

# Poland: Tusk government begins second term

Christoph Dreier  
12 October 2011

The Polish parliamentary election held on Sunday has confirmed the center-right government led by Donald Tusk to run a second term. With 99 percent of the votes counted, Tusk's ruling Civic Platform (PO) received 39.2 percent of the vote and its coalition partner, the Polish Peasant Party (PSL), 8.4 percent.

This represents a drop in support for both parties compared to the last election four years ago; the PO lost about 2 percent and the PSL 0.5 percent. Voter turnout was extremely low at 48.9 percent—a five percent drop on the figure from 2007. This means that the loss of votes in absolute numbers for the two ruling parties was even higher.

Polls indicate that the PO lost the support in particular of young voters. This is not surprising, as the free-market program of privatisation introduced by the Tusk government has hit youth particularly hard. The official youth unemployment rate has risen from 17.3 to 24.9 percent over the past three years. In fact, the real number is much higher. As before, 35 percent of the population lives in relative poverty. The minimum wage is around €250 net per month.

Stock markets responded positively to the election result, anticipating more privatisation and deregulation from the new government, which will further increase the profits of investors at the expense of the Polish working class.

The ability of the PO with its anti-worker policies to remain in office ? the first Polish government to be re-elected since 1989 ? has less to do with its own strength, but has its roots in the lack of alternatives and the bankruptcy of the entire political establishment. Tusk had relied so much on the weakness and unpopularity of the opposition that he only commenced his campaign a few weeks before the election and adopted a very leisurely pace.

The largest opposition party, the "Law and Justice" (PiS) party, also lost about 2 percent and gained just

29.9 percent of the vote. The party governed Poland from 2005 to 2007, in coalition with two right-wing parties, and had sought to make numerous changes in legislation aimed at authoritarian forms of rule based on the party's chauvinist ideology.

At the beginning of his campaign, the leader of the PiS, former Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski, raised social issues and harshly criticized Tusk for his privatisation program. As a result, the PiS experienced a noticeable increase in support. Towards the end of the campaign, however, Kaczynski increasingly fell back on his chauvinistic and anti-German propaganda, which, according to analysts, cost him many votes.

Trailing far behind with 8.3 percent was the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) - the successor to the Stalinist state party. The party lost half of its votes compared to 2007. In the election campaign the SLD sought to address some social issues, but the electorate was no longer prepared to believe its promises.

Between 2001 and 2005, the post-Stalinist party made unprecedented social cuts while in government, discrediting itself in the eyes of the population.

The only party that increased its vote was the Palikot movement, which ran for the first time and won 10.1 percent of the vote. It received support in particular from younger voters.

The founder and namesake of the party, Janusz Palikot, raised a number of demands such as equal rights for homosexuals, the separation of church and state, the legalization of soft drugs, and a relaxation of the country's abortion law.

He drew attention to himself with striking and provocative actions. On a talk show, he sought to highlight sexual abuse in Polish prisons with the aid of a pink plastic penis. Shortly before the election, he posed in a loin-cloth and, Jesus-style, postured as the new messiah of the left.

In fact, Palikot is not a left-wing figure. At the end of

last year, he was still a member of the ruling party. A multimillionaire, Palikot criticized Tusk from the right for not sticking to his proclaimed program of liberalization: there had been too few layoffs in the state apparatus and little enthusiasm for real reform. A key demand of Palikot is the abolition of the country's progressive tax in favour of a so-called "flat tax" of 18 percent. Such a uniform tax rate would favour the wealthy and big business.

Palikot's ability to pose as the Messiah of the left and win ten percent of the vote with a few media tricks underscores the degeneration of the Polish political establishment.

Since the restoration of capitalism, every Polish government has carried out right-wing policies against the population. From 1991 on, this program was implemented alternately by nominally right-wing governments involving representatives of the Solidarity movement and nominally leftist governments led by the post-Stalinist SLD. After four years of social cuts, privatization and deregulation, the governing party invariably lost the election, reorganising its ranks or falling apart completely.

Voter turnout has slumped continuously since 1993. The only exception was in 2007, when millions of Poles turned out to vote the despised Kaczynski government out of office.

Tusk's re-election as prime minister does not reflect Poland's alleged economic stability or confidence in Tusk's politics, so much as the fact that the majority of the working population has long since turned its back on the official political system.

All the parties represented in parliament have sat in government in the past seven years and enforced unpopular policies of the European Union and the banks against the workers. This is why all politically significant issues were downplayed in the election campaign. Instead, while Tusk ran a very restrained campaign, Kaczynski conducted a public relations campaign, often featuring the conservative politician together with scantily clad young women.

The SLD responded by publishing a video in which one of its candidates stripped down to her bra with the slogan: "Do you want more? Then you have to choose SLD." Another candidate shouted party slogans over a background of loud heavy metal music.

In this political atmosphere, Palikot could win ten

percent of the vote for a right-wing economic program based on a handful of populist phrases. While many of his voters certainly expressed their displeasure with the entire political spectrum, the rise of Palikot is above all an expression of the utter bankruptcy of the entire official political establishment.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**