

Dutch Prime Minister Rutte wins out against far-right challenger

By Peter Schwarz
16 March 2017

The far-right Party for Freedom (PVV) did not make the breakthrough that was long predicted in yesterday's Dutch election.

The party of Geert Wilders, which was leading the polls for several months with up to 20 percent of the vote, received only 13.1 percent in the end and is competing with the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the left Liberals (D66) for second place behind the right Liberals (VVD) of Prime Minister Mark Rutte. Despite a 6 percentage point drop in its vote, Rutte's party won the election with 21 percent of the vote.

The biggest loser of the election is the Labour Party (PvdA), the VVD's coalition partner in the present government. It was punished for its support for austerity and its massive attacks on social welfare. Its vote collapsed from 25 to under 6 percent. It is now in seventh place—behind the Greens and the ex-Maoist Socialist Party, which kept its previous result of 9 percent. The Greens vote tripled from 2.5 to 9 percent, mainly because the party criticized racism and xenophobia.

The 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.

Governments all over Europe and especially in Germany welcomed the Dutch election result with relief. German foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel said it was a "success for Europe." He was now optimistic about the coming election in France. And the head of Chancellor Angela Merkel's office, Peter Altmaier (CDU), wrote on Twitter: "Netherlands, you are a champion. Congratulations for this splendid result."

After Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, a success for Wilders would have been seen as a further step in the disintegration of the European Union and towards a possible victory of Marine le Pen of the

National Front in the French presidential elections.

However, Wilders' poorer than expected result signals by no means an end of the sharp shift to the right in European politics. He is a symptom, not the cause of this turn to the right, which is the response of the bourgeois parties to a profound crisis of capitalist society in the Netherlands and across Europe.

Wilders' xenophobic, anti-Islam campaign set the tone for the entire election. Both Rutte's VVD and the Christian Democrats have taken over Wilders' right-wing rhetoric. 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 provocation against the Turkish government, banning its ministers from entering the Netherlands in an attempt to stir up nationalist hysteria.

The election opens what is likely to be a period of deep political instability. The right Liberals and the Labour Party, who had a majority of 79 seats in the 150-seat parliament, have lost half of their votes and are now down to 40 seats. The number of parties in the new parliament will rise from 11 to 14 or 15. Rutte needs at least three, if not four coalition partners, to form a new government. It is expected that it will take weeks, if not months of intense horse-trading and backroom deals to establish a new coalition.

To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>