Switzerland: Right-Wing and Xenophobic Parties, from Margin to Mainstream?

BY CHRISTOPHER T. HUSBANDS

SWITZERLAND presents a paradox to most of its observers. Its surface appearance is of calmness and serenity, a surprising success in the task of blending together into a single polity communities that are disparate in language, religion and cultural traditions. Indices of economic and social success are exemplary, due to the benign consociational effects of multiple cross-cutting social cleavages:[1] an almost-zero strike rate because of corporatist accommodations between employers and trade unions; rates of unemployment that, despite increases compared with thirty years ago, are still below those in most other west European countries; and official crime rates so much lower than those of many comparable countries that attempts at explanation once attracted international criminological attention.[2] There are contradictions, however, as well as social divisions not far beneath its apparently smooth surface. Despite attempts by popular initiative, unsuccessful in any case, to change its military call-up practices, it remains a militaristic society long after the objective need for a large available military has evaporated; its adult males still face the prospect of compulsory service until the age of fifty. Yet Swiss soldiers' involvement in military action has usually been little more than that of the Divisionaire Krueger (sic, the French word now always has double-n) in Graham Greene's 1980 novel, *Doctor Fischer of Geneva* or *The Bomb Party*; despite a long career in military service, the only wound in action that the Divisionaire had ever received was a nip on his finger from a live lobster served at a private dinner party. The unfortunate Switzerland has intermittently been the butt of such sarcasm, on a previous occasion most famously with the jibe about the cuckoo clock in *The Third Man*, a film whose screenplay was written by Greene, although the specific speech was supplied, as well as spoken, by Orson Welles.

The Swiss government has since 1959 been a four-party corporatist coalition of the liberal Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei der Schweiz (FDP), the left-leaning Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz (SPS), the centre-right Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz (CVP), and the right-wing populist and currently controversial Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP).[3] The continuity of this coalition became so apparently assured, at least until the electoral success of the Schweizerische Volkspartei in 1999, that participation in general elections in a

county whose constitution elevates participatory democracy almost to a fetish, with its commitment to referenda and popular initiatives, is usually among the lowest in western Europe. Indeed, many domestic critics have long been observing that, on the basis of actual participation in elections, Switzerland has become a democracy in crisis. Several other examples of subterranean tensions may be seen in the past couple of decades, such as squatting movements and riots by squatters in some of the major cities such as Zürich.

However, its vulnerabilities are perhaps best revealed in its attitude to its resident foreign population, despite the fact that Switzerland has been an immigrant-dependent society and economy throughout the twentieth century and back into the nineteenth. If reaction to immigrants is the 'barium meal' test of a society's cultural maturity, Switzerland has often failed to pass it. For example, naturalisation and citizenship processes are handled by the country's individual cantons and it is true to say that not all are equally inflexible and narrow-minded in their practices and policies on this matter. Nonetheless, some have in the past insisted on various demonstrations of 'Swissness', a test failed spectacularly in one of the German-speaking rural cantons in the 1980s in a case that attracted minor international notoriety, when an unfortunate soul was rash enough to admit to disliking the sound of cowbells, even after many years in the country. The attitudinal syndrome revealed by such incidents is a subject that liberal and radical Swiss writers, filmmakers and playwrights have satirised, gently or with considerable causticity. Rolf Lyssy's 1978 *Die Schweizermacher* poked elaborate fun at the procedures used by two police immigration officers to establish 'Swissness'. Also, one Italian applicant for Swiss citizenship in the film had so over-identified with Wilhelm Tell during his naturalisation interviews that, while subsequently rejoicing in his success at finally achieving citizenship, he allowed himself to be goaded at the celebratory party by his less 'Swissness'-afflicted former compatriot friends into shooting an apple from his son's head using a bow and an arrow tipped with a rubber sucker. However, from the Italian perspective the same theme was not a subject for humour. Franco Brusati's not wholly impressive 1973 film, *Pane e Cioccolata*, contained some amusing vignettes, especially in the early scenes, but soon changed to a much more embittered mood.

The Swiss cultural and literary avant-garde has long been attracted by the tensions and dramas associated with the Swiss and immigration. For example, Alain Tanner and Claude Goretta, Swiss film directors who between them did much to keep alive the otherwise limited reputation of Swiss cinema during the 1970s and 1980s, dealt challengingly in some of their work with the foreigner/immigration issue in Switzerland. The marxist Tanner's stunning *Le Milieu du Monde*, made in 1974, concerned an ultimately unsuccessful relationship between an Italian immigrant-worker waitress, played by Juliet Berto, and a bour-

geois (and married) Swiss politician, who was unable to accept her across the nationality and class divisions between them. The man, incidentally, could not at first believe that in contemporary Switzerland there existed accommodation with only shared toilet facilities! Goretta's *La Mort de Mario Ricci*, which appeared somewhat later, in 1983, concerned a journalist who was pursuing a story in a Swiss village and became distracted from this by raising queries about the death of the eponymous young Italian immigrant worker.

Even more famously, the playwright, Max Frisch, has produced perhaps the most acerbic single aphorism about the attitudes of many Swiss towards the immigrants working in their country. Now perhaps dated by the emergence of the political-asylum issue, it still has an undoubted directness: 'A puny master race sees itself in danger: it called for a labour force and those who are coming are human beings. They do not destroy prosperity; on the contrary, they are essential for prosperity. But they are there.'[4] *Andorra*, probably Frisch's most famous drama, first produced in 1961, was about how a community turned against its Jewish member in response to an outside threat, a clearly intended allegory of aspects of Switzerland's behaviour during the second world war, which only in very recent years has received serious, and even then contentious, attention in the country. Its ambivalence and uncertainty towards foreigners, both those outside and those in its midst, has historical analogies to some contemporary reactions to those seeking to come in. Professional historians, such as Alfred Häsler in *Das Boot ist Voll*[5] (with a new edition in 1989), which was drawn upon in a film of the same title made in 1981 and directed by the avant-garde film-maker Markus Imhoof, long ago documented the story of Swiss attitudes to Jewish refugees, large numbers of whom were turned back into Nazi Germany to their death. It is ironic to note the durability of the 'boat' metaphor and the same phrase is widely used, in Switzerland and other west European countries to summarise the case against the admission of political-asylum seekers. As will be seen, this latter issue has been central to the appeal of the extreme and neo-conservative right in contemporary Switzerland.

The critical international scrutiny during the last several years of many aspects of Switzerland's role during the second world war, including numerous questionable features of its relationship with Nazi Germany beyond its treatment of Jewish refugees attempting escape and the dubious, often unscrupulous, attitudes of some of its bankers towards the deposits made by Holocaust victims has been far from welcome in some sections of Swiss society. Indeed, it is noteworthy that some of the functionaries of the Schweizerische Volkspartei have been especially hostile. The whole issue has undoubtedly produced a certain defensive nationalism. Even the liberal *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, whilst giving much space to articles on 'Shadows of the Second World War', has not been immune to occasional displays of 'Schadenfreude' when

morally unacceptable behaviour by other non-combatant countries, such as Sweden, has been exposed.

Extreme-right and xenophobic politics in Switzerland, 1930–2000

In the year 2000 it may fairly be said that xenophobic fringe political parties are of almost inconsequential significance in Switzerland, largely due to the successful surge during the 1990s of the Schweizerische Volkspartei and also because they are victims of a general shift in recent Swiss electoral politics against all small marginal parties. However, before describing how this situation came about, it is useful to consider the historical evolution of extreme-right and xenophobic politics in Switzerland. This is presented in three periods: the pre-war and second world war period till 1945; the postwar period till 1985, when the Autopartei der Schweiz was founded; and the period from 1985 till the present.

THE PERIOD TILL 1945. The multilingual and consociational character of Switzerland is a rich source of diversity and multiplication in national life, in politics as well as in other spheres. Although some Swiss political parties may seek to be organised on a national basis and have titles equally in all the national languages, most have a particular identity with one rather than the other linguistic communities and so draw their support accordingly. Others unabashedly organise only within one linguistic community and the potential for multiplicity is correspondingly increased. Taking only German-speaking Switzerland, some 40 fascist movements have been identified between 1925 and 1944, with particular surges of organisational activity in 1933 (the year of the so-called 'Front spring' in the light of contemporary events in Germany), 1940 and 1941.[6] The Nationale Front is undoubtedly the most important of these movements. Founded in Zürich in 1930, it had 200 local groups by 1935, as well as others abroad. Wearing the grey shirt as its uniform had been proscribed in 1932. At its height it had 9,200 members and national and cantonal electoral representation. For example, in Zürich canton it won 6.2% of votes and six of 180 seats in 1935. In Schaffhausen canton (in north-east Switzerland) in September 1933 it won 27% of the vote. The party dissolved itself in March 1940 in order to avoid proscription and prosecution as a consequence of an ongoing official enquiry. It had absorbed the Neue Front in 1933 and worked with similar movements in launching publicity and meetings.[7] Perhaps its now best-known supporter was the soldier, Emil Sonderegger (1868–1934), who had been in charge of troops in Zürich in the country's 1918 general strike and was the Chief of the Army's General Staff from 1920 to 1923.[8]

In Swiss-speaking Switzerland the Fédération Fasciste Suisse was the only French-speaking movement with pan-Swiss support and organisa-

tion. Founded in 1933 and led by Arthur Fonjallez (1875–1944), who had been a university teacher of war history, it had connections with Mussolini's Italy. A further movement, the Union Nationale, subject of a major study by Joseph, was founded in 1932 in Geneva and also aspired to pan-Swiss influence.[9] It was active till 1939, when it dissolved amid internal divisions, although some of its senior activists founded or moved into other movements and in some cases worked for the Germans during the war. Unsurprisingly in view of the proximity to Mussolini's Italy, the Italian-speaking canton of Switzerland, Ticino, also produced extreme-right activities. The Lega Nazionale Ticinese was founded in 1933 by Alfonso Riva, a lawyer, who had also been influenced by Charles Maurras' Action Française. In February 1935 it won two of 63 cantonal seats in Ticino, although with only 2.5% of votes.

After the cessation of overt hostilities in June 1940 in western Europe between the Germans and their conquered neighbours, the Dutch, the Belgians and the French, and in the light of the country's abutment on to Austria and Italy, the Swiss had every expectation that they would be invaded by Hitler's Germany, a fear that persisted into 1941.[10] In 1940 there had been panic movements by the civilian population away from border areas. There seems no doubt that, had Germany successfully invaded, there would have been a core of fascist sympathisers willing to offer their services to the occupying power, as was the case in The Netherlands and of course, perhaps most famously, Norway. On the other hand, this core would probably have been relatively small and it would be a mistake to contribute to the impression that an invasion of Switzerland or a Swiss 'Anschluss' would have been welcomed in the style of the Austrian example in 1938.

THE POSTWAR PERIOD TILL 1985.   As in other west European countries after the war, extreme-right activities in Switzerland necessarily entered a 'catacombs period' from which some have never emerged. True, there are neo-nazi tendencies in Switzerland, in recent years often associated with sporting defence groups or with skinheads, but the Swiss state has managed to maintain control over these.[11] On the other hand, whereas the extreme right in western European politics has only since the mid- and late 1970s come to rely strongly on xenophobic and racist appeals, Switzerland (like Great Britain) offers early, quite successful, examples of the xenophobic politics that later emerged in many other west European countries.

Switzerland, as mentioned earlier, has a long tradition of using immigrant labour, a practice that stretches well back into the nineteenth century. Indeed, in Zürich in July 1896 there were major riots involving attacks on Italian workers[12] that had exactly the hallmarks of 'communal riots', to use the expression introduced by Janowitz in the 1960s and as seen in the United States, for example, famously

in Chicago in 1919 or in Detroit in 1943.[13] By the postwar period Swiss immigration policy had been fully formalised and the country had, and still has, a distinctively high foreign-resident population. A strongly parochial strain in Swiss national culture, associated especially but far from exclusively with the German-speaking section of the country, reacted against the importation of foreign influences, seeing these as diluting intrinsic features of the Swiss national character. The concept of 'Überfremdung', already established in the German language from the 1920s with at that time a distinctly anti-Semitic and then racist connotation (which remained one of its principal meanings in the Nazi era, although it was also used to mean monopoly ownership by foreign concerns),[14] was applied in order to describe the perceived threat to national culture and identity. Indeed, with that in mind, James E. Schwarzenbach (1911–94) established as early as 1961 the Nationale Aktion gegen die Überfremdung von Volk und Heimat (National Action against Excessive Foreign Influence on People and Homeland). Schwarzenbach was a substantial figure, son of an industrialist, had studied history at the University of Fribourg and was the owner of a publishing house. The Nationale Aktion's first foray into national politics was in the October 1967 elections to the National Council (the lower chamber of the Swiss national legislature), when it won 0.6% of the vote but stood only in the Zürich and Basel-City cantons. This, however, was enough to win for Schwarzenbach a single parliamentary seat from Zürich. By 1971 Schwarzenbach had split from the original organisation to found the rival Schweizerische Republikanische Bewegung and between them the two formations won more than 7% of the vote in the 1971 National Council elections; their successes were even higher in certain cantons. Yet that was a temporary peak, followed by slippages in 1975 and 1979. This haemorrhaging of support was one factor inducing Nationale Aktion to change its name, which it did in 1977 to Nationale Aktion für Volk und Heimat (National Action for People and Homeland). By 1983, as the asylum-seekers issue first emerged on to the national political agenda, there was a noticeable upturn to 3.5% won by a joint ticket of Nationale Aktion and the Schweizerische Republikanische Bewegung. Throughout the 1980s the former benefited at national, cantonal and municipal levels from controversies about asylum-seekers in Switzerland, this being a particular form of xenophobia that has continued its influence to the present. In Berne City Council elections in 1984 Nationale Aktion won 10.9% of the vote and nine out of 80 seats. In Zürich in March 1986 it won almost 10% of votes in City Council elections, giving it 11 out of 125 seats. In Geneva, its companion anti–immigrant movement, Vigilance (which was based exclusively in the Geneva canton and had been founded as long ago as 1964) won 19.0% of votes and 19 seats in elections to the cantonal parliament in 1985!

THE PERIOD FROM 1985 TILL THE PRESENT. In 1985 a group of conservative activists led by Michael E. Dreher, a Zürich lawyer, founded the then-called Autopartei der Schweiz, renamed from 1992 (if only after some internal controversy) the Freiheitspartei der Schweiz. The party began, as its name implies, as a bourgeois party oriented to the interests of motorists and was self-avowedly anti-environment, resorting on occasion to phrases like 'ozone hysteria'. However, it also came to adopt a xenophobic and 'outside right' position, being equally active in a number of referenda and initiatives whose subjects emphasised Swiss autonomy (see below). The Autopartei started modestly in the National Council elections in 1987, winning two seats, but by the 1991 equivalent elections it was able to benefit from the partial meltdown of political allegiances in a number of west European countries that came about with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the consequential upheaval in international relations. Nationale Aktion, now renamed the Schweizer Demokraten, won five National Council seats in 1991 and the Autopartei as many as eight. There was some relapse in 1995, although the Schweizer Demokraten and the Freiheitspartei between them still retained ten National Council seats, with significant shares of the vote in some cantons. However, the 1999 National Council elections were marked by the fruition of a process that had begun in the early 1990s, when the Schweizerische Volkspartei (starting in particular with its Zürich group under the now internationally known Christoph Blocher) became more strident in its opposition to asylum-applicants in Switzerland. The party's share of the National Council vote rose from 15 to 23% between 1995 and 1999, making it the largest national party. The Schweizer Demokraten fell back to 1.8% and one parliamentary seat, retaining a significant share of the vote in very few cantons, of which one was Basel-Country. The Freiheitspartei effectively suffered obliteration and some local groups have attached themselves to other parties, especially to the Schweizerische Volkspartei. A relative similarity between the Freiheitspartei's social base and that of the more successful Schweizerische Volkspartei has weakened the former since at least the mid-1990s (in 1996, for example, its President, Roland Borer, was earnestly seeking to re-establish his party as the 'only middle-class opposition party' (*NZZ*, 12.2.96)). By February 2000, as the party faced disintegration and internal schism, it was announcing in a press release as a riposte to internal dissidents that 'the Freiheitspartei wants with calmness, peace and friendship to separate itself from those who see their political home in another party' (*NZZ*, 14.2.00).

As already mentioned, there has been a general winnowing of the Swiss party system that has affected almost all of the smaller parties. For example, the Landesring der Unabhängigen, active since 1935 and with 16 out of 200 National Council seats at its height in 1967, retained a mere one in 1999. The left-wing fringe and even the Swiss

Greens have also suffered a disintegration of support during the 1990s. That said, it remains plausible to argue that the Schweizer Demokraten and the Freiheitspartei have been the eventual victims of the classic squeeze faced by single-issue or few-issues parties (*NZZ*, 26.10.99); they are vulnerable to having the principal basis of their appeal co-opted, even if in sanitised form, by a mainstream party offering greater possibility of implementation. Even a cursory examination of the press propaganda and the website of the Schweizerische Volkspartei made very clear that the purported 'abuse of asylum' was a central issue upon which it campaigned before the 1999 National Council elections. Of course, this process is not necessarily irreversible; but as long as such a mainstream party can retain its nerve in pushing for issues in ways that other mainstream political actors may nonetheless view as unsavoury, there is every prospect of a permanent death-blow to these fringe parties.

OTHER MARGINAL RIGHT-WING PARTIES. It is relevant to mention that there are in Switzerland a number of other marginal right-wing parties that are of sufficient size to feature in some of the reported election and referendum data, although they scarcely attain the status of bit players in the dramas described in this article. Perhaps foremost is the Lega dei Ticinesi. Founded in the late 1980s and with a title that is a deliberate analogue of the Italian Lega Nord of Umberto Bossi, this is a right-wing formation advocating greater autonomy for the largely Italian-speaking canton of Ticino. Having emerged with two seats from the 1991 National Council elections, it has worked at the parliamentary level with the Schweizer Demokraten, who of course have had only a single National Council seat since 1999.

The ideological basis of the Swiss xenophobic parties

It is a paradoxical task to attempt an account of the ideological features of the Swiss xenophobic parties. The reason is that the Schweizer Demokraten in particular and in recent years the Freiheitspartei have undoubtedly been associated in the public mind very much with immigration and asylum issues; yet both parties, in their propaganda, their election manifestos and—within the past couple of years—their websites, have had publicly disseminated stances on most other issues of contemporary Swiss politics. Of course, this characterisation needs nuancing; the Freiheitspartei, for example, sufficiently remembers its roots to want to continue holding the fort for the supposedly embattled motorist against the assaults of the environment lobby. The Schweizerische Volkspartei, as a mainstream party that has recently cultivated xenophobic mobilisation, fits this single-issue designation much less easily; nevertheless, for its newly acquired voters even its image has been heavily implanted with the immigration and asylum issue, particularly since its popular initiative 'against illegal immigration' (actually

directed against asylum-seekers), which was voted upon in December 1996 but had been launched in 1992 and submitted in 1993 with more than 100,000 valid signatures; with 46% of the vote, it was almost accepted on an above-average turnout of 47%.

During the 1960s and 1970s there had been a number of anti–immigration or anti-foreigner initiatives, most particularly associated with James Schwarzenbach and/or Nationale Aktion or the Schweizer-ische Republikanische Bewegung, although the first was actually one from the Zürich Demokratische Partei that demanded a reduction in the percentage of immigrants in the population to a maximum of 10%. It was withdrawn in 1968 after pressure placed upon its initiators by the Federal Assembly. In 1969 was launched what is still perhaps the best-known of the anti-immigrant initiatives, often called 'the Schwar-zenbach initiative', which was narrowly defeated in June 1970 with a vote of 54.0% against on an unusually high turnout of 74.7%. Schwar-zenbach had left Nationale Aktion at the end of 1970 but in 1971 the party launched an initiative 'against foreign incursion and over-popu-lation of Switzerland', which sought to limit the numbers of naturalisa-tions and of foreigners, as well as placing restrictions on seasonal and border workers; this was rejected in 1974. A further initiative that it launched in 1973 sought the right of referendum concerning inter-national treaties; this was rejected in 1977. In 1974 Schwarzenbach tried again with an initiative seeking to reduce the foreign population to 12.5% in ten years; this was rejected in 1977. Yet another Nationale Aktion initiative in 1974 to limit naturalisations was rejected in 1977 and a 1973 one 'against the selling-off of the national soil' (directed against foreigners wanting to buy property in Switzerland) was rejected in 1979. In 1985 the party launched another initiative for the limitation of immigration that was rejected in December 1988 with less than a third of those voting being in favour.[15]

We now examine the present ideological character and policy posi-tions of, in particular, the Nationale Aktion/Schweizer Demokraten and the Autopartei/Freiheitspartei by examining their stances on a relevant selection of significant consultative and mandatory referenda and on popular initiatives from 1987 to the present, earlier identified as a distinctive recent period in the growth of xenophobic politics in Swit-zerland. We focus particularly upon the referenda and initiatives since 1987 for which the Nationale Aktion/Schweizer Demokraten, the Auto-partei/Freiheitspartei or the Schweizerische Volkspartei took a distinc-tive position, in contrast with all or most other political parties, in their recommendations to voters on whether to accept or reject. These referenda and initiatives concern not merely immigrants, foreigners and asylum-seekers but, almost as important, several of them relate to issues that touch upon the difficult evolving relationship between Switzerland, as an historically neutral and non-aligned country, and the rest of Europe (including the European Union) and the world, all in the context

of heightened globalisation that makes retention of a non-aligned and non-involved status increasingly difficult for a country located so strategically in the geography of western Europe. There is no doubt that, just as many Swiss have felt offended by the critical international attention to the country's war record, so the more conservative sections of the population feel correspondingly harassed by, and resentful of, external pressures towards greater European and global involvement. This, after all, is the country where a referendum held in March 1986 on joining the United Nations Organisation attracted positive votes from only 24.3% of those voting.

Several of the recommendations to voters on particular referenda or initiatives made by the Nationale Aktion/Schweizer Demokraten and the Autopartei/Freiheitspartei make clear that the ideological profiles of the two parties are in some respects quite divergent. Although both are parties particularly located in the German-speaking east and north-east of the country and both have xenophobic reputations, their social bases are rather different. The Nationale Aktion/Schweizer Demokraten have a much more working-class electorate, a fact that has produced recommendations for some issues in the direction opposite to those of the Autopartei/Freiheitspartei. The Autopartei did not, for example, favour Nationale Aktion's 1988 popular initiative to limit immigration. In 1998 the Schweizer Demokraten were the only party to oppose a Federal order on a temporary new article concerning cereals. In 1989 the Autopartei (along with the tiny right-wing, Protestant-based, Liberale Partei der Schweiz) endorsed the popular initiative to insert into the Constitution increased speed-limits, 130 km/hour on motorways and 100 km/hr in non-built-up areas; the Schweizer Demokraten were opposed to this. In 1993 the Freiheitspartei was the only party opposing a Federal order on firearms control. In 1994 it was the only party to oppose a plan for needing a permit displayed on one's windscreen in order to drive on the country's motorways. In 1996 it was again the only party opposing the Federal Assembly's counter-proposal to its own popular initiative 'for a nature-friendly system of agriculture'. On occasions both the Schweizer Demokraten and the Freiheitspartei are found to be positioned with otherwise very dissimilar ideological bedfellows. In 1992 they were both with the Partei der Arbeit, the former Communist Party, and the Grüne Partei der Schweiz, the Swiss Greens (and with the tiny fringe Eidgenössisch-Demokratische Union) in their common opposition to joining the institutions of the Bretton Woods Agreement, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, albeit for different reasons. In 1999 the two parties and the Partei der Arbeit were the only ones to oppose a Federal order on a new Federal constitution. On environmental issues, as well as ones concerning international relations, it is also common to see Schweizer Demokraten, the Freiheitspartei and the Greens in the same camp: for example, on the issue of building a new Alpine rail transit, although again for

different reasons. It is also noteworthy that, as we shall see, there are occasional referendum issues that find the Schweizerische Volkspartei also siding with the Schweizer Demokraten and the Freiheitspartei.

In order further to buttress the point made earlier about the partial ideological distinction between the Schweizer Demokraten and the Freiheitspartei, one may look at evidence about the positions on a composite left-right scale of the members of the 1995–99 National Council.[16] Its components are 80 issues of economic and non-economic liberalism on which there were parliamentary votes between 1996 and 1998; the reported scale runs from –10 (the most left-wing) to +10 (the most right-wing). The mean score of the six Freiheitspartei members included in the study was 8.7, that of five Schweizer Demokraten members (including those of the Lega dei Ticinesi) was as low as 3.9, whilst, for a further revealing comparison, the 29 Schweizerische Volkspartei members averaged a score of 8.2. There are clearly strong elements of economic liberalism within the Schweizer Demokraten.

Considering the referenda and initiatives from 1987 to 1999, one notes several further facts. The idiosyncratic status of the canton of Ticino, largely Italian-speaking, emerges in several votes. It was the canton least disposed to the Nationale Aktion's negative recommendation on a 1987 consultative referendum on future national rail policy but most disposed a year later to its popular initiative to limit immigration. Moreover, it is remarkable how on so many occasions one of the north-east German-speaking rural cantons emerges as the most reactionary in terms of its support for, or opposition to, a particular issue. Uri and Schwyz occupy this position in several instances and, coincidentally, are in the region of the country where the Schweizerische Volkspartei does especially well. There is a further irony perhaps in the fact that these cantons are two of the three (along with Unterwalden) that supposedly swore the perhaps apocryphal 'Rütli oath' to establish the original Swiss confederation in 1291, an event commemorated with an annual national holiday on 1 August as the foundation of modern Switzerland!

Three referenda that took place in 1992 deserve a special discussion because their results, especially that of the last one in December, have been far-reaching for Switzerland. Two referenda held in May, about joining the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, actually produced unexpectedly large majorities, even at just above 55% in favour, but were then widely seen as the first stage in what should have proven a relatively smooth and uneventful path for Switzerland to enter into the European Union. The approval of the Federal order on joining the European Economic Area, in the last of these referenda, was seen beforehand as a straightforward next step in this progress. The governing parties, except the Schweizerische Volkspartei, came out strongly in favour in the weeks before the vote. Industry, the trade unions, and Switzerland's banking community were equally forthright in their posi-

tive recommendations. The Schweizer Demokraten and the Freiheitspartei, along with the Greens, were the fringe parties that opposed the move. Emboldened and encouraged by the earlier votes in May on the Bretton Woods arrangements, many commentators clearly assumed that the Federal order would be accepted, even if the result might be close. There was thus considerable anguish and dismay when, on an historically high and wholly exceptional level of turnout of almost 80%, the issue was lost, albeit narrowly — a result for which both the Schweizer Demokraten and the Freiheitspartei did not hesitate subsequently to attempt to take credit. A later inquest into the referendum result, conducted by the Bundesamt für Statistik, concluded that the proposition was particularly rejected in poorer, more traditional, German-speaking areas of the country (*NZZ*, 28.2.93, 1.3.93). Whatever the reason for the outcome — and the Schweizerische Volkspartei's stance was undoubtedly quite pivotal — it set back, certainly by years, Switzerland's still-stumbling approaches to join the European Union. Undoubtedly, the opponents of the measure touched a vein of isolationist and anti-globalisation resentment that contributed to this result. It was, after all, a period when the whole of Europe was in especial turmoil, which could be pointed to in order to remind voters of the potential for chaos from too close an involvement with other countries: for example, right-wing extremist violence and the debate about changing the constitutional provisions on asylum were hotly debated ongoing issues in neighbouring Germany at that time.

The Schweizer Demokraten had also submitted a popular initiative 'for a rational asylum policy' in July 1992 but this was declared invalid by the Federal Assembly. In July 1999 the Schweizerische Volkspartei, the Schweizer Demokraten and the Freiheitspartei together launched an initiative intended to reduce the time between the date of submission of a popular initiative with the requisite number of valid signatures and that upon which it is voted on (*NZZ*, 12.7.99).

Aspects of the social base of xenophobic politics in Switzerland

Switzerland is a country where the canton is a particularly important unit of political organisation and it is the case that not even the main parties of government, including the purportedly pan-Swiss ones, put forward candidates in every canton at National Council elections. This diffuseness in party organisation, likely to cause difficulties to poll respondents in being asked about certain parties in some cantons, is one reason why political opinion-polling concerning partisan preferences does not have quite the mesmeric influence, or the frequency, that one sees in Austria, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and most other west European countries. True, relatively regular polling has long been conducted by Switzerland's several private polling agencies, although with far less frequency than in these other countries mentioned, and

without the complementary routine publication of results in the national press.[17] There does not therefore exist quite the plenitude of data on support for xenophobic parties, disaggregated according to market researchers' standard 'facesheet' social-base variables that one finds, for example, in the case of the French Front National. However, the Institut der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für praktische Sozialforschung, based at the Universities of Berne and of Geneva, has published regular analyses of voting in national referenda and initiatives and in National Council elections, based in part upon sample-survey data. Yet the level of support for the fringe xenophobic parties has on occasion been so low that national samples clearly fail to locate a sufficient number of respondents willing to admit to such a preference and so to provide the basis for reliably estimating parameters about characteristics of their total electorates. In such a situation one must resort to the more questionable practice of drawing individual-level inferences from aggregate (or 'ecological') data in communities and cities where support is relatively higher.

Survey data with very small case-bases for Nationale Aktion/Schweizerische Republikanische Bewegung support show that, in the 1979 and 1983 National Council elections, this electorate was strongly male, but findings with respect to age and occupation are so divergent between the two elections that one suspects small-case base distortions.[18] However, at that time, in the 1980s, it was incontestable that the Schweizerische Volkspartei's support was disproportionately or strongly Protestant, middle-aged, rural and farm-based, home-owning, married and (almost exclusively) German-speaking.[19] By 1999, on the other hand, it was younger, with a noticeable increase in support among the very poorest, but still more Protestant and from the German-speaking part of Switzerland, although for the last two characteristics noticeably less so than in the 1980s (*NZZ*, 5.2.00, 6.2.00). A brief final note based on the twelve districts of the city of Zürich: support for Nationale Aktion was always a particularly working-class phenomenon, being distinctive in districts with a strong manual-worker presence. On the other hand, support for the Autopartei when it emerged was distributed more diffusely in geographical terms, a pattern that continued in Zürich after the party's metamorphosis into the Freiheitspartei.

Conclusions for the future

With the traditional xenophobic parties of Switzerland in disarray, with the neo-nazi fringe groups having little realistic chance of any sort of significance or breakthrough (despite a suggestion of recent greater strength), and with the mainstream Schweizerische Volkspartei having co-opted the immigration/asylum issue, what then may the future hold for organised political xenophobia in Switzerland?

One scenario would hypothesise the collapse of the four-party coalition that has governed the country since 1959. This is improbable, but

not wholly impossible. In March 2000 the Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz announced that it wanted to force the breakdown of meetings between the government parties scheduled for May 2000 by staying away from them, pending the withdrawal of remarks by Blocher about alleged totalitarian similarities between the Social Democrats and fascism, and it was being reported that the total lack of common ground between the Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz and the Schweizerische Volkspartei did pose problems for the governing concordance (*NZZ*, 15.3.00). However, notwithstanding this, one is somehow sure that some compromise will prove inevitable, since all the participating parties have apparently become too accustomed to government seriously to contemplate break-up. In any case, the coalition has survived previous differences between its members; the Schweizerische Volkspartei, alone of the four, counselled 'no' in the December 1992 referendum on entry to the European Economic Area, but the coalition lived on. Moreover, the Schweizerische Volkspartei itself is far from monolithic; its Zürich wing, led by Blocher, is more intransigent and non-conciliatory than sections of the party in some other cantons, a fact that has itself caused internal party wrangles and disagreement.

Were the Schweizerische Volkspartei to choose to leave the coalition, or to be excluded from it, it might well—buttressed by right-wing xenophobia—cultivate the 'outsider' status held by Austria's Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs until its participation in a governing coalition. With almost a quarter of the national vote, the Schweizerische Volkspartei might be successful in this. However, Switzerland is not Austria and the hypothesising of some trans-Alpine extreme-right surge is far from the mark. It now (in late March 2000) looks most probable that the Schweizerische Volkspartei will continue in the government, keeping it 'on its toes' on immigration and asylum-related issues. The fact that the Schweizerische Volkspartei has long been a governing party, as well as Switzerland's non-combatant status during the war and the fact that, unlike Austria, it did not embrace the Third Reich and produce a substantial proportion of the latter's most notorious figures, undoubtedly explain why Blocher's success for the Schweizerische Volkspartei in the 1999 National Council elections occasioned merely a short-lived frisson of slightly concerned international scrutiny, and none of the opprobrium and obloquy heaped upon Jörg Haider and his party when they entered Austria's governing coalition with the Österreichische Volkspartei at the beginning of February 2000.

On that basis, the smaller and traditional xenophobic parties do face oblivion and extinction, despite their presence with varying degrees of salience during forty years of Swiss politics. Indeed, recent developments in Switzerland represent a routinisation of genteel xenophobia that promises greater long-term viability for the phenomenon than its fringe and ephemeral manifestations during the second half of the twentieth century. Political science is littered with the skeletons of fringe parties

that blossomed and spluttered, failing to break into the mainstream. Mainstream parties, on the other hand, usually prove themselves much better long-term survivors.

The emergence to international prominence in 1999 of the Schweizerische Volkspartei as a clearly xenophobic party achieving electoral success on that basis led to its rather sudden reclassification by some commentators as an 'extreme-right' party; this has led to the bizarre outcome in certain 'league tables' of west European right-wing extremism of Switzerland's having previously been relatively low in this league (based on its recent reduced level of support for the Schweizer Demokraten and the Freiheitspartei) to its being in sudden contention for prime spot, along with Austria, merely through this belated political reclassification of the Schweizerische Volkspartei. However, even if, perhaps overreacting, the Council of Europe has in a recent report on extremist parties and movements in Europe characterised the Schweizerische Volkspartei as 'extremist' because of its 'xenophobic tendency' (*NZZ*, 10.2.00), one may dispute the appropriateness of the 'extreme right' epithet. The party undoubtedly has its unsavoury aspects, but to equate it by such a labelling exercise in effect with, say, the French Front National or the German Deutsche Volksunion would be inaccurate and simplistic. After all, this is Switzerland: land of the cuckoo clock, not the Borgias!

1   P.L. van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, Elsevier, 1981, pp. 193–7.

2   M.B. Clinard, *Cities with Little Crime: The Case of Switzerland*, Cambridge University Press, 1978; however, see also F. Balvig, *The Snow-white Image: The Hidden Reality of Crime in Switzerland*, Oxford University Press, 1988.

3   Parties' names are, where possible, their versions in the language with which they are particularly associated, although most have standard (if sometimes little-used) names in the other national languages. The genuinely pan-Swiss parties have been cited using the German version of their names.

4   M. Frisch, Preface in A.J. Seiler (ed.), *Siamo Italiani—Die Italiener: Gespräche mit italienischen Gastarbeitern*, E.V.Z.-Verlag, 1965, p. 7.

5   A.A. Häsler, *Das Boot ist voll: Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge, 1933–1945*, Ex Libris Verlag, 1967.

6   C. Cantini, *Les Ultras: Extrême droite et droite Extrême en Suisse—les Mouvements et la Presse de 1921 à 1991*, Editions d'en bas, 1992, p. 16.

7   For comprehensive histories of the Nationale Front, see B. Glaus, *Die Nationale Front: Eine Schweizer Faschistische Bewegung, 1930–1940*, Benziger Verlag, 1969; and W. Wolf, *Faschismus in der Schweiz: Die Geschichte der Frontenbewegungen in der deutschen Schweiz, 1930–1945*, Flamberg Verlag, 1969.

8   R. Zeller, *Emil Sonderegger: Vom Generalstabchef zum Frontenführer*, Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 1999.

9   R. Joseph, *L'Union Nationale, 1932–1939: Un Fascisme en Suisse Romande*, Éditions de la Baconnière, 1975.

10 See K. Urner, **Die Schweiz muss noch geschluckt werden!***: Hitlers Aktionspläne gegen die Schweiz—Zwei Studien zur Bedrohungslage der Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 1990, esp. pp. 13–84.

11 See U. Altermatt and H. Kriesi (eds), *Rechtsextremismus in der Schweiz: Organisationen und Radikalisierung in den 1980er und 1990er Jahren*, Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 1995. Although there have been numerous such movements, their existence is often ephemeral. The Patriotische Front, for example, was much in the news in late 1980s, when some of its activists attacked asylum-seekers' hostels; by 1995 it had ceased to be significant. However, some locations, such as Winterthur in Zürich canton, do have a continuing reputation for extreme-right activism and skinhead presence. According to the Federal Chief of Police, the neo-nazi scene in Switzerland has grown from a core of 300

individuals in 1997 to 500 in 1999 and has become more violent (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ), 19.7.99). These small and often violent non-electoral groups and movements are not, however, the principal subject of this article.

12 V. Bory, *Dehors!: De la chasse aux Italiens à la peur des refugiés, 1896–1986*, Pierre-Marcel Favre, 1987, pp. 21–42.

13 M. Janowitz, 'Patterns of Collective Violence' in H.D. Graham and T.R. Gurr (eds), *Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, a Report submitted to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, Sage r.e, 1979, pp. 261–86.

14 The last word, so to speak, on the etymology and uses of this repulsive *Unwort* is to be found in C. Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus*, Walter de Gruyter, 1998, pp. 615–17. The first mention of the word in a German-English dictionary is probably that in the revised 'Breul', although the meanings given ('passing into the hands of foreigners, monopolization by foreign concerns') are partial and sanitised; see K. Breul, *Cassell's German and English Dictionary*, revised and enlarged by J.H. Lepper and R. Kottenhahn, Cassell 1e, 1940, p. 613. It is part of German linguistic practice to use the 'Über'-prefix for, among many other purposes, ethnic or nationalist slurs. Early nineteenth-century German even contained the now mercifully obsolete 'überjüdeln', meaning 'to cheat'. The ethnic insult is self-evident. See J.H. Kaltschmidt, *A New and Complete Dictionary of the English and German Languages*, Druck und Verlag von Karl Tauchnitz, 1837, p. 418, or *Flügel's Complete Dictionary of the German and English Languages*, adapted by C.A. Feiling and A. Heimann, Part II, Whittaker 3e, 1845, p. 619.

15 For these anti-foreigner initiatives see, for example, Bory, op. cit., pp. 57–8.

16 B. Jeitziner and T. Hohl, 'Die konkreten Positionen von Parlamentariern in Zahlen: Ratings als Mittel der Transparenz in der Politik', *NZZ*, 8.10.99, p. 27.

17 Quarterly polling is the norm, rather than the monthly time-series of such polling in many other countries; before the 1999 National Council elections there was some publicity about poll findings (see, e.g. *NZZ*, 7.10.99).

18 See H.-P. Hertig, *Analyse der Nationalratswahlen 1979* (Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Praktische Sozialforschung, Universität Bern, 11, May 1980), p. 12, and C. Longchamp, *Analyse der Nationalratswahlen 1983* (Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Praktische Sozialforschung, Universität Bern, 20, June 1984), p. 12. The complementary 1987 publication contains no such small-case base analyses; see C. Longchamp, *Analyse der Nationalratswahlen 1987* (Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Praktische Sozialforschung, Universität Bern, 33, February 1988).

19 Ibid., pp. 22–3.