

Poland: Law and Justice Party wins second term in office, loses majority in the Senate

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The far-right Law and Justice Party (PiS) won 43.49 percent in Sunday's parliamentary elections in Poland, up from the 37.6 percent it received in the previous parliamentary elections in 2015.

The Civic Coalition (KO), comprised of, among others, the liberal Civic Platform (PO), the Polish Greens, and the Nowoczesna ("Modern") party, received only 27.40 percent. The Lewica coalition, which includes pseudo-left parties like Razem (Together) and Wiosna (Spring) as well as the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), had hoped to achieve between 20 and 27 percent, but received only 12.56 percent of the votes. Voter turnout stood at 61.7 percent.

PiS retained its majority in the Sejm (lower house of parliament), but lost its majority in the Senate where it will now hold 48 seats. The opposition parties from KO and the Lewica and the PSL will together also hold 48 seats.

While PiS polled over 60 percent in its traditional bastions in the predominantly rural East and southeast of the country, the liberal opposition failed to win a majority in all but one region.

Nevertheless, the electoral victory for PiS was narrower than the ruling party had expected. PiS headquarters, according to a report by *Politico*, were "far from euphoric." In an evident sign of nervousness within the party, its head Jarosław Kaczyński stated, "We received a lot, but we deserve more."

The election marks a deepening of the years-long political crisis in Poland. Since PiS became the ruling party in 2015, when it won an overwhelming majority in both houses of parliament, it has implemented far-reaching methods aimed at creating an authoritarian regime by criminalizing speech and historical research on Polish anti-Semitism, whipping up xenophobic and

nationalist sentiments, and transforming Poland into a leading bulwark of US imperialism's war preparations against Russia, spending billions on military armament and the creation of paramilitary structures.

PiS has thus stood at the forefront of the international turn of the bourgeoisie to the right and the promotion of far-right forces and militarism. This has created conditions in which the largest march of fascists in Europe since the end of World War II took place in the Polish capital Warsaw in 2017. Last year, Polish president Andrzej Duda and prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki demonstratively joined a demonstration of a quarter million people dominated by the far-right on the occasion of Poland's "Independence Day."

The fact that PiS was nevertheless reelected is largely due to the incapacity and, indeed, unwillingness of the official opposition to capitalize on the social and political opposition to PiS in the working class. For years, the official opposition parties have focused their criticism of PiS on appeals to the EU and especially German imperialism. They are speaking for a section of the bourgeoisie and upper middle class that is as fervently pro-war and anti-Russian as PiS but fear that the latter's almost exclusive reliance on the US as an ally endangers Poland's geopolitical and economic interests.

Their biggest fear, however, is that a genuinely left-wing opposition to the PiS government will emerge from within the working class. In the spring, 300,000 Polish teachers went on a national general strike, one of the largest in Poland since 1989, when the Polish People's Republic was destroyed by the Stalinist bureaucracy and capitalism was restored. The strike shook the entire political establishment in Poland and provided an inkling of the enormous class and political tensions that have been building up in the country.

Teachers were seething with anger not only over the poverty wages they receive, but also about the education reform by PiS that has been aimed at transforming schools into a vehicles for nationalist and historically revisionist propaganda.

However, the PO-aligned teachers' unions worked systematically to sabotage the teachers' strike. Blacking out all political issues from the strike, they eventually sold it out, leaving teachers without virtually any gains after an embittered 17-day struggle.

The unions also opposed any renewed strike before the elections, even though a vast majority of the teachers have indicated that they were ready to go on strike again. The unions eventually called for a national work-to-rule protest which began on Tuesday in a effort to dissipate teachers' anger.

According to recent statistics, Polish teachers make only 59 percent of the average pay of teachers in the European Union.

The liberal opposition has consciously decided to focus exclusively on mobilizing its traditional base in sections of the upper-middle class, and the EU-oriented educated intelligentsia. Throughout the campaign, the opposition refused to make any appeals to social discontent, and made barely a mention of the dictatorial measures, historical revisionism and build-up of fascist forces openly pursued by PiS.

Under these conditions, PiS, has been able to exploit the opposition's collaboration in stifling workers' anger and the fact that the liberal parties are correctly associated with years of devastating austerity and privatization programs.

Alarmed by the teachers' strike, PiS has focused its electoral campaign on a combination of the promotion of extreme national chauvinism and anti-LGBTQ hatred, and demagogic social appeals. The party has promised to double the minimum wage, and increase pensions. In this campaign, PiS was heavily supported by the Catholic church which is still very influential among the country's impoverished rural layers, which comprise roughly 40 percent of the total population.

In the past years, the PiS government, while massively expanding the country's military spending, also enacted limited social programs with the aim of consolidating support especially among the rural population and the most impoverished sections of the working class.

PiS introduced child benefit payments of 500 z?oty (roughly \$128) per month, abolished the income tax for Poles under 26, large sections of which are unemployed or underemployed, and raised the minimum wage.

The systematic promotion of anti-Semitism and the far-right by PiS has been directly encouraged and legitimized by representatives of both US and German imperialism. Most recently, during his visit in Poland on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of WWII early in September this year, the German president Frank-Walter Steinmeier omitted any reference to the Holocaust.

During the German occupation of Poland from 1939 to 1945, the Nazis killed approximately 6 million Poles and turned the country into the epicenter of the industrial annihilation of European Jewry. In the six death camps erected in Nazi-occupied Poland, together with mass shootings, an estimated 4.5 million out of a total of 6 million Holocaust victims were killed, among them almost the entire pre-war Polish-Jewish population of 3.5 million.

In several visits to Poland since 2017, US president Donald Trump, who himself ever more openly resorts to the whipping up of fascistic, anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic sentiments, has openly backed the PiS government. He has also officially endorsed the Intermarium strategy pursued by the PiS government, which is aimed at creating a network of far-right governments in Eastern Europe to form a bulwark against both Russia and Germany, and worked to expand the US-Polish military ties.

Strikes and mass social protests by the working class are already reemerging as significant factors in Poland. The critical question in the coming period will be to fight to build a leadership for these struggles to link them up consciously with a fight against war and the capitalist system on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.



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