

Gdańsk mayor and opposition politician Paweł Adamowicz brutally assassinated

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On Sunday, the mayor of Gdańsk and well-known opposition politician Paweł Adamowicz was stabbed multiple times on the stage of Poland's largest charity event. He succumbed to his wounds in a hospital on Monday. The assassination, political responsibility for which lies squarely with the ruling right-wing Law and Justice Party (PiS), has sent shockwaves throughout Poland and has deepened the political crisis in the country.

The attack occurred in plain view before a large audience and was filmed. The assailant, armed with a six-inch knife (15 centimeters), stabbed Adamowicz on stage several times, including in the heart and stomach. After the stabbing, he grabbed the microphone and turned to the crowd, claiming that he had killed Adamowicz because he had been thrown in jail by the Civic Platform party (PO), to which Adamowicz had belonged until 2015. "That's why I killed Adamowicz," the assassin shouted. He was able to walk around on stage for about half a minute after the attack.

Eye-witnesses reported that he laughed and that there were no police present. The assailant was eventually detained by security guards and was later identified as 27-year-old Stefan W. According to official reports, he had a history of mental illness and violent assaults, and was just released from prison where he had spent five-and-a-half years for armed robbery.

The political conditions and climate for this brutal assassination by a mentally disturbed individual have been created through the year-long promotion of fascist forces and sentiments, including anti-Semitism, homophobia, racism and extreme nationalism and militarism, by the ruling PiS.

Adamowicz, the mayor of Gdańsk since 1998, had been one of the most prominent targets of the campaign

of PiS and openly far-right forces against opposition politicians.

Like most leading bourgeois politicians in contemporary Poland, Adamowicz began his political activities in the Solidarity movement of the 1980s, and was a leader of the student strikes in Gdańsk in 1988/1989. A conservative-leaning politician for most of his life, and member of the liberal PO party until 2015, Adamowicz in recent years became one of the most outspoken critics of the anti-refugee and anti-Semitic sentiments fostered by the PiS government. He participated in an LGBT parade in Gdańsk in 2018 and condemned anti-Semitic attacks on a local synagogue.

Adamowicz was also a prominent supporter of the European Union (EU) investigation into PiS's reforms of the judicial system, aimed at abolishing the separation of powers. Last year, when he was reelected as mayor, he was subject to a massive government-sponsored campaign that depicted him as corrupt.

In 2017, the far-right All Polish Youth included him on a published kill list of opposition politicians. On his fake "death certificate," the All-Polish Youth indicated "liberalism, multiculturalism, stupidity" as his "cause of death." A legal investigation into the death list was dropped by the state attorney. Even after his assassination, the far-right politician Grzegorz Braun, who is close to the fascist Obóz Radikalny Narodowy (ONR), described Adamowicz as a "traitor to the nation." This kind of terminology has also been used routinely by PiS politicians to denounce the pro-EU opposition.

The call "death to enemies of the fatherland" and "traitors to the nation" featured prominently at the 2017 march of some 60,000 fascists in Warsaw, the largest fascist demonstration in Europe since the end of World War II. Last November, PiS officials and the Polish

president Andrzej Duda marched alongside fascist forces, including the ONR and the All-Polish Youth, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Polish independence.

The liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza* wrote, “Let’s stop pretending now. Paweł Adamowicz was the most hated local politician by right-wing government propaganda. On the right-wing forums they didn’t stop the hatred, even after his death.”

The charity event where the attack occurred has also long been a target of the Polish far-right and PiS media. The Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity (WOŚP) collects donations for medical equipment for Polish hospitals and is perceived by the Polish right as a secular rival organization to the Catholic-funded Caritas. It was founded and headed by Jerzy Owsiak, a popular radio host and critic of the PiS government, who has been attacked as a foreign agent, corrupt, and a German puppet by the right-wing media. Just days before the murder of Adamowicz, state TV broadcast a show that depicted Owsiak as a puppet of the Civic Platform and as collecting cash marked with the Star of David. Owsiak stepped down as head of the WOŚP after the murder of Adamowicz.

Under these conditions, it was only a matter of time before this type of assassination would occur.

The murder of Adamowicz has shocked masses of people in Poland. Thousands have demonstrated in Gdańsk and other cities, and many are expected for the funeral, which is scheduled for this Saturday. His coffin will be on display in Gdańsk starting on Thursday.

While the demonstrations were held under the banners of “love” and against hatred and hate speech in politics, there is an acute awareness of the political responsibility of PiS and the far-right for the assassination. One resident of Gdańsk who participated in a memorial meeting told the *Guardian*, “If you watched our main government TV, you would see that for months there were programmes about how bad he is, how he lies, how he steals. They created a mood in which weak people, sick people, respond to this kind of atmosphere.”

Most leading Polish news outlets described the assassination as a watershed in political life.

The murder has drawn comparisons with the assassination of the Polish President Gabriel Narutowicz in 1922 by Eligiusz Niewiadomski, a painter and former government official who was close

to the far-right National Democratic Party, a predecessor of today’s ONR. He was declared mentally ill, but also was idealized as a martyr by the far-right following Narutowicz’s murder.

The assassination is set to further deepen the political crisis in Poland.

The response of PiS to the murder has been a mixture of desperate attempts to deny any political character to the assassination and calls for “unity,” on the one hand, and open disregard of even pro-forma expressions of sympathy for the victim, on the other. Most notably, Jarosław Kaczyński, the head of PiS, demonstratively stayed away from a minute of silence for Adamowicz in the Polish Sejm (parliament) on Wednesday.

The conservative *Rzeczpospolita* has warned in a commentary that Adamowicz’s murder has put PiS “in a very difficult situation” and that “emotions in this matter are not on the side of the rulers.”

The murder of Adamowicz in Poland is the result of a dangerous development which poses immediate threats to the working class. The rise of the far-right, which has created the conditions for this assassination, cannot be fought within the framework of bourgeois politics and the pro-EU opposition, led by the PO.

Behind the promotion of fascist forces and racism lies a fundamental reorientation of bourgeois politics amid a historic crisis of capitalism. In Poland, this shift is taking particularly sharp forms, as the bourgeoisie is preparing for a direct military conflict with Russia and an open confrontation with the working class with the full support of US imperialism. But the promotion of the far right and its integration into the state apparatus are not unique to Poland. Similar developments are taking place in neighboring Germany and internationally. This dangerous political climate can only be changed through an independent intervention of the working class in political life in Poland and across Europe on a socialist basis.



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