm of Heinrich Himmler, the head of Hitler's SS. Fortuyn was the Dutch Haider. More friendlier, Fortuyn was likened to Silvio Berlusconi. In a debate with

Fortuyn in January 1997, PvdA member Marcel van Dam said to Fortuyn, "you are an unusually base sort of person" in response to Fortuyn's claim that the Netherlands was being "Islamicized."¹⁵

Mass psychologist Jaap van Ginneken argued that even if much of the public reaction was tied to the shock of the assassination and the feeling that this should not have happened, and must not in the future, there was a connection to Pim's personality. "He was exciting and was a special person with clear, polite speech, someone who could make jokes.' And because he came into people's living rooms so often via radio and television people came to feel that they knew him personally. 'In this way it could feel as if you had lost a family member.'"¹⁶

Cultural anthropologist Gert Jan van Reenen argued that although Fortuyn was unbelievably vain he wished people to perceive of him as the ultimate underdog – something most people are naturally sensitive to. When a woman threw a pie into his face earlier in the year the response was to blame the woman, not Pim's inflammatory words. In addition he seemed to be a "real person" via his homosexuality and open emotions.¹⁷

The practical result of the assassination was to increase the support for the LPF as a protest against violence in addition to a protest against politics as usual. The LPF received 17% of the vote and became the second largest party in the Tweede Kammer. The CDA (Christian democrats) and VVD (liberals) joined with the LPF to form the ill-fated governing coalition after the PvdA turned down CDA's first offer to form a government. The LPF turned out to be highly unstable due to a lack of an overarching ideology or an underlying institutions to provide stability. Infighting soon made the party, and the coalition increasingly unworkable. The CDA and VVD, hoping to take voters from the increasingly unpopular LPF, called new elections. The results of the January 2003 elections gave a resounding victory to the PvdA by increasing its presence in parliament to 48, up from 31 seats. The VVD now has 28 seats, up from 24. The LPF suffered a route, declining from 26 seats to 8. The CDA held steady remaining the largest party with

¹⁵ Dimone van Driel, "De razendsnelle mythevorming rond Pim Fortuyn," *Nederlands Dagblad* (10 May 2002).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

44 seats. The Leefbaar Nederland party originally headed by Fortuyn did not receive enough votes to remain in parliament.

THE FUTURE OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN THE NETHERLANDS

On 11 March 2003 provincial elections were held throughout the Netherlands as happens every four years. The voters handed the social democrats and the Christian democrats a resounding victory just as they had a few months earlier in the general elections for the Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) or lower house of parliament. The LPF and other populist parties fared poorly in the provincial elections. One year earlier, and almost to the date, Pim Fortuyn's Leefbaar Rotterdam party shocked the nation by becoming the largest party in that city's government. One year later, the right-wing populist parties have almost disappeared. What happened?

Based upon why the LPF did so well in the May 2002 elections outlined above, several reasons can be given for why the party was trounced in the January 2003 general elections and March 2003 provincial elections: first, Pim is gone. This is neither a necessary nor sufficient cause for the LPF's poor showing in the last two elections, but the party was originally built to sustain Fortuyn's political ambitions. Without him, its chances were slim. Second, the party lacked effective organization. Without the stabilizing effects of strong institutions, the feuding leadership limited the party's effectiveness as a coalition partner and an articulator of its supporters concerns. This is not unique to the LPF, the history of Dutch political parties is littered with one-issue parties unable to transform themselves into something more sustainable. The LPF was handicapped from the start. Third, the larger parties eventually realized that they had lost touch with the voters and refigured themselves to compete more effectively with the reformist parties from the right and brought their voters back home.

But what of the Dutch electorate? Has there been a shift to the right or can the unusual election results of May 2002 be attributed to a unique confluence of events? The latter would seem to be true given that the January 2003 general elections and the March 2003 provincial elections showed large gains for the party of the left as well as large defeats for the parties of the far right. However the PvdA (labor party) also

picked up several of the populist themes of the LPF. Perhaps the parties are moving right by simply following the more conservative opinions of the electorate.

The political scientists Galen Irwin and Joop van Holsteyn argue that the Dutch electorate has not shifted to the right. They take the results of the National Voter Survey 2002 as their starting point.¹⁸ The survey has been conducted before and after the last ten general elections. The same group of people are interviewed and asked a series of questions regarding political beliefs, perceptions and expectations.

The Survey showed that participants had not moved further right or left in their opinions on the political spectrum. From a scale of 1 to 11, the proportion of those who considered themselves to be left remained steady at 25-30%; centrist, 30-45%; and on the right, 25-30%. Such self-positioning is relative, and so the survey asked opinions on specific policy issues and found that not much change had taken place in that group of respondents.

Attitudes toward asylum seekers and immigrants showed some change, though in one direction only. Participants were asked whether they thought the government must do everything possible to send asylum seekers back. In 1998 42% thought the government should and in 2002 49% agreed. Irwin and Holsteyn considered the 9% difference to be minimal. However when asked if immigrants should completely conform to the Dutch culture, 55% thought so in 1998 and 68% thought so in 2002. The 13% difference was the "only" indication of actual change in the opinions of the electorate per the researchers. They conclude, however, that taken together, the data does not constitute a sufficient basis for the claim that the Dutch electorate has shifted to the right. Irwin and Holsteyn also point to a 9% increase in cynicism as minor and unable to explain support for Pim Fortuyn. Instead, they argue that two things explain the May 2002 elections: changes in party offerings, and decreasing party loyalty among the electorate which provides opportunities for political entrepreneurship.

Irwin and Holsteyn explanation for May 2002 is that there has been a group of Dutch voters all along who have held right-wing populist views but until Fortuyn they had no one to give their vote to and so

¹⁸ The results of the survey and Irwin's and van Holsteyn analysis are reproduced in "Kiezers zijn niet rechtser geworden," *NRC Handelsblad* (18 January 2003).

they remained "invisible". In the January 2003 elections the conservative VVD did not pick up this group's votes when they rejected the LPF because the party was part of the old, unpopular Purple Coalition and the party that had been blamed for fiscal problems in the country. The PvdA, on the other hand, while in the Purple Coalition, quickly realized their mistake. They fired the old Purple Coalition leader Melkert, and elected a new one, Bos. According to Irwin and Holsteyn, this was enough to make the PvdA look like a new party and one in keeping in step with the wishes of the voters. It was rewarded at the polls in January and March of 2003.

Irwin and Holsteyn also point to decreasing party loyalty as a second reason for the dramatic outcomes of the May 2002 and January 2003 elections. In 1971 around 69% of the respondents voted for the same party in the previous election. In 1981 the percentage had sunk to 49% and in 1994 the percentage stood around 38%. In 2002 the number of respondents who had voted for the same party in the previous election was only 29%.

Not surprisingly, Irwin and Holsteyn also point out that voters make up their minds closer to the day of the election than ever before. This not only makes forecasting electoral outcomes more difficult, it allows last minute events to alter people's electoral choices and change political outcomes. In this situation Fortuyn's assassination had a significant impact on who sat in the Tweede Kamer.

There is a major problem with Irwin and Holsteyn's analysis: it can't explain why the LPF and Leefbaar Nederland did so poorly in January 2003. If there has always been a right-wing populist group of voters just waiting for a party like the LPF to come along, and they voted for it in May 2002, why would they not have voted for it again in January 2003?

The survey shows a small shift to the right and perhaps one large enough to make the difference during the crazy elections of May 2002. From anecdotal evidence I suspect that part of the reason for the PvdA's tremendous showing and the LPF's and Leefbaar Nederland's defeat in the January 2003 elections is due to the embarrassment many Dutch felt for electing the party of a deceased far-right populist. The Dutch pride themselves on their *nuchterheid* or sensibleness and electing an unknown party with a dead

leader is not in keeping with that. The response seems to have been a return to the respectable parties of the social and Christian democrats.

CONCLUSION

The normally staid Dutch political establishment has been through a very unusual year. The reasons vary: feelings of insecurity born of post-Cold War malaise, fears stemming from the September 11 attacks on the United States, political entrepreneurship, failure of the exist political parties, and the assassination of a political maverick. Have things settled down or can future upheavals be expected? It is clear that the Dutch electorate is still apprehensive of the future and the Second Gulf War is not helping. International terror organizations discovered in Europe are a constant reminder of the vulnerability of open societies. It certainly remains to be seen if the present Dutch government, indeed any government, can truly manage the change brought on by European integration, global competition, and immigration. Seeing as party loyalties are very low, electoral volatility cannot be ruled out. The lesson Pim Fortuyn leaves behind may be less ideological than strategic: bypass the party structure and appeal to the voters directly through the mass media. The future cannot be predicted, but voter apprehension may continue to lead to party changes in the future.