

Polish elections offer no alternative for the broad masses

Cezar Komorovsky
29 September 2007

On September 7, the Polish Parliament (Sejm) resolved to dissolve itself, with new parliamentary elections set for October 21. The motion was carried with 377 votes in favour, 54 against and 20 abstentions.

The Polish government—a fragile political coalition between the ruling nationalist and right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS) and its two even more reactionary partners, the Farmers' Self-Defence and the League of Polish Families (LPR)—had been characterised by a series of intrigues and crises since its election in May 2006. The coalition eventually broke up in July of this year following corruption scandals, abuse of the security apparatuses by the main party in the coalition, the PiS, and growing popular opposition to the government.

The country's ruling elite has now decided to use the new elections to reorganise its personnel and party political landscape in order to continue its ongoing assault on the living conditions and democratic rights of the vast majority of the population.

Political cleavages within the PiS were exposed when Interior Minister Janusz Kaczmarek was sacked on August 9 by his superior, PiS head and Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski. Together with identical twin brother Lech Kaczynski, who presently serves as the president, the two are leading an authoritarian campaign in the country to eliminate as much political opposition within the state, industry, and media as possible.

To this end, their Central Anti-Corruption Bureau (CBA), which is theoretically assigned the task of halting ubiquitous "corruption" in official channels, has been staffed with loyal acolytes whose job is to neutralise anybody deviating from the PiS and Kaczynski line. This pattern has been repeated in many influential state institutions, from state-owned industrial concerns to the public media and universities. Officials demonstrating some degree of independence have been dismissed in droves to make way for pliant PiS sycophants.

On August 24, Prime Minister Kaczynski suspended secret parliamentary committee hearings to prevent Kaczmarek, who is now being feted in oppositional circles as a seasoned PiS dissident, from giving information about the activities of the CBA on the pretext that such information is a state secret.

Kaczmarek retaliated by publicly declaring that the PiS was using the Secret Services, state prosecutors, and the CBA to gather information not only on opposition politicians, private media owners and journalists, but also on figures within the PiS itself.

On August 31, masked special agents from the Secret Services promptly proceeded to arrest Kaczmarek on the charge of endangering state secrets and held him in custody overnight.

On September 2, the Kaczynskis also charged Kaczmarek with providing information to the press about a scheme to frame former agriculture minister and head of Farmers' Self-Defence, Andrzej Lepper, whose party, himself included, has since been deprived of political power by the PiS. The scale of depravation within the Polish ruling elite seemingly knows no bounds.

The list of people whom Kaczmarek is alleged to have utilised to inform on Lepper reads like a who's who of the rich and powerful in the country. According to the government, this list includes:

- * Jaroslaw Marzec, the former head of the CBA. He was dismissed from his post on August 9 for unannounced reasons.

- * Ryszard Krauze, the head of Poland's largest software company, Prokom. The fifth richest man in Poland, he has since left the country.

- * Jaromir Netzel, former CEO of powerful Polish insurance agency PZU. He has since been sacked due to alleged involvement in the present affair.

- * Konrad Korniatowski, the former chief of police.

The scheme revolved around a tract of agricultural land to be re-zoned for commercial use, from which Andrzej Lepper and some supporters were to have benefited handsomely. However, it has since been revealed that the land to be re-zoned did not exist, thus exposing the pretext under which Lepper and his party were effectively disenfranchised.

Unperturbed by the unmasking of their intrigues, the Kaczynski twins are now mobilising the most backward sections of Polish society, in particular the heavily Catholic countryside, in their election campaign. They are relying on their control of the media and above all the unpopularity of opposition parties to secure a further term in office.

In this regard, Prime Minister Kaczynski's remarks on August 25, as quoted by Reuters, that "we will win," should be taken as a warning to the working class that the upcoming elections on October 21 could very well be marred by direct manipulation by the PiS, if they do take place at all.

As if sensing this threat to the legitimacy of bourgeois rule, the Vienna-based Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) offered to send international observers to monitor the upcoming elections, in tandem with remarks made by former Czech President Vaclav Havel on September 3 that foreign

monitors should be present in Poland on October 21. The Polish government promptly turned down the “offer,” making clear that foreign monitors would not be welcome.

While raising a hue and cry about the blatantly antidemocratic excesses of the PiS, the nominal opposition parties in Poland have absolutely nothing to say about the roots of the present political crisis in Poland. This is because they have been part and parcel of the systematic plundering of the social gains of the working class ever since the liquidation of the Stalinist state in 1989.

Representative of these layers is none other than former Prime Minister Leszek Miller from the post-Stalinist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), a formation made up of former Stalinist bureaucrats and party hacks. On June 1, the Polish newspaper *Dziennik* reported that Miller was seeking a return to “big” politics by creating a right-wing faction called the “Social-Liberal Platform” inside the SLD. This faction is firmly opposed to even the most cursory concessions by the SLD to disillusioned workers and youth.

“They haven’t accepted the fact that socialism lost,” Miller told *Dziennik*. “It doesn’t make sense to return to socialism.... We should not of course forget people who are excluded and poor,” he continued, “but in my opinion, a modern left supports free-market economy.”

It has since been reported that Miller has resigned from his party and declared he will lend his support in the upcoming elections to Farmers’ Self-Defence. “He’s looking for a place—it doesn’t matter where—from which he can show his SLD colleagues that he still has some clout,” said television journalist Dorota Gawryluk.

Miller’s evolution is symptomatic of the utterly fraudulent nature of the Polish political system, which, in this respect, has much in common with many other eastern European countries. Miller embodies that unscrupulous and unprincipled layer of politicians who change their parties and posts as easily as they change their shirts. What remains consistent in the course of their various careers is their virulent opposition to socialism and the interests of the masses of the population.

Leszek Miller was the former secretary of the Stalinist Central Committee prior to the collapse of Stalinism in 1989. As leader of the SLD, he was instrumental from the beginning in introducing free-market economy measures in post-Stalinist Poland. In 2004, he introduced the so-called Hausner plan, which involved drastic cuts in the sphere of welfare and social spending and reduced pensions and social insurance payments for farmers. Less than two years later, the hated SLD was demolished in parliamentary elections, receiving less than 5 percent of the vote (in the 2001 elections, the SLD notched up 41 percent).

Now Miller is intent on reviving his political career and continuing his assault on the rights and conditions of the working class through the agency of the thoroughly reactionary Farmers’ Self-Defence Party.

The political trajectory of his party, the SLD, parallels Miller’s opportunism. It has recently reconstituted itself into the ludicrously named LiD (The Left and Democracy) and has sent out feelers to Poland’s nominally main opposition party, the rabidly pro-big business Citizens’ Platform (PO).

On August 23, former Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski

(also former leader of the Stalinist youth organisation) said that the reconstituted LiD would be ready to join the PO in the next government after the elections. “A coalition between the PO and the LiD would be politically natural,” he said.

The PO does not hide from its openly anti-working class policies, while posturing as a legitimate alternative to the Kaczynski brothers. It favours “a liberal Poland based on the force of human egoism,” even more increased privatisation, and a 15 percent flat tax, on top of a highly regressive VAT.

And if these policies were to be opposed by a radicalised working class increasingly making its voice felt in public life? PO leader Donald Tusk has an answer to this question, found in an early 1992 interview with the newspaper *Trybuna*. Popular resistance to neo-liberal economic policies, he said, should be beaten back with rubber truncheons and armed force if necessary.

In fact, a coalition between the PO and the LiD makes a mockery of any recognised forms of democracy for the forthcoming elections. Polish voters will be able to vote only for parties of the right wing, all of which are pledged to continue the process of re-dividing social resources to benefit big business, while intensifying the dismantling of social and democratic rights.

Despite its own unpopularity—recent opinion polls reveal that 80 percent of the working class and youth are “ashamed” of the present leadership—the Kaczynski brothers currently have a slight lead in the polls. They are banking on mobilising more support than the discredited opposition under conditions where, based on prior elections, a low turnout of the electorate is expected.

The recent mobilisations and militant struggles by nurses, bus drivers and other sections of workers indicate the explosive nature of the social and political crisis in Poland. Workers, students and young people can place no faith in the slate of right-wing and extreme-right parties standing in the forthcoming election. Their wheeling and dealing with regard to political posts and privileges has more in common with a clique of Mafia gangsters dividing the booty than with any form of recognised parliamentary procedure.

It is necessary to draw a balance sheet of the political experiences made since the collapse of Stalinism as the basis for the turn to a new international socialist perspective and the construction of an independent party for the Polish and European working class.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact