

Poland: Teachers, students demand resignation of education minister

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The appointment of neo-fascist Roman Giertych of the League of Polish Families (LPR) to the position of national education minister has provoked protests by concerned workers as well as youth throughout Poland.

The May 5 appointment was denounced by *Gazeta Wyborcza* as “a slap in the face for all Polish teachers.” Student demonstrations immediately occurred in most large cities after Giertych’s appointment, with more than 10,000 marching nationwide demanding his resignation.

“We fear that an atmosphere of nationalism, chauvinism and radical clericalism along the lines of the ideas propagated by *Radio Maryja* (an ultra-nationalistic, anti-Semitic Polish radio station) will now penetrate into all schools. The already limited pluralism will be completely erased,” declared a spokesperson for the student demonstrators.

The Polish Teachers’ Association (PTA) had already requested his dismissal. “The minister lacks competence in the area of education,” said PTA head Slawomir Broniarz. “He is unfamiliar with the functioning of the Polish education system.”

An online petition calling for Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) to remove Giertych as education minister received 60,000 signatures within 40 hours in early May. A group of students, teachers and education experts then gathered 140,000 signatures calling for Giertych’s resignation a month later. More than 2,500 teachers came to Warsaw on June 9 to protest Giertych’s appointment.

Roman Giertych, born in 1971 in Srem, Poland, comes from a prominent family of Polish chauvinist politicians. His father, Maciej Giertych, was the LPR presidential hopeful in 2005, and his grandfather, Jędrzej Giertych, was a central figure in Poland’s inter-war ultra-nationalist circles in the 1920s. (See “Poland: Right-wing extremists officially join government”)

Giertych is remembered by many of his teachers as

having been an average student. His biology teacher recalls him as a “consistent questioner of the validity of the theory of evolution” and a “militant.”

In 1989, at the age of 18, Giertych reactivated the extreme right-wing All-Polish Youth (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*), which in the 1930s had served as the youth organization of the National Party (SN), an entity characterized by extreme nationalist and anti-Semitic activities.

The present outfit, as the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote on May 12, has become known by “the activities of the skinhead thugs in its ranks, who have used brutal methods to oppose demonstrations by homosexuals or art exhibitions that do not correspond to the extremely limited horizons of this organization.” Giertych remains honorary chairman to this day.

The All-Polish Youth also keeps regular contact with openly neo-Nazi groups in the country. One of these, the fascist “Blood and Honour,” maintains a web site called “Redwatch,” which collects information about individuals who are known for their left-wing sympathies. It places the names of “enemies,” with all their data, including photographs, telephone numbers and addresses, on their Internet lists. It then calls for all those who view their material to physically assault these individuals on the spot. This resulted in a vicious knife attack on May 16 on one of the activists listed on the Warsaw “Redwatch.”

For several years in the mid- to late 1990s, Giertych was a member of the National Democratic Party (SND) and the National Party (SN), and from the ruins of the unpopular right-wing Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) he became a leading figure behind the formation of the League of Polish Families in 2001.

Giertych’s appointment to the education ministry was the result of the entry of the xenophobic Farmers’ Self-Defense Party, headed by Andrzej Lepper, and Giertych’s own LPR into the government of the right-wing Law and

Justice Party (PiS). The PiS was until that time ruling precariously as a minority party, holding the largest percentage of seats in the Polish Parliament (Sejm). The coalition with Self-Defense and the LPR ensured it an absolute majority for its rule.

The LPR shares much in common with its partners in Poland's new coalition government. None, for instance, has a mass base of support, with the LPR currently filling only 6.3 percent of the seats in the Sejm. The turnout among registered voters in the 2005 parliamentary elections was reported to be slightly below 40 percent, and even the largest party in the government, the PiS, received only 34 percent of that total.

However, the LPR is even more radical in its right-wing policies and actions than its coalition partners. Unlike the PiS and Self-Defense, which on rare occasions are compelled to err on the side of caution, the LPR operates openly as a racist and chauvinist entity. It is tied to the avowedly anti-Semitic and xenophobic radio station *Radio Maryja* and its cable television counterpart *Trwam*. Both outlets make no secret of their theocratic impulses, and demand that the Polish state merge with the Catholic Church.

The LPR also has a strong anti-European Union (EU) profile. It campaigned vehemently against the 2003 Polish referendum on EU membership, denouncing the EU as a "centralized socialist superstate." Officially, the LPR favors a "Europe of nations," bringing to mind the political relationships preceding the first and second world wars.

Radio Polonia describes the party as an organization of "professional anti-Semites." Conspiracy theories abound within its ranks, and its targets extend from freemasons to "international Jewish financial circles." Two prominent members have caused a scandal by being photographed making the "Sieg Heil" salute.

It is in this noxious environment that 35-year-old Roman Giertych was promoted to the head of the education ministry, a position that gives him substantial power over the pedagogical development of the nation's children. Giertych views this as an opportunity to indoctrinate Poland's youth with nationalism and religious backwardness.

While declaring that he does not seek to introduce "ideology" into the schools, Giertych calls for the interjection of "patriotic education" in the classroom.

"Polish schools should be normal," declares Giertych. "There is no room for propagating in them things not in accordance with the constitution. I will not allow some

environments to take hold in schools that propagate homosexuality as a way of life."

"People should be proud to be Polish," he continues. "They should want to live and work in Poland, and not emigrate. They should also be ready to take on sacrifices for Poland."

According to *Radio Polonia*, the speaker of the Sejm, Marek Jurek (PiS), tends to agree. "First of all," he has declared, "we should add patriotic content to those subjects that naturally teach pupils about national identity, like the history of literature, civic education, or political history."

The oppositional party, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), has denounced Giertych's and Jurek's ideas as "courses in nationalism."

Giertych and his party are also fanatically Catholic. His father, Maciej Giertych, has gone on record on the *Answers in Genesis* web site as stating, "Evolution is not a conclusion drawn from observations. It is an ideology to which observations are applied when convenient and ignored when not."

These ultra-religious ideologues hope to scrap hundreds of years of social and scientific progress and indoctrinate Polish youth with the most backward forms of religious bigotry.

These developments point to a crisis of political rule in Poland. The appointment of Giertych to the post of education minister was a reaction to the instability of the PiS, whose government is now, according to all major polls, experiencing plummeting support within the Polish populace. The PiS found it necessary to bring this chauvinist and his party into its government so as to consistently carry through its attacks on Polish working people, who have experienced a dramatic decline in living standards at the hands of each successive Polish government since 1989.



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