

Poland: Kaczynski brothers provoke government crisis

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Using falsified secret service documents, Polish Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski of the Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwo—PiS) has sacked Andrzej Lepper, the right-wing populist leader of Self-Defence (Samoobrona—SRP) as vice premier and minister of agriculture.

This action makes clear that neither Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski nor his twin brother, President Lech, will brook any political dissention from within the ruling coalition at a time of mounting conflict with ever-larger sections of working people. Lepper's party reacted in its usual spineless fashion at this attempt to discipline it, but since has tried to increase its influence in relation to the PiS through joining forces with other parties.

Since the 2005 elections, when Lech became president and the PiS emerged as the strongest grouping in the Sejm (parliament), the Kaczynski brothers have increasingly sought to establish authoritarian forms of rule. The main obstacle to this, however, has been their lack of a parliamentary majority. The PiS has only 149 of the 460 seats in the Sejm. At first, the party formed a minority government, and then hoped to gain more stability in a coalition with two right-wing extremist parties—Self-Defence and the League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin—LPR). A year ago, Jaroslaw Kaczynski took over the office of prime minister.

Since then, there have been numerous attempts to discipline the smaller coalition partners. The right-wing parties have reacted submissively, fearing the consequences of new elections. According to current opinion polls, they would not receive enough votes to be assured representation in parliament.

The dismissal of Lepper from the conservative government had been planned for a long time. The initial accusation of corruption quickly turned out to be a fabrication. The Central Anticorruption Bureau (Centralne Biuro Antykorupcyjne—CBA)—an elite investigation agency under Prime Minister Kaczynski's control—failed to provide any evidence against Lepper. It soon became clear that the whole affair was part of a sting operation aimed at entrapping officials from Lepper's agriculture ministry.

Lepper was accused of using bribes to facilitate the purchase of agricultural land for lucrative building projects. Undercover agents approached two contacts from Lepper's office who promised to sign a sales contract for approximately 3 million zloty (US\$1.94 million). According to press reports, the CBA falsified documents and signatures in order to provide evidence of the sales. The anti-corruption agency seems to have gone so far as to force a CBA worker to steal the money needed for the deal. The affair

culminated in Lepper being placed under comprehensive surveillance.

When these events became known somewhat sooner than intended—with the handover of the money still not having taken place—the CBA was compelled to act quickly and arrested the two persons involved, arranging for the agriculture ministry to be searched and documents seized. On the same day Lepper was removed from his office, Sports Minister Tomasz Lipiec (LPR) was also sacked on suspicion of corruption.

The CBA was established only last year. It is vested with extensive police and secret service powers and is under the direct control of the prime minister, who can intervene directly in its work. To preserve the appearance of neutrality, its staff are officially barred from any political or union affiliations. In fact, the first CBA chief appointed by former Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz was a PiS politician.

The extensive powers and comprehensive field of activity of the new authority were designed in particular to enforce the Lustration Law. Ostensibly, this legislation is intended to uncover any links an individual may have had to the secret service under the former Stalinist regime. In reality, the CBA has utilised the law to remove those individuals Poland's current rulers find unacceptable—from the scientific community, the media and state institutions. In the last year, the government used these structural changes to shape a subservient media and state apparatus.

The powers of the CBA are an affront to fundamental democratic rights. Without any due legal process, it can bug public areas and collect information about individuals from state authorities, telephone and insurance companies, and personal records and store this data for an unlimited period. With this fabrication of "evidence," the Kaczynskis have thus created an instrument to secure the power of the PiS, posing an enormous threat to civil liberties.

The Kaczynskis have now directed these powers against their coalition partners in an effort to dominate the government. For some months, an open confrontation between and working class and the government has been developing. A strike of doctors and nurses has been followed by announcements of mass protests and strikes involving teachers, miners and railway workers. In view of this threat to an already unstable government, the Kaczynskis fear that Lepper's demagogic expressions of sympathy with some layers of the working population could encourage popular opposition to their regime, despite the fact that as a rule they have

been able to rely on Samoobrona in difficult circumstances.

The present actions of the government—which have become increasingly systematic, employing ever more criminal methods—are of a piece with the events of last autumn. At that time, Lepper was also forced to leave the government because he had criticised the low level of social spending in the 2007 budget and the dispatch of Polish soldiers to Afghanistan.

More recently, Lepper made headlines when in an interview with RIA (Russian Information Agency) Novosti, he repeatedly opposed the stationing of the US anti-missile defence shield in Poland and announced he was in favour of a referendum on the matter. At the same time, while the PiS demagogically denounced the striking doctors and nurses as the “powers of darkness,” declaring their actions illegal and threatening to break up the dispute by force, Lepper expressed his sympathy for protesting workers.

Lepper’s noisy rhetoric should not be confused with serious opposition. It took only a week for him to drop all conditions for a return to the coalition—which had included more expenditure on farming, the health sector, social security benefits and an increase in teachers’ salaries—and professed his readiness to unconditionally participate in the coalition.

Samoobrona repeatedly raises social questions to draw notice and avoid sinking into total obscurity within the party landscape. This farmers’ party—which is often falsely termed “left-wing”—has struggled to reconcile its social demagoguery with the right-wing policies of the government it has joined.

Samoobrona differs from the PiS and LPR only in that it did not stem from the old Solidarnosc parties, but developed as a social movement among farmers. It is a concentrated political expression of the backwardness of Polish small farmers, who were largely ruined in the 1990s. The party combines the promotion of certain social questions with extreme nationalism and agitation against foreigners. The organisation’s representatives, above all Lepper, are just as corrupt and opportunist as their coalition partners. But they are knowledgeable that they cannot completely relinquish their social demagoguery if they want to survive beyond the next elections.

Lepper’s social phrase-mongering, however, has not been able to cover up Samoobrona’s role in the government. At the same time, the PiS, with its reactionary campaigns against abortion, homosexuality and the theory of evolution, has succeeded in winning support amongst those backward layers formerly attracted to the LPR and to a degree to Samoobrona. According to current opinion polls, both of the latter parties would no longer gain sufficient support to enter parliament and are thus completely at the mercy of the Kaczynskis. This became clear again in recent weeks, when Lepper resigned like a whipped dog while his party remained in the coalition.

In view of this situation, Lepper and the chairman of the LPR, Roman Giertych, announced the union of their two parties into the League for Self-Defence (LiS). Both hope in this way to beat back the attacks of the PiS and be better able to attract votes. This “new strategy” is nothing more than old wine in a new bottle. As a small political elite prepares for new elections, political decisions continue to be made by a tiny minority—usually the same political

figures—and the population is unable to exert the least political influence.

The “new” LiS is already searching for allies and has approached the right-wing Catholic priest Tadeusz Rydzyk. Since the Kaczynski brothers came to office, Rydzyk’s radio station Maryja has become a de facto government broadcast outlet.

The LPR, whose youth organisation and parliamentary deputies do not shrink from using Nazi symbols and violence against unpopular groupings, employs nationalism and chauvinism in an effort to mobilise the most backward social layers. In parliament, the party has been involved in absurd theatrics, such as a motion to crown Jesus Christ as King of Poland.

For its part, the PiS has been preparing for a government crisis and also for possible new elections. In addition to establishing the CBA, in the last two years it has installed its own personnel in all important areas of the media and state. It has also changed legislation, such as the broadcasting law, in its favour and to the detriment of its competitors within the coalition and the opposition. The sacking of Lepper and the disciplining of its coalition partners is a further move in this direction.

In view of an anticipated massive confrontation with workers, it is conceivable that the PiS could even manipulate or suspend the elections. A “Lex PiS,” in which an absolute majority of seats in parliament would be awarded to the strongest party, has already been suggested by the Kaczynskis. If this method had been applied to the results of the last elections (in which only 40 percent of the population took part), it would have meant just one tenth of the electorate voting for the PiS would have determined a majority in parliament.

The fact that the right wing in Poland can behave in such an unscrupulous manner is bound up with the lack of any serious opposition to their policies within the political establishment. The low election turnout testifies to the fact that workers have no expectations in either of the political camps that have regularly alternated in government in recent years. Ex-Solidarnosc leaders and post-Stalinists share responsibility for the social disaster that is now pitting the working population against the government.



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