

Tens of thousands march in Warsaw against constitutional coup

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An estimated 50,000 people marched through the streets of Warsaw on Saturday to protest against the newly formed right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) government and its undemocratic actions aimed at disempowering the Constitutional Tribunal. The protest was organised by the nonpartisan Committee for the Defence of Democracy (KOD), which joined forces with the two major bourgeois opposition parties.

The protesters marched from the building housing the Constitutional Tribunal to the Presidential Palace, situated in the downtown area of the capital, chanting, “We will defend the constitution!” and “Hands off the Tribunal!” and calling for the prosecution of President Andrzej Duda by the State Tribunal for violating constitutional law. Smaller marches took place in other major cities such as Poznań, Szczecin, Wrocław, Toruń, Lublin and Bielsko-Biała.

The protests were sparked by the ongoing constitutional crisis caused by the PiS over the appointment of Constitutional Tribunal judges. Despite a ruling by the Constitutional Tribunal that the election of three justices by the previous parliament was constitutional, President Duda refused to swear them in. Instead, in an unprecedented move, he accepted the oath from judges appointed by the PiS in order to secure its full control over the Tribunal.

By deliberately halting the publication in the *Journal of Laws (Dziennik Ustaw)* of the Tribunal rulings from December 3 and December 8, which declared the election of the PiS-appointed judges unconstitutional, and by ignoring the court’s decisions, the new government signalled that it would stop at nothing to undermine the country’s judicial branch, thereby undermining the validity of any of the court’s verdicts against the PiS.

The new government has also started to purge critical

journalists from the public media and is preparing laws to bring the private media under its complete control.

Since winning the presidential elections in May and parliamentary elections in October, the PiS has moved rapidly to establish an authoritarian regime. Led by PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński, who, despite holding no official office, is the actual strongman behind the new regime, the PiS is pushing to abolish the separation of powers enshrined in the constitution and bring all branches of state power—legislative, executive and judicial—under its direct control. Kaczyński is an avowed admirer of Josef Pilsudski, the strongman of authoritarian pre-war (WWII) Poland.

The attempts to abolish the basis of bourgeois democracy and establish a dictatorial regime in Poland are aimed first and foremost at the democratic and social rights of the working class. Under conditions of sharp social polarisation, deepening economic crisis and pronounced political and military tensions with Russia, the Polish bourgeoisie is preparing for violent class confrontations.

While the protests and the massive turnout last Saturday signal concern about the attacks on constitutional rights and democratic forms of rule, the orientation of the protests was itself reactionary. Dominated by layers of the urban intelligentsia, the demonstrators displayed red and white Polish flags next to those representing the European Union.

The European Union, as pointed out in an earlier article, is no safeguard for democracy, but quite the opposite: it is “a hotbed of nationalism, inequality, dictatorship and war.”

Everywhere, the European bourgeoisie is sharply moving to the right—from Greece, where the EU has imposed another round of draconian austerity measures with the support of the Syriza government, to France,

where the Socialist Party government has imposed a three-month state of emergency, to Hungary, where the regime of Viktor Orban has systematically abolished democratic rights.

The authoritarian dictatorship emerging in Poland under the very nose of the European Union is its own monster. The responsibility for the deep political crisis that engulfs Poland lies with the EU and all the governments that controlled Poland since the restoration of capitalism in 1989, including the Civic Platform (PO)-Polish People's Party (PSL) government coalition of 2007-2015, which supported EU austerity policies while backing the predatory strategy of imperialist war abroad.

Representatives of this previous government coalition marched at the front of Saturday's protest. They are themselves guilty of enacting anti-social legislation as well as breaking constitutional law. They paved the way for the authoritarian measures of the PiS and will do so again if they get the chance. Public support for both parties has plummeted: PO's poll numbers fell from 24 percent to 17 percent, and the PSL, representing rich farmers, would not win sufficient votes to enter parliament if elections were held today.

The main parliamentary opposition to the PiS, the Nowoczesna (Modern) Party, whose public support has jumped from 7.7 percent to 17 percent, led by Ryszard Petru, does not represent Poland's working people, but rather layers of the country's dissatisfied petty-bourgeoisie.

Petru is a former employee of the World Bank and an avid supporter of Leszek Balcerowicz, a former finance minister responsible for the transformation of the country's economy in 1989 on the basis of free market principles (so-called "shock therapy"). Nowoczesna advocates the subordination of the educational system to the needs of the capitalist market, deregulation in major branches of the economy, incentives to small business owners and deep cuts in social spending.

Also hostile to the working class are the opposition parties that did not enter parliament. These include Zjednoczona Lewica (United Left), an amalgamation of discredited components of former Stalinist formations such as Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance-SLD). They also include the Social Democrats and Greens, as well as the pseudo-left Razem (Together) party, which is modelled after Syriza

in Greece and Podemos in Spain.

The PiS is moving so quickly to secure authoritarian rule by unconstitutional means not only because of the weakness of the opposition, but also because it realizes it has little time before social anger erupts as the government proves unable to fulfil its populist election promises to fight poverty and curb the influence of foreign capital. The party's main pledge, 500 z?oty (€120) a month for each second and following child of qualifying families, will not aid those most in need, as the new law will disqualify the poorest from receiving other social benefits.

The defence of democratic and social rights, as well as the struggle against war and militarism, can be waged only by a movement of the working class, acting independently of the competing wings of the bourgeoisie and affluent middle class. Such a movement must unite Polish workers with workers in Europe and internationally on the basis of a socialist programme. It must draw the historical lessons of Stalinism, which never represented communism, but instead defended the strivings of a privileged, counterrevolutionary bureaucracy, deeply hostile to the working class.



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