

# Dutch Prime Minister Rutte wins out against far-right challenger

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The far-right Party for Freedom (PVV) of Geert Wilders did not make the breakthrough that was long predicted in yesterday's Dutch election. With 13.1 percent of the vote, it came in second behind the right-wing Liberals (VVD) of Prime Minister Mark Rutte, who won the election with 21.3 percent of the vote.

However, Wilders' poorer than expected result by no means signals an end of the sharp shift to the right in European politics. Rutte's VVD and the Christian Democrats (CDA), which came in third with 12.4 percent, have largely taken over the xenophobic, anti-Islamic rhetoric of Wilders, who set the tone for the entire election. Their only difference with Wilders is over the European Union. While Wilders is calling for a referendum on exiting the EU, Rutte's VVD and most of the other bourgeois parties are strongly defending it.

Wilders will continue to play a major political role. While he did not meet the expectations raised by the polls, he improved his vote by 3 percent since the 2012 election. "PVV-voters, thank you! We have won seats! The first win is in. And Rutte is far from rid of me!!" read his first response to the result on Twitter.

Notwithstanding Rutte's victory, the vote of the ruling coalition collapsed, almost halving the number of its seats in parliament from 79 to 42. This is far from the 76 seats needed to form a majority in the 150-seat parliament.

While Rutte's right Liberals lost eight of their previous 41 seats, the biggest loser in the election was their coalition partner, the Labour Party (PvdA). Labour was punished for its support for austerity and its massive attacks on social welfare. Its vote collapsed from 25 percent to less than 6 percent. With only nine seats left, it is now in seventh place—behind the Greens and the ex-Maoist Socialist Party.

The vote of the Socialist Party, which supported the

anti-immigrant drive of the main bourgeois parties, went slightly down from 9.6 to 9.1 percent. In contrast, the Green-Left vote quadrupled from 2.3 to 9 percent. Among voters under 34, it received more than a third of the vote, and in Amsterdam it was the strongest party, with almost a fifth of the vote.

The entire election campaign was highly polarized. This led to a large turnout of 82 percent, the highest for 31 years and 6 percent more than in the last election.

The Green Left, as well as other smaller parties and the left Liberals (D66), who increased their vote from 8 to 12.1 percent, clearly benefitted from the opposition to Wilders' fascistic campaign, particularly among younger people. But both, the Greens and D66, seek to channel the opposition to Wilders behind staunch support for the EU and are quite prepared to back a right-wing government led by Rutte. Basing themselves on sections of the middle class, they play a similar role to those in the United States who try to divert the opposition against Trump into the dead end of the pro-Wall-Street and pro-war Democratic Party.

Governments all over Europe welcomed the Dutch election result with relief. German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said it was a "success for Europe." He said he was now optimistic about the coming election in France. The head of Chancellor Angela Merkel's office, Peter Altmaier, wrote on Twitter: "The Netherlands, oh the Netherlands you are a champion!... Congratulations on this great result."

Paolo Gentiloni, the Italian prime minister, said the "anti-EU right has lost the elections," and urged supporters to work to "revitalise the Union."

French President François Hollande pontificated, "The values of openness, respect for others and a faith in Europe's future are the only true response to the nationalist impulses and isolationism that are shaking

the world.”

However, Wilders is a symptom, not the cause, of the turn to the right in European politics. This turn is the response of the bourgeois parties to a profound crisis of capitalist society in the Netherlands and across the continent.

Neither the EU nor any of the European governments are opposed to Wilders’ xenophobic and anti-Islamic line. The maltreatment and rejection of refugees has become the official policy of the EU.

At the beginning of the month, Rutte published an open letter to immigrants, telling them, “If you don’t like it here, you can leave.” And three days ago, he staged a calculated provocation against the Turkish government, banning its ministers from entering the Netherlands in an attempt to stir up nationalist hysteria and win the backing of a section of Wilders’ potential support.

The only concern of Merkel, Hollande, Gentiloni et al. is the defense of the EU as a basis for escalating militarism, including colonial-style interventions and hostile action against Russia, and for the development of repressive police state measures internally as well as even more sweeping austerity attacks on the working class.

The idea that, after Wilders was boosted by Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, his election setback will undermine the prospects of Marine le Pen of the National Front in the French presidential election does not stand up to scrutiny.

Le Pen’s party has much stronger organizational and historical roots than the PVV, which is very much a one-man band. The FN has been better able to capitalize on the betrayals of France’s Socialist Party government, the crisis of François Fillon and the Gaullist right, and the neo-liberal economic agenda of the candidate presently favoured to win, the independent Emmanuel Macron, to combine hostility to the EU with a claim to represent the interests of “working people” against the establishment.

For the Netherlands, the election opens what is likely to be a period of massive political instability and fierce political and class struggles. The small country of 17 million inhabitants is riven by deep social and cultural divisions. As a former colonial power, it has a huge immigrant community that has been hit very hard by growing social inequality. Liberal cities like

Amsterdam stand in contrast to the religious “bible belt,” one of the most conservative areas in Europe.

In the post-war period, these contradictions were bridged by an elaborate culture of political consensus, which found its highest expression in the collaboration since the 1980s of the neoliberal right, the Labour Party and the trade unions in dismantling the previous social gains of the working class. This has led to sharp social polarization and the virtual collapse of the bourgeois “left.”

The political situation in the Netherlands is reminiscent of the conditions that existed in Weimar Germany between 1919 and 1933, where a parliament paralyzed by intense conflicts presided over conditions that gave rise to the coming to power of Hitler.

With hardly more than a fifth of the seats in a parliament of 14 or 15 parties, and the country deeply divided, Rutte needs at least three, if not four, coalition partners to form a viable government. It is expected that it will take weeks, if not months, of intense horse-trading and backroom deals to establish a new coalition.

Everything depends now on an independent intervention by the working class. This demands the establishment of a Dutch section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, opposed both to nationalism and the European Union and capable of working with co-thinkers across Europe and internationally to unite workers of all countries on the basis of a socialist program for the overthrow of capitalism.



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