

Polish government strengthens the far right

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As part of its preparations for war against Russia, the Polish government is deliberately strengthening the far right.

Since the Law and Justice Party (PiS) entered government last autumn, the number of attacks of a racist or xenophobic character has risen to its highest level since 1989. This was revealed by investigations by the NGO Nigdy Wi?cej (Never Again).

Currently, there are almost daily incidents of violent attacks by right-wing forces.

Widespread attention was given recently to an assault on Jerzy Kochanowski, a history professor at Warsaw University. A drunk right-winger insulted and struck Kochanowski on a tram because he was speaking German with a colleague from the University of Jena. He received virtually no assistance from fellow passengers and was forced to have a head wound treated in hospital.

On the same day, two women of Asian origin fell victim to right-wing violence. In an open letter, university students announced their solidarity with the professor and opposed the growth of racist and nationalist sentiments.

The PiS government is consciously encouraging this development. It is stoking racism and strengthening the influence of the far right with state measures.

In April, Prime Minister Beata Szydlo abolished the Council for the Struggle against Racism and Discrimination, which was established under the previous government. At the same time, she is integrating radical right-wing groups into the state apparatus.

The most well-known example is the ONR (National Radical Camp), whose members have been responsible for several attacks on foreigners and homosexuals. In August, ONR members attacked the leaders of the Komitet Obrony Demokracji (KOD) opposition movement, sending them to the hospital.

Defence Minister Antoni Macierewicz has been planning, since the beginning of the year, the integration of the ONR into a new territorial defence unit, which is being expanded into a second army under the direct control of Macierewicz and the PiS government.

Both in terms of its name and programme, the ONR stands in the tradition of the organisation of the same name in the 1930s, which belonged to the so-called *Endecja* under Roman Dmowski and became a training ground for Polish fascist paramilitary units.

These units were not only responsible for anti-Semitic assaults and attacks on Jewish businesses, but also at times collaborated with the Nazis in the persecution of the Jews during the German occupation of Poland.

Militant anti-Semitism and racism continue to be key planks of the ONR's programme today. Some of their members have been prosecuted for using the Hitler salute. Like its predecessor organisation in the 1930s, the ONR finds support today among academics: their current leader is 27-year-old Aleksander Krejckant, a graduate of European studies.

Another prominent figure is Justyna Helcyk, who has a degree in chemistry.

Catholic priests have repeatedly organised joint events with ONR members over recent years. Jacek Mi?dlar, a priest from Wroc?aw, is an open supporter of the ONR. He compared the organisation, according to *Newsweek Polska*, to "chemotherapy for a malignant tumour that has affected Poland and the Poles."

In the Sejm, Poland's parliament, the government also cooperates indirectly with the ONR. The ONR is part of the National Movement (Ruch Narodowy, RN), which supported the Kukiz'15 party in the election and was therefore rewarded with five of its 42 seats. This party collaborates closely with the PiS in parliament.

The PiS is itself closely tied to the extreme right.

Macierewicz was a leading member for many years of various ultra-right formations and published a radically nationalist and anti-Semitic newspaper, before joining PiS in 2005. After the PiS election victory and assumption of power for the first time in 2005, many members of the right-wing coalition Liga polskich rodzin (LPR, League of Polish Families) joined the PiS, including Jan Olszewski, the official adviser to former President Lech Kaczyński, who died in 2010.

In addition, the right-wing Catholic radio station Radio Maryja is a firm backer of the PiS government. The station has its main influence over sections of the rural population in the east of the country. It is led by priests and media mogul Tadeusz Rydzyk. Rydzyk has enjoyed the official support of the Vatican since the time of Pope Benedict XVI, even though he has repeatedly made anti-Semitic, homophobic and racist statements.

The strengthening of the radical right is part of the militarisation of Polish society with which the PiS government is preparing for war with Russia and a brutal suppression of social protests from the working class.

During its first year in power, the PiS has taken major steps towards the construction of a police state and encouraged a nationalist revision of history. The PiS has increased the defence budget, which had already risen to 2 percent of GDP under the Citizens Platform (PO) government, to 3 percent of GDP. The PiS plans to spend a total of €16.3 billion in the coming years on rearming the military.

Poland will therefore be one of the most important arms markets in Europe, together with the Baltic states, which are also rearming swiftly against Russia. According to arms expert Ben Morris from *Jane's*, the arms are above all “heavy military equipment like tanks that are planned for use in a conventional war on its eastern border.”

The US, Poland’s most important international ally, and NATO support the military buildup and the right-wing forces imposing it.

In the lead-up to the NATO summit, which took place in Warsaw in July, six former Polish defence ministers closely aligned to the opposition PO called for the resignation of Macierewicz. But the conference, where Obama shook his hand, adopted measures closely corresponding to those proposed by Macierewicz.

Macierewicz was therefore able to significantly consolidate his position in the government. After PiS head Jarosław Kaczyński, observers view Macierewicz as the most influential politician in Poland.

In an interview with the opposition-aligned newspaper *Polityka*, General a. D. Janusz Boronowicz said that Macierewicz had more power than any other defence minister prior to him. “Essentially he can do what he likes. In my view he is the first civilian leader of the armed forces.” Boronowicz has played a leading role in the Polish army for close to two decades and was influential in interventions in Afghanistan and Syria. He resigned from the army early this year out of protest at the reforms introduced by Macierewicz.

The interview with the general in *Polityka* sheds light on the sharp tensions being produced within the ruling elite by the PiS government’s political agenda. Boronowicz accused Macierewicz of being responsible for leaving the army leaderless and dividing the army leadership.

With direct reference to Germany’s invasion of Poland at the start of World War II, he said, “The situation is totally unacceptable. And in the event of a potential conflict it is preparing the way directly to a repetition of the defeat of September 1939. We are on the best path to repeating all of the mistakes of the past.”

This general and the liberal opposition fear that the PiS’ politics are dividing Polish society to such an extent that the stability of the state could be at stake in the event of a war or a social movement of the working class.

The editor of *Newsweek Polska* and a well-known supporter of the opposition, Tomasz Lis, accused Andrzej Duda (PiS) of being the weakest president since 1989. He warned, “Since 1989, Poland has never needed a real president more than it does now, at a time when the position of the state is at risk and the community is more fragile than perhaps ever before.”



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