

# Poland: The coming to power of the Kaczynski brothers

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For over three weeks, Poland has been governed by Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski and his twin brother, President Lech Kaczynski. While most Poles view such a state of affairs with distrust and hostility, the brothers have already made clear that they are not interested in the opinions of the population and aspire to authoritarian forms of rule.

Four weeks ago, Jaroslaw Kaczynski announced he planned to replace then-Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, chairman of the party “Law and Justice” (PiS), which emerged last September as the strongest parliamentary grouping in the Polish parliament (Sejm) following the elections. After the general election, Jaroslaw Kaczynski stated categorically that he would not seek to become premier if his brother were to win the presidential elections that followed one month later. “For most Poles, it would be unacceptable for two brothers to occupy the most important state posts,” he said at the time.

One month later, in October 2005, Lech Kaczynski was elected as president, and Marcinkiewicz became prime minister. On May 19 of this year, when Jaroslaw Kaczynski was elected by 240 of the 460 deputies in the Sejm as the new head of government, it became clear that the entire procedure had been a stitch-up in order to bring an extreme right-wing government to power. Jaroslaw Kaczynski’s government rests on the right-wing populist peasants’ party “Self-defence of the Republic of Poland” (Samoobrona) and the openly anti-Semitic and extremist right-wing “League of Polish Families” (LPR).

According to a poll by Gfk Polonia for the conservative daily *Rzeczpospolita*, the new head of government is supported by just 3 percent of the population, while a further 2 percent is prepared to tolerate him. In contrast, his predecessor polled more than 60 percent in terms of support. The unparalleled unpopularity of this government is due not only to the personal characteristics of the prime minister, but also to the policies for which he and his right-wing coalition stand.

Seldom before in a country of nearly 40 million has a family clan wielded such political power and employed rank nationalism to disguise the fact that it only enjoys the support of a tiny layer of profiteers and parasites.

In his first government statement, Jaroslaw Kaczynski made absolutely clear whose interests he represents. He plans to keep to the austerity measures of his predecessor and reduce the budget deficit in the coming year to less than 30 billion zloty (about €7.42 billion). Such a reduction in the deficit is only possible if massive

cuts are pushed through against the general population.

The appointment of Stanislaw Kluza as the new finance minister also points in this direction. Kluza told *Rzeczpospolita* that he wanted to implement the budget plans and the tax changes of his extreme neo-liberal predecessor Zyta Gilowska. Delays would lead only to uncertainty for taxpayers, he said. Furthermore, he stated that it was important to tell people that the task of the state was not to dispense social security benefits. In Poland, the minister argued, there are too many people claiming social security benefits because of their supposed inability to work or ill health.

Under such circumstances, the assertions that his government would improve the situation for socially worse-off families or pay physicians and nurses higher salaries are laughable. They merely serve to deflect the persistent opposition to the austerity measures. In the nine months in which the PiS has been in government, the deep cuts in social programmes it has carried out have already met with angry protests by hospital workers, miners and teachers.

Faced with these protests, the PiS increasingly relies on the most backward elements in Polish society. After a short period as a minority government, the PiS secured its parliamentary majority through a coalition with the two right-wing extremist parties, Samoobrona and the LPR. It encourages Polish nationalism, vilifies homosexuals and glorifies the Catholic Church.

The LPR is seeking to counter its falling poll ratings through a reactionary petition campaign demanding the death penalty for sexual offences. The deputy LPR chairman, Wojciech Wierzejski, said in Warsaw that the introduction of the death penalty for this kind of criminal is “the only effective weapon of society against the increasing problem of paedophilia.”

In his government statement, Kaczynski promised continuity in this regard. He stands for policies that uphold Poland’s history and for the development of national pride. Respect and order should return to schools. “The principle of all principles is: It is good to be a Pole!” the prime minister said. He underlined his homophobia by limiting the family to the “bond of man and woman” and also said that the Church should play a leading role in society. With such words, Kaczynski seeks to mobilise the backward, right-wing elements of Polish society in order to implement his policies of social cuts.

Resting on such nationalist and chauvinist phraseology, Kaczynski is developing authoritarian state structures and, together with his brother and the PiS, is systematically extending his control over these structures in an extremely ruthless and

aggressive manner. According to a report by *Reczpospolita*, after hundreds of civil servants, ambassadors and leaders of the state enterprises have been replaced by the Kaczynskis' personal and political friends, the government is now moving against middle management. Combined with the removal of many executive board members, this is damaging the economy, since the "firms' organisational memory is lost," according to the Polish economic scientist Krzysztof Obloj. "An atmosphere of denunciation and nepotism arises, which enables more unprofessional elements to predominate."

In the week when Kaczynski was elected as head of government, the Sejm also decided to change the laws covering local elections in favour of the current government parties, and in particular the LPR and Samoobrona, which are expected to suffer heavy losses in the upcoming local polls. Just weeks before the election, the law has been changed to enable them to form a common party block and improve their electoral chances. The opposition has protested in vain. At the start of their period in office, the PiS also extended its control over the state-run media.

The Kaczynski brothers have a long history of political deceit and manoeuvres, which makes a mockery of any democratic principles. In the 1980s, both stood on the right wing of the Solidarity movement, and in 1989 sided with Lech Walesa for the restoration of capitalism, subsequently creating the Centre Alliance (PC), which was led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski for the following eight years.

From 1990 to 1993, the party participated in various governments and helped implement the brutal smashing up of Poland's welfare state. In 1993, the party failed to re-enter the Sejm, and in 1997 joined "Election Action Solidarity" (AWS). After four years of social devastation—including a period in which Lech Kaczynski was justice minister—this political formation followed the fate of the PC, having alienated virtually the entire electorate. In a manner that has become characteristic for Polish politics, the unpopular Kaczynski brothers simply created a new party in 2001, the PiS, led by Lech Kaczynski until 2003, when his twin brother Jaroslaw took over the chairmanship.

The displacement of Marcinkiewicz and the entry of Jaroslaw Kaczynski into government is the highpoint of a policy of intrigues directed from behind the scenes by the PiS chairman and current prime minister. The cabinet was reshuffled numerous times at Kaczynski's behest; four different finance ministers were to push through the budget cuts in his first nine months in government.

The aggressive course pursued against the Polish population has been accompanied by a similarly aggressive foreign policy. Kaczynski only touched on foreign policy issues at the end of his recent government statement, but he made the direction of his administration unmistakably clear.

As hundreds of Lebanese civilians have been killed and tens of thousands driven out by the US-Israeli aggression, Kaczynski has stressed that his government's foreign policy is determined by Poland's membership in NATO and its close alliance with the United States, placing his government completely on the side of the brutal US-Israeli aggression. Kaczynski announced his continuing support for the US in the Middle East and that the 900 Polish soldiers currently stationed in Iraq would remain. "We are

not a nation of deserters," Kaczynski said.

Through the alliance with the US, the Kaczynski government is trying to strengthen the Polish position vis-à-vis its neighbours Germany and Russia, and to establish Poland as an eastern European regional power. Kaczynski is also demanding the admission of Ukraine—an ally of Poland since the "Orange Revolution"—into the European Union. Despite the alliance with the US, Poland's room for manoeuvre has narrowed, after Russia and Germany decided upon the building of the Baltic pipeline against Warsaw's opposition, and Moscow turned off the gas to Ukraine at the beginning of the year, in a demonstration of its influence in energy politics.

In his government statement, Kaczynski called on Poland to pursue an energy policy independent of Russia. "We are taking steps to access Norwegian gas," the prime minister said. Moreover, Poland is to consider the building of nuclear power plants: "The hysteria over this energy source is receding. We should consider steps in this direction."

The nationalist tones emanating from Warsaw, combined with the poisonous attacks on the European Union, have led to some frosty receptions for Polish politicians visiting European capitals. In spring of this year, both French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Angela Merkel refused to stage a joint press conference with the Polish president following their official discussions.

With more than €26 billion, Poland is by far the largest net recipient of EU funds, a fact the representatives of the European great powers take every opportunity to rub in the noses of the Polish nationalists and EU critics. Some weeks ago, President Lech Kaczynski reacted huffily and called off his participation in a regular meeting of the tripartite Weimar talks with his colleagues from Germany and France, because of a supposed upset stomach.

But the "upset" will not continue indefinitely, since the Kaczynskis are not prepared to bite the hand that feeds them. Their nationalism is primarily for home consumption—i.e., to enable them to impose their social attacks on the population by resting on the most reactionary forces.



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