

Switzerland approves reactionary “Deportation Initiative”

Marianne Arens
30 November 2010

Just one year after a referendum banning the construction of minarets, another referendum in Switzerland has sharply tightened the country’s immigration law. The narrow majority vote in favor of the so-called “Deportation Initiative”, launched by the populist right-wing SVP (Swiss People’s Party) led by Christoph Blocher, means that in future foreigners without a Swiss passport found guilty of criminal offences will be doubly punished and in many cases automatically expelled from the country.

In future foreigners found guilty of such minor offences as the abuse of social security benefits can be deported without any recourse to an individual examination of their cases. Prior to this latest initiative, deportations were carried out for serious crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, and dealing in drugs or the smuggling of persons.

In order to leave the issue entirely to the SVP, the bourgeois Free Democratic Party (FDP) and Christian-Democratic Party (CVP) had drawn up their own counterproposal, which barely differed from the SVP draft. Their alternative proposal was turned down in every Swiss canton.

The SVP proposal was accepted on the basis of a slim majority of 53 percent and was rejected in the cities of Basel, Geneva, Neuenburg, Freiburg, Waadtland and Jura. In Zurich, 50.8 percent voted in favour while 49.2 percent opposed the measure.

Electoral participation stood at 52.6 percent, i.e., just over half of all those entitled to vote. Switzerland has around 8 million inhabitants but only 5 million voting-age adults are enfranchised. That means that 1.5 million voters were not allowed to vote on an issue that will affect the lives of around 2 million citizens. Twenty-two percent of the population do not hold a Swiss passport, including many third generation immigrants.

Voting results reveal that opponents of the initiative barely conducted any campaign compared to the concerted national campaign carried out by the SVP costing about 10 million Swiss francs. The backward and primitive posters and leaflets of the SVP, railing against foreign rapists and featuring cartoons of black sheep being herded across Swiss borders, were delivered to every household.

The Swiss Socialist Party (SP), the Greens and some trade unions had called for both parts of the referendum to be rejected, but only arrived at this position after procrastinating for some time. No one conducted a campaign to defend the basic democratic right of equal treatment, which is completely violated by the referendum proposals. Nor was any attempt made to mobilize young people and the working population to repulse the attack posed by these measures.

On Sunday evening following the vote, the SP deputy Simonetta Sommaruga—successor to the Social Democrat Moritz Leuenberger who had resigned—declared that crimes committed by foreigners were “a serious problem in the population”. The Swiss government would accept the result of the referendum and seek to implement it, she said.

The question arises why the right wing could undertake such a vile racist manoeuvre and face no serious opposition. The reason is to be found in the profound divisions in Swiss society. Agitation against so-called “criminal foreigners” is aimed at diverting attention from the country’s real social problems and mobilising unstable and indignant middle class forces against the poorest and most defenceless social layers.

Switzerland has the largest per capita wealth in the world, but this wealth is extremely unequally distributed: the richest 100 Swiss possess as much wealth as the lower three quarters of society.

Proportionally, Switzerland has the most millionaires of any country, but one seventh of the population does not have enough income to make ends meet, and 10 percent of all jobs are considered to be precarious. A quarter of a million children up to the age of 18, around 12 percent of the total, live in poor households, and one sixth of all residents are considered poor.

As was the case in every European country, Swiss banks, such as the global player UBS, were bailed out with billions of taxpayers' funds, while the working population is being forced to bear the brunt of the 2008 financial crisis through the slashing of social and welfare benefits. Poverty, unemployment and social distress at the bottom end of society are the result.

A second initiative by the SP, "Equality in Fiscal Matters Initiative", was also put to the vote on Sunday. The initiative proposed a minimum tax of 22 percent for those with a tax deductible income of at least a quarter of a million Swiss franc, with an additional 5 percent tax for private fortunes exceeding 2 million francs. The measure was aimed at permitting the country's 26 separate cantons to outbid one another to offer companies and the rich an incentive to invest based on competitive tax rates.

This initiative was rejected by the electorate. In an unparalleled campaign the SVP denounced this timid attempt by bourgeois parties and business groups to tax the rich as an all-out attack on middle- and small-sized enterprises aimed at "socialist expropriation". On its web site the SVP wrote that this initiative "does not bring more justice, but dreams of a socialist state. The middle class and small business will have to pay the price."

Again, dozens of millions of Swiss francs were spent on the campaign against this initiative, with ammunition provided by the rival massive campaign against "foreign criminals". The Greens and Social Democrats were generally portrayed as "dreamers" and naive "do-gooders".

In reality, the SP and the Greens do not differ in principle from the other bourgeois parties; they are simply trying to find a better way to defend and maintain the capitalist free market in Switzerland. Stunts like their "Equality in Fiscal Matters Initiative" are aimed at appeasing the widespread and growing anger with bank managers and the wealthy since the onset of the financial crisis.

Popular anger has exacerbated the banking crisis. A political program based on overcoming increasing social polarisation would have to first and foremost challenge national backwardness and unite the working population in Switzerland with the European and international working class in a struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe.

Secondly, the enormously wealthy Swiss banks, large private fortunes and major industry must be put under the supervision and control of the working population and placed at the disposal of society as a whole.

Such a perspective is feared by the SP and the Greens as by all other Swiss parties. This explains why the so-called left in Switzerland has reacted so passively and defensively, leaving the initiative to the SVP. The SP and the Greens represent the interests of the Swiss nation state and private capitalist ownership and fear a mobilisation by layers of workers far more than the offensive launched by big business and the banks.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact