

# Violent clashes erupt at Poland Independence Day rally

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Violent clashes between police and far-right protesters erupted in Warsaw during a street rally commemorating Poland's National Independence Day on November 11. Among an estimated 40,000 participants, a crowd of ultra-right nationalists pelted riot police with flares, stones and pieces of concrete. TV Republika reporters were attacked as well.

More than 270 people were arrested and nearly 50 injured, on both sides. Police used pepper spray, water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse aggressive demonstrators who were destroying traffic signs, demolishing public transportation booths and vandalising city property. Washington Traffic Circle resembled a battlefield.

The date commemorates the restoration of the Second Polish Republic headed by the reactionary Józef Piłsudski on November 11, 1918. Piłsudski established himself as a brutal dictator leading a social patriotic movement based on Polish nationalism. In May 1926, he led a coup-d'état, and in 1934 signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler.

After a gradual rightward, pro-US shift, intensified under the governments of the Kaczyński brothers and Donald Tusk, a March of Independence on November 11 was introduced in 2008 by far-right groups National Radical Camp and All-Polish Youth. The groups are known for their neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic and homophobic orientation.

Hundreds of militants and trained volunteer militia members modeled on fascist squads were able to break away as they crossed Poniatowski Bridge over the Vistula river and reached the Polish national football stadium, turning the protest into a riot.

"Greetings, Great Poland! Welcome, army of patriots! We've made it! Provocateurs did not win, neither did provocateurs from the police and Special

Forces!" shouted Robert Winnicki, the leader of All-Polish Youth.

"For us, Poland's border does not end at the Bug River. In Vilnius and Lvov, every stone can speak Polish," stated Witold Stefanowicz of the National Radical Camp, referring to the old nationalist ambitions of "Great Poland" stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

Although the influence of these organisations is limited, their increasing presence is due to two basic factors. First and foremost, the role of the so-called "left" and the trade unions. The Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), successor to the Stalinists, headed the government from 2001 to 2005, pursuing policies based on deep social cuts, deregulation and privatisation, paving the way for a sharp rightward shift.

Solidarność, the right-wing trade union that was instrumental in the process of restoration of capitalism in Poland, enjoys the full support of the SLD. The trajectory of betrayals by both it and the ex-Stalinist union federation, the OPZZ, is best documented by their drastic decline in membership. Today, only about 5 percent of workers are unionised in Poland.

The neo-fascists also seek to exploit the overwhelming opposition of the vast majority of the population to the pro-capitalist policies of the European Union (EU) and the disastrous social policies of the ruling class, which have shattered illusions in the restoration of capitalism.

Under the banner of "God, Honor and Fatherland", the National Radical Camp and the All-Polish Youth that organised the rally claim to be historically linked to parties established in 1934 and later banned, such as the fascist National Radical Camp (ONR) and the National Democracy (ND or *Endecja*) of Roman Dmowski.

In its openly anti-communist, racist and homophobic

declaration, the ONR states its programme to be “based on the Christian doctrine, thus eliminating the ideology of human rights brought by the Enlightenment, which became a secular creed leading to multiplying and absurd societal demands, such as the rights of the minorities.”

Infiltration by police agents provocateurs and secret service agencies cannot be ruled out either. The state makes use of such tools as it perceives the rising tide of malcontent and sharpens its teeth against the working class, the ultimate target of state repression.

The recent revival of extreme right groups in Poland mirrors the rise of a far-right threat all across Europe, the most intense expression of which was the US- and German-backed putsch in the Ukraine last February, supported by the fascist Svoboda and Right Sektor.

In recent years, Polish governments have proved loyal allies of US and German imperialism, from Poland’s participation in the Iraq war to the missile agreement with the US in 2008 to the support of Ukraine’s February coup.

Nationalist marches have become more aggressive in character. Last year, the demonstrators, masked and armed with red and white flags, set cars on fire shouting anti-gay, anti-Russian slogans. They threw bottles and flares, burning a gay rights movement rainbow display on Zbawiciela Square, and set fire to the guard post in front of the Russian embassy, causing an escalation in already tense relations between the two countries. Out of 210 arrested, only 3 were charged with a petty crime and sentenced to three months in jail and a fine of 300 z?oty (US\$90).

The National Movement currently enjoys the support of barely 1 percent of Poles (TNS Polska Poll 2014). March organisers recruit participants from disaffected layers of the middle class and *lumpen*, mainly football hooligans and other subcultures, such as martial arts fans and skinheads, as some are already organised and trained to fight. Preying on social despair and frustration, these groups make their appeal to unemployed and underemployed youth on the basis of chauvinism, racism and backwardness.

Poland’s youth unemployment rate is particularly high, ranging between 23 and 28 percent in the last 25 years, higher than the OECD average of 16.3 percent (the overall unemployment rate for 2014 is 13.5 percent). For many young people, a national holiday

like Independence Day, which this year is also a celebration of the 25th anniversary of capitalist restoration in Poland, offers another opportunity to express anger and frustration.

The Independence March commences each year from the main traffic circle of Poland’s capital, Rondo Centrum, the name of which was changed in 1995 to honor the head of National Democracy, the infamous anti-Semite nationalist Roman Dmowski. After the dissolution of the Stalinist government in 1989, names of many streets in Polish cities were changed for “ideological reasons” and named after controversial right-wing nationalist political figures.



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