

Poland: Anti-government rallies continue as Lech Wa??sa warns of civil war

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For the second time this month, thousands took to the streets in Poland to protest against the continuing assault on the country's laws and governing institutions by the newly elected administration of Law and Justice (PiS). It is estimated that about 20,000 demonstrated in front of the parliament in the country's capital Warsaw last Saturday. This is less than half the crowd of about 50,000 that gathered in front of the Presidential Palace the previous Saturday. Smaller demonstrations took place in 21 cities all over the world, including protests in front of Polish embassies in Berlin, London and New York.

The protests were organised by the Committee for the Defence of Democracy (KOD), which was set up by figures supporting the main opposition parties Civic Platform (PO) and the Polish People's Party (PSL). The protests are directed against the constitutional coup by the PiS government, which has sought to disempower the Constitutional Tribunal in the first few weeks of its rule and bring the security services under its control. The protests have been supported not only by PO and PSL, but also by the neo-liberal party Nowoczesna (Modern), led by the economist Ryszard Petru.

The protests attracted mostly layers of the urban liberal intelligentsia and the upper middle class. In Warsaw, the protesters also included numerous students and young professionals. Many protesters carried Polish flags, fewer carried EU (European Union) flags. Signs at the protests read: "Hands off the Tribunal", "No to PiSlamization", "Duda must go", a reference to President Andrzej Duda. Chants included: "We defend democracy", "A free Poland, a democratic Poland" and "Poland is here". At one point, protesters in Warsaw also chanted: "We have the Polish flag in our heart."

The protest in Warsaw ended after two hours, one

hour earlier than planned, because of an anonymous bomb threat. In Warsaw, the KOD provided their own security guards, assisting the police to keep order at the rally.

Formed only little over a month ago, the PiS government has already managed to disempower the Constitutional Court, take full control of the intelligence services and has threatened to gag the media and cultural institutions. In addition, it is moving to suppress political opposition with its proposed "anti-terrorism" act. It has also begun to purge the civil service sector by replacing senior officials in key positions with figures loyal to PiS.

After President Andrzej Duda's refusal to respect the orders of the Constitutional Tribunal and swear in three tribunal judges elected by the former parliament, the PiS parliamentary majority is now moving quickly to completely paralyze the court by introducing a new bill that would require all court rulings to be agreed by 13 out of 15 elected justices with a two-thirds majority of votes.

The newly proposed public administration bill aims at making drastic changes in the civil sector by eliminating the institution of the Civil Service Council as well as the requirement to recruit civil service candidates through open competition—thereby clearing the way for senior positions to be selected on political grounds. The bill would also erase the current provision prohibiting those with recent political affiliations (less than five years) to hold office in the civil service department.

In the middle of the night on December 18, the military police raided NATO's Warsaw counterintelligence office and removed personnel appointed by the former Civic Platform (PO) government. Sacked from his post, Colonel Krzysztof

Dusza told the TVN24 station that he had not received a written dismissal order.

The policies of PiS have also prompted criticism from representatives of the European Union and German imperialism, who have signalled support for the opposition rallies. The president of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz (German Social Democratic Party), declared that events in Poland had the character of a “coup d’état”. The situation, already causing political tensions between Poland and Germany, is scheduled for a debate in the European Parliament on January 19, 2016.

A few days before the latest protests, Lech Wałęsa, the former head of the Solidarity trade union and first president of the Polish Republic after the dissolution of the Polish People’s Republic in 1989, warned that the constitutional crisis could escalate into a “civil war”. In an interview for TVP Info “Dziś Wieczorem” (“Tonight”), Wałęsa expressed his anger over the way the new government was behaving, stating he was beginning to be ashamed of the election of PiS. “They must start getting themselves under control or there will be a civil war”, Wałęsa warned.

The former president criticized President Duda (PiS), stating that “he was doing everything to divide Poles, to irritate them”. At the same time, Wałęsa said he supported many of the reforms envisaged by PiS, “but not in this way.” They had to be implemented “in an open and democratic way”. “This needs to be corrected”, he said. Referring to the PiS leadership, he said, “I will try to convert these people. They are my colleagues, I would not like to come out against them.”

Wałęsa also called for a referendum to shorten the parliament’s and president’s terms in office: “The referendum needs to be called. It will be won. They [PiS] will not honour it, but there will be such a pressure from the [masses in the] streets, that they will be physically thrown out.”

Wałęsa’s statements are a clear attempt to warn the ruling elite of the danger of social upheaval. Wałęsa fears that under conditions of increasing divisions within the bourgeoisie and a lack of support within the upper-middle class for the government, the working class could intervene.

Social tensions in Poland run high, with youth employment at 25 percent, a deeply impoverished countryside and widespread poverty wages. The blatant

assault by the PiS government on democratic rights has led to a quick loss of support for Duda, who was elected in May this year. In a poll by IBRIS Onet, close to 60 percent of the respondents regarded Duda’s presidency as negative. Duda is seen by many as a puppet of the ruling PiS’ strongman, Jarosław Kaczyński.

Wałęsa is one of the most experienced bourgeois politicians in Poland; he played a key role in the restoration of capitalism in Poland and was president from 1990 to 1995. He has gone on record supporting the policies of the right-wing dictator Józef Piłsudski, who ruled Poland from 1926 to 1935 and was responsible for the jailing and persecution of thousands of trade unionists and socialists.

In an interview with Polish television several years ago, Wałęsa said that he believed in democracy the same way as did Józef Piłsudski, the “First Marshal of Poland”, that is by bringing back law and order through a coup d’état. He openly suggested that he was preparing for such an option in the future to prevent a working class revolution, which will inevitably erupt if out of control capitalism continues on its current course.



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