

Poland adopts new anti-communist law

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The Polish parliament recently adopted a de-communization law, giving local governments one year to remove all symbols representing communism from the public space.

As of April 1, the bill, fully titled “On the prohibition of propagation of communism or any other totalitarian system through the names of all public buildings, structures and facilities”, bans public display of names commemorating communism, including “people, organizations, events or dates symbolizing the repressive, authoritarian and non-sovereign regime of 1944-1989 in Poland” and criminalizes any propaganda in their favor.

The Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), which serves as the historical police for the right-wing Law and Justice Party (PiS) government, has sent out letters to many local authorities with a list of over 1,300 of the “most flagrant examples that glorify the anti-Polish communist ideology” in their cities.

Among those organizations and individuals included on the IPN’s list of “cursed communists” are the volunteer members of the 13th International Brigade, known as the Dabrowski Brigade, who fought Franco’s fascist forces during the Spanish civil war of 1936-39; members of the revolutionary workers’ organization Proletariat II (1888-1893); the party of Rosa Luxemburg—the Social Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL, 1900-1918); the Polish Socialist Party-Left (PPS-L, 1906-1918); the Polish Communist Party and the Left Opposition in Poland (1918-1938); the anti-fascist partisans of the People’s Army (AL) and the People’s Guard (GL); the Polish People’s Armed Forces (AWP); officials of the former USSR and PRL (the Polish People’s Republic 1945-1989) and “leftist” writers including Julian Tuwim, Jan Brzechwa and Władysław Broniewski.

The list of names makes it clear that the law targets primarily the revolutionary leaders of the Polish socialist workers’ movement and pro-Soviet anti-fascists. To justify the attack on the legacy of the revolutionary Marxist movement in Poland and the Soviet Union, its most honorable leaders are lumped together with those responsible for crimes committed by the Stalinist agents and bureaucrats, as well as fascists and the Nazis.

Article 13 of Poland’s Constitution of 1997 as well as article 256 of the penal code already bans political parties and organizations that make a reference to totalitarian methods and practices of Nazism, fascism and communism as well as those propagating racial and ethnic hatred or violence. Nazism, fascism, communism and racism are intentionally mentioned in the same breath as if they were synonyms.

Equating communism with Nazism and fascism, and, subsequently, communism with Stalinism with the term

“totalitarian communism”, is part of a deliberate effort. This perverted falsification of history aims at confusing the working class and preventing the development of a revolutionary socialist movement.

The crimes committed by Nazi Germany on the territory of Poland during WWII were of tremendous and unprecedented scope and scale. The Red Army was instrumental in crushing the Third Reich, the liberation of the Jewish people and other nations from extermination in concentration camps. That the USSR, despite the criminal rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy, was able to mobilize against the Nazi war machine and ultimately defeat it, was a reflection of the enormous strength of the 1917 October Revolution.

The harassment of leftist organizations and simultaneous promotion of nationalistic and fascistic forces by the Polish authorities reveal that the real target of all those allegedly “anti-totalitarian” legislations was never fascism or Nazism, but socialism and the legacy of the October Revolution.

On March 31 of this year four activists from the Stalinist Communist Party of Poland (KPP) were given 9 months of suspended prison sentence with forced labor and fines by the Regional Court in Dąbrowa Górnicza in Silesia for propagating communist ideology through the Internet and their newspaper *Brzask*. Around the same time, on April 16, around 400 neo-fascists were allowed with impunity to march to celebrate the 82nd anniversary of the establishment of the ONR party (the National-Radical Camp) in Białystok.

It is revealing to note how the reactionary anti-communist law was passed without a single parliament delegate objecting.

Introduced by the PiS, the bill was adopted unanimously with 438 votes in favor and only one abstention. Members of the opposition parties such as Civic Platform (PO), which co-authored the bill, and Nowoczesna (Modern) which ran to the defense of Lech Wałęsa after he was outed as a Stalinist spy, voted for the bill. So did members of the agrarian Polish People’s Party (PSL), which was active during the rule of the so-called “non-sovereign regime of 1944-1989” under the name of the United People’s Party (ZSL).

One of the main controversies surrounding the bill concerns war memorials honoring the struggle of the Red Army to liberate the territories of modern day Poland from the Nazi occupation during WWII. The IPN is currently proposing a removal and transfer of more than 500 Soviet monuments to a remote open-air museum park.

The law is yet another open provocation against Russia, adding fuel to already tense relations between both states. It met with a

harsh response from the Russian authorities: the Civic Chamber of Russia appealed to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and UNESCO for international intervention.

“The intolerant policy of Poland in regards to the Soviet monuments is reminiscent of the actions of the ISIS fighters in Syrian Palmira”, Russian foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zacharova stated. She announced that Moscow would not remain indifferent to actions bordering on barbarism, such as the demolition of monuments of generals and soldiers who fought to free Europe from fascism.

Russia’s foreign minister Sergei Lavrov stated that with the passage of the new law Poland reached top position among the countries crusading against Soviet monuments. Within the last year 30 monuments symbolizing the Red Army have been desecrated or illegally removed. The upkeep of war memorials and final resting places is guaranteed through the bilateral agreement of 1994 between the Polish Republic and the Russian Federation.

There are over 1,800 cemeteries, memorials and final resting places of Soviet soldiers in Poland. An estimated 600,000 Soviet troops lost their lives during military actions against the armies of Hitler on the country’s territory in the years 1944-1945, saving hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens from resettlement and almost certain death in the Nazi concentration camps. Fighting on the side of the Red Army, the Polish People’s Armed Forces lost an estimated 17,500 troops, 5,000 alone in battles for control of Pomerania Embankment fortifications. Now these soldiers are being treated as traitors who helped impose the Soviet occupation in Poland.

The spokesperson of the Polish foreign ministry stated in response to Lavrov’s criticisms that the 1994 agreement does not apply to the so-called symbolic monuments which are “a clear symbol of Soviet domination over Poland” and can be removed without violating provision stipulated in the agreement.

Such an interpretation is legally feasible thanks to the 1652 resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of 2009, which distinguishes between “war graves and victory monuments erected to glorify totalitarian regimes or former occupation forces.” Dismantling the heritage of former “communist totalitarian systems” has been strongly advised by the Assembly.

In a step to revise history and undermine the role of the Soviet Union in defeating the Third Reich, the Polish parliament approved legislation last year replacing the May 9 holiday commemorating the capitulation of Nazi Germany to the USSR, with a May 8 V-E Day, the capitulation to the allied nations. By dismantling war memorials and changing dates of public holidays, the bourgeois regime hopes to tear out an inconvenient page in history: that it was the Soviet Red Army that liberated Poland from Nazism, and not its Western allies.

The first wave of de-communization swept the country soon after the reestablishment of capitalism in the early 1990s, when many names of streets, parks and buildings commemorating leaders of the Polish and international workers’ movement as well as events honoring the Red Army’s victory over the Nazis, were erased and replaced by the names of nationalistic ideologists, heads of imperialistic states, Catholic cardinals and pre-WWII

authoritarian dictators, such as the anti-Semitic cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the anti-communist pope John Paul II, the far-right nationalist Roman Dmowski and the authoritarian dictator Józef Piłsudski.

Local governments in charge of de-communization were not always in a hurry to carry out the changes due to high administrative costs as well as the protests of the local residents. With the passage of the latest law assigning new names for streets or buildings in question now becomes mandatory. The estimate for the project is calculated at 1.5 million zł (about €350,000).

The de-communization law was preceded by similar provisions adopted in various countries, such as Hungary, Moldova and Ukraine, and then found in some cases to be unconstitutional or in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights. In the case of Moldova, the Venice Commission stated that using symbols such as the hammer-and-sickle or the red star by individuals, including parties that do not display totalitarian ideologies, could not be treated as dangerous propaganda.

These reactionary and utterly anti-democratic laws need to be rejected by the working class in Poland and internationally. The cynical revision of 20th century history by the nationalistic ruling regime aims at justifying the drive towards war with Russia on behalf of the United States, NATO and the European imperialist powers. By falsely associating contemporary bourgeois Russia with the USSR, it aims at erasing the heritage of the Soviet Union and its victory over Nazism, the legacy of the socialist movement in Poland as well as the gains for the working class introduced after the establishment of pro-Soviet Polish regime in 1945.

The fact that the de-communization law comes 27 years after the collapse of Stalinism, amidst great disillusionment with capitalism and protests of the working class against worsening living conditions, exposes the true nature of the act. Above all it is a preventive measure to threaten and suppress all domestic opposition against capitalism. Revising the history and promoting heinous nationalism and Russophobia are directly aimed at preventing the unification of Polish and Russian workers, and blocking them from learning the lessons of a revolutionary international workers’ movement that so mightily threatened capitalism in the 20th century.



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