

Kwasniewski returned in presidential elections in Poland

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Presidential elections in Poland held October 9 returned former president Alexander Kwasniewski. He received 53.9 percent of the votes cast and was elected on the first ballot. The non-party candidate Andrzej Olechowski followed far behind with 17 percent, while Marian Krzaklewski, chairman of the trade union *Solidarnosc*, gained only 15.6 percent.

Lech Walesa, who was also contesting the election, received only 0.8 per cent of the votes cast. This is remarkable, since only five years earlier when Walesa was himself president, the elections were a neck and neck race between him and Kwasniewski, who was only able to achieve a 3 percent lead in the second ballot to win the race.

The vote for the extreme rightwing candidates in these elections was small. Andrej Lepper of the farmers' trade union *Samoobrona* received only 3 per cent of the vote, all other the rest did not even add up to 1 percent. A reason for this could be that the *Solidarnosc* candidate Marian Krzaklewski stole their thunder. His election campaign was carried out with such nationalist-catholic tones; it was hard to detect any difference with the extreme right.

Nevertheless, for Krzaklewski and the AWS rightwing electoral alliance that presently forms the government and whose chairman he is, the result is a setback. The press immediately began speculating about the possibility of early parliamentary elections. The AWS has lost any support in the population and for months has been unable to act politically.

The AWS was cobbled together before the last elections to the *Sejm* (parliament) out of over 30 different rightwing parties and groupings. All they had in common was that their roots were in *Solidarnosc*. After the parliamentary elections they first formed a coalition government with the liberal Freedom Union

(UW), which had likewise developed out of *Solidarnosc*. Jerzy Buzek of the AWS became Prime Minister. The principal purpose of this government—rapid entry into the European Union (EU) and the “economic reform” programs associated with this—brought it again and again to the brink of disaster. The coalition finally fell apart in the summer. Since then, Jerzy Buzek and the AWS have headed a minority government.

Violent disputes, particularly inside the AWS, often blocked the passage of parliamentary bills for months. The growth of social and political misery led to strikes and demonstrations, which paralysed the country and forced the government to retreat. For millions of Poles, the adaptation of the country's laws to the requirements of the EU, under conditions where there is still a degree of nationalised property in key industries such as coal, steel and agriculture, means the loss of their livelihoods. The government still does not have an answer to these problems. It is divided between those in favour of entry into the European Union and those who oppose such a course—between “modern” business and financial politicians and moderate to extreme catholic nationalists.

Kwasniewski's eventual victory had been clear for months. Opinion polls predicted that his Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD—the successor organization of the Stalinist party that ruled Poland until 1989), would gain well over 60 percent of the vote.

Kwasniewski's steep rise inside the party and state goes back to the time of the disputes with *Solidarnosc*. In 1987 he became a Minister for Youth, Sport and Tourism. Later he represented the government at the “round table” discussions with the *Solidarnosc* opposition. He still boasts that he has never belonged to the opposition.

His current aims do not differ, however, from those of *Solidarnosc*. His first term of office coincided with Polish membership of NATO, for which he had argued strongly. His most important political aim remains Poland's rapid entry into the EU, with all the sharp social cuts for the Polish population this demands. In this regard, he agrees with the line of the AWS government and the Freedom Union, even if he has a few warm words for the "socially disadvantaged".

Following the clear result in presidential elections, there could now be early elections to the *Sejm*, which in all probability Kwasniewski's SLD would win. However, this would change little for the conditions of the bulk of the Polish population.

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