

# Anti-immigration party wins election in Switzerland

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The right-wing anti-immigrant Swiss People's Party (SVP) won the biggest share of the vote in Sunday's parliamentary election. The SVP won 29.4 percent of the vote, improving on its 26.6 percent result in 2011. The increased vote for the SVP means an extra 11 seats in Switzerland's lower house of parliament, bringing its tally to 65.

"Shift to the right expected in Switzerland", Germany's *Tagesschau* headlined its report last Thursday. The SVP was campaigning with the slogan "stay free," but really meant "Free from refugees", wrote the newspaper. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote, "All polls indicate a victory for the right-wing populists."

The SVP dominated the election campaign, with tens of millions being spent for its aggressive advertising offensive. It has not only relied on its own propaganda apparatus, but on newspapers like the *Basler Zeitung*, which was taken over by SVP leader Christoph Blocher last year, and the *Weltwoche* of right-wing agitator Robert Köppel.

The centrepiece of the SVP's election campaign was repugnant chauvinism and primitive anti-immigrant appeals. The party, directed on a strict right-wing course by the multibillionaire Blocher, is exploiting fears of job losses by victimising the weakest of all: refugees and immigrants. It branded the 300,000 immigrants without papers as potential terrorists.

Its intention is clear: the SVP wants to mobilise backward sections of the population and position them in opposition to the working class. More than 20 percent of the population, mostly workers, cannot vote at all because they do not have Swiss citizenship. Characteristic of the SVP's right-wing election campaign is the fact that with the slogan "Swiss legal state, foreign judges", they are demanding an exit from the European Convention on Human Rights.

But the right-wing campaign is only proving successful because nobody opposes it. The big business FDP (Free Democrats) was able to slightly improve its vote by 1.3 points and gained three extra seats, tilting parliament further to the right. Although the FDP has some reservations about

the SVP's anti-Europeanism, it hopes to be able to control Blocher's party in government as before.

The other bourgeois parties, including the Social Democrats (SP), place their trust in the well-worn mechanisms of the so-called concordance model, designed to hold social conflicts in check and maintain the unity of the country, which is marked by linguistic, religious and cultural differences. The SP increased its share of the vote by just 0.1 percent to 18.9 percent but are expected to lose three seats. The Greens and Green Liberal Party lost a total of nine seats.

In the nineteenth century, the FDP, the oldest party and the traditional mouthpiece of big business and the banks, dominated the Federal Council alone for over 40 years. Then in 1890, the Christian Catholic CVP emerged as the second party. After the 1917 Russian Revolution and a general strike in November 1918, the Farmers', Industrial and Citizens' Party (BGB), out of which the SVP would later emerge, was established as a bulwark in opposition to the socialists and brought into government.

The SP only received a permanent seat on the Federal Council in 1943, in the midst of the Second World War, after it had proven its reliability by abandoning strikes and committing to keeping social peace.

Since 1959, the so-called magic formula has applied, according to which the FDP, CVP and SP get two and the BGB/SVP one seat in government regardless of the election results. There was a slight alteration in 2003, when the CVP gave up one of its seats to the rising SVP, which was later given to the split-off BDP (Conservative Democratic Party).

The parties are trying to maintain a balance between the nationalism of the SVP and the economic and political opening to the EU, which is essential for the technologically advanced export economy of Switzerland. This balancing act is coming under increased risk because of the deepening economic crisis.

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) wrote last week, "The strength of the franc" is hanging "like a millstone around the neck of the export economy." The FAZ was therefore fearful of a victory by the SVP, which would

complicate relations with the EU. As the FAZ wrote, the “Free Democrats are determined to save the bilateral agreements.” Last year, the SVP narrowly won its initiative “Against mass immigration,” and therefore suspended the freedom of movement agreement with the EU.

The government is well aware that the Swiss economy depends entirely on the global markets and the stock market. At the same time, the intensification of the international financial and economic crisis is deepening social tensions. This has been made clear since last January, when the Swiss National Bank (SNB) surprisingly lifted the fixed exchange rate between the franc and the euro.

Many Swiss businesses see an opportunity to pursue long-planned attacks on the working class. Particularly in retail, hotels, food production, mechanical engineering and other sectors that produce for export, increasing numbers of workers are losing permanent jobs and guaranteed incomes.

Job cuts, short-term working and wage cuts are the order of the day. Although the official unemployment rate of 3.2 percent in Switzerland is relatively low, it rose by 6.4 percent in comparison to last year, equating to more than 8,000 more unemployed than in 2014.

Youth unemployment increased by over a thousand people (5.8 percent) compared to this month last year, as the state secretary for the economy reported. In total, close to 200,000 were reported as looking for work in September, more than 13,000 more than last year.

A new wave of layoffs is anticipated over the winter. As the *Handelszeitung* reported in August, the following companies are planning job cuts and outsourcing from Switzerland this autumn: the food giant Nestlé, industrial firm Alstom, electronics concern Lonza Group, the Sulzer company, the oil refinery Tamoil, the German Pfisterer group, Von Roll Infratec, cement producer Olcim, the Siemens division in Zug, Unilever in Schaffhausen, the cable maker Huber+Suhner, the agro-chemical firm Syngenta, Coca Cola in Bern, Electrolux in Glarus, Trichema in Baar, hotel company Schweizerhof, Julius Bär bank, HSBC private bank, medical insurer Helvetia, media firm Rengier and the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) daily.

In addition, numerous firms are demanding wage cuts and unpaid overtime from their workforce, including steel producer Benteler in Rothrist, Basel-based Souter, and St. Gallen’s metalwork SFS group.

Due to the crisis of the franc, any new government, whatever its composition, will impose new attacks in the coming legislative period against the working class.

To prevent the franc from falling below 1.20 to the euro, the Swiss National Bank has bought more than €400 billion of euro bonds since 2011. The sudden ending of the fixed exchange rate cost the bank several billion francs. These

huge losses, which in the long term will be recouped from health insurance, pensions and the cantons, will produce major attacks on pensions and the social conditions of the population.

With its reform “Pensions 2020”, the government has already announced the course it will pursue. With the justification that the elderly and survivors’ insurance and pension system is overburdened with debt, insurance contributions are to be increased and the female retirement age will rise from 64 to 65. Further social cuts are planned with the reorganisation of public services. Only the Swiss army is exempt from cuts. The budget for military spending is to rise continuously.

The SP is fully involved in these attacks. Federal President Simonetta Sommaruga heads the justice and police department in the current government, while the interior ministry, responsible for health, education, research and culture, is led by her party colleague, Alain Bersat. The Social Democrats are thus responsible for refugees, the distribution of unemployment benefits and other social services, as well as domestic policing should protests emerge.

The SP’s parliamentarians are businessmen, professors, trade union functionaries and state employees, not workers. All of the party’s representatives in parliament are much less people’s representatives than lobbyists for corporations and associations, as the official register for conflicts of interest shows.

In this political vacuum, where no real alternative exists, the SVP propagates its right-wing wares, while the vast majority of the population does not bother to vote. Overall voter turnout on Sunday was just 48 percent. In 2011, voter participation was also less than 50 percent. Among young people aged 18-34, two thirds stayed away from the polls.



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