

The Dutch elections and the danger of fascism

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The Dutch national elections, which are being held today, have been dominated by an outpouring of xenophobia, nationalism and racism on a scale unseen since the days when Adolf Hitler railed against the “Jewish conspiracy” in Berlin’s Sportpalast and Benito Mussolini whipped up crowds from the balcony of Rome’s Piazza Venezia.

Geert Wilders and his fascist Party for Freedom have called for a ban on immigration from Muslim countries, the closure of mosques and a ban on the Koran. But Wilders, far from being the exception, has set the tone for the entire spectrum of Dutch politics, from the conservative government of Prime Minister Mark Rutte to the ex-Maoist Socialist Party.

“If you don’t like it here, you can leave,” Rutte told immigrants earlier this month. The *Wall Street Journal* commented that, coming from a “multilingual classical-music lover, long known for pro-globalization and socially liberal policies,” this rhetoric “epitomizes a European establishment” that is ever more openly embracing the right-wing populism embodied by Wilders.

The *Journal* noted, “In France, the presidential candidate for conservative party Les Républicains, François Fillon, has heavily focused on defending French cultural identity,” while “German Chancellor Angela Merkel, seeking a fourth term in September, has stepped back from her open-door immigration policy.” The newspaper added, “In the U.K., Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May has made stronger immigration controls a priority for the country’s future relations with the EU.”

The seemingly magnetic appeal of Wilders’ right-wing populism to bourgeois politicians on both sides of the Atlantic was expressed in an outburst by US Congressman Steve King, a representative from Iowa, who this week proclaimed, “Wilders understands that culture and demographics are our destiny. We can’t

restore our civilization with somebody else’s babies.”

For decades, bourgeois historians have asserted that the rise of fascism in the 1930s, contrary to the analysis of Marxists such as Leon Trotsky, was some sort of terrible accident, the result of the actions of “madmen” like Hitler and Mussolini who took power despite the best efforts of capitalist politicians to preserve democracy.

By contrast, Trotsky explained that fascism was the expression of the basic tendencies of capitalism, which in periods of relative prosperity can afford the outward trappings of democracy, but in periods of crisis reverts to its basic inherent tendency: militarism and dictatorship, which capitalist politicians seek to provide with a “populist” cover through xenophobic and nationalist demagoguery.

The emergence of fascism in 20th century Europe and the coming to power of the Nazis amid the Great Depression in 1933 were not an isolated historical catastrophe never to be repeated, but the product of capitalism and its deep decay. In the 21st century, amid the deepest capitalist crisis since the 1930s, fascist forces increasingly dominate European bourgeois politics.

Just three days before the election, Rutte sought to prove his right-wing credentials by provoking a major diplomatic incident with Turkey. His government banned the Turkish Foreign Minister from entering the Netherlands, barricaded the Turkish Consulate in Rotterdam, and expelled the Turkish Minister of Family Affairs with a police escort to the country’s border.

The other parties applauded, including the social democratic Labour Party (PvdA) and the pseudo-left Socialist Party. Parties throughout Europe followed suit. In Germany, the Left Party enthusiastically greeted Rutte’s right-wing provocation and urged the German government to follow the example of the “consistent

approach” of the Dutch government.

This shift far to the right is the response of the bourgeois parties to a profound crisis of capitalist society in the Netherlands and across Europe. Decades of welfare cuts, the enrichment of a tiny minority at the expense of the majority and the spread of war have generated economic and social tensions that cannot be resolved by democratic methods.

“Under the impact of class and international contradictions that are too highly charged, the safety switches of democracy either burn out or explode,” wrote Leon Trotsky in 1929, more than three years before the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor of Germany. “That is what the short circuit of dictatorship represents.”

Then, as now, the bourgeoisie responds to the crisis of the capitalist system with militarism, war and dictatorship. The methods of social conciliation, on which bourgeois rule was based in the post-war period, have long ceased to function. The social democratic parties and trade unions are discredited and have lost any support in the working class.

In the Netherlands, the PvdA, once one of the most influential European social democratic parties, stands on the brink of collapse. In opinion polls, it is in seventh place. In the early 1980s, the PvdA launched the attack on the Dutch social security system and has since played a leading role in destroying it. Since 2012, there have been six PvdA ministers in Rutte’s right-wing government. Its best-known representative, the head of the Euro Group, Jeroen Dijsselbloem, came to prominence agitating for austerity against Greece.

Now the Dutch ruling class is trying to avert the threat of a social explosion by drawing on the methods of fascism, mobilizing the dregs of society against the working class.

Wilders, himself a former parliamentary deputy of Rutte’s People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), appeals to the middle class, faced with the threat of being thrown into the mass of the working poor, and to the frustration of impoverished workers by blaming immigrants for this social misery. In the first half of the 20th century, fascism used the Jews as scapegoats; today, a bankrupt political system scapegoats immigrants and Muslims.

The adoption of Wilders’ right-wing policies by the establishment parties must be taken as a warning. The

ruling elites are preparing to break with democratic methods, to suppress any opposition to social cuts and militarism.

This is true not only in the Netherlands. After the Brexit referendum in the UK and the election of Trump as president of the United States, the Dutch election is setting the tone for the French presidential election in April, where far-right candidate Marine Le Pen leads in the polls, and for the German elections in September, where the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) is garnering similar poll numbers to Wilders’ PVV.

The fact that it is the far-right forces that profit from the deepest crisis of world capitalism since the 1930s is an unanswerable indictment of the capitalist political establishment.

The return of fascism, war and militarism can only be opposed by an independent movement of the international working class, fighting for the overthrow of capitalism and the construction of a socialist society. This means building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout Europe and internationally.



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