

International media and politicians silent on anti-Semitism in Polish elections

Clara Weiss
24 July 2020

The re-election of Andrzej Duda of the far-right Law and Justice Party (PiS) as president of Poland marks a new stage in the shift to the right of bourgeois politics in Europe.

Duda won a narrow victory on July 12 over his rival, Rafał Trzaskowski, from the liberal Civic Platform (PO), carrying the day over Trzaskowski above all in the rural areas. The central role of anti-Semitism in the official campaign of the PiS has no precedent in Poland since the end of the Nazi occupation in World War II.

In numerous features on the PiS-controlled state broadcaster TVP, Duda's rival, Trzaskowski, was essentially depicted as a puppet of world Jewry, prepared to "sell out" the interests of the Polish people. He was linked to a "powerful foreign lobby" and "rich groups who want to rule the world," including the Hungarian-American billionaire George Soros, who is one of the main targets of the anti-Semitic right in Eastern Europe.

In another broadcast, Trzaskowski was denounced as hostile to Catholics and a believer in the "god of Spinoza," whom TVP described as a "Jewish philosopher."

In an interview with the far-right Catholic radio station Radio Maria, influential among rural layers and the extreme right, Jarosław Kaczyński, the de facto head of the PiS, stated, "Only someone without a Polish soul, a Polish heart and a Polish mind could say something like that. Mr. Trzaskowski clearly doesn't have them, seeing as he says that this [restitution of Jewish property robbed during World War II] is open to discussion."

These denunciations stand directly in the tradition of the fabrications of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," an anti-Semitic tract from 1903, which alleged a "Jewish world conspiracy" and insisted that the Jews were a "fifth column," preparing to sell out and betray national interests.

This anti-Semitic propaganda formed the basis for numerous violent pogroms in the former Russian Empire, including the territories of what is today Poland, most notably in response to the Revolution of 1905. In the interwar period, the "Protocols" were promoted by Polish far-right nationalists such as Roman Dmowski, whose organization was responsible for numerous anti-Jewish terror attacks and pogroms.

During World War II, Poland, home to the world's largest Jewish community before the war, became the main site of the Holocaust. It was here that all the major death camps, including Auschwitz and Treblinka, were set up. Out of the six million European Jews who were murdered, most were murdered on

Polish soil, including 90 percent of Poland's 3.5 million Jews.

While principal responsibility for this genocide lies with the Nazis, Polish anti-Semites welcomed the annihilation of European Jewry and perpetrated numerous pogroms before, during and after the Holocaust. The most notorious of them, the pogroms of Jedwabne in 1941 and of Kielce in 1946, have been at the center of a state-led campaign by the PiS to deny the murderous role of Polish anti-Semitism.

Since 2018, discussion of Polish anti-Semitism and its role in the Holocaust has been banned, and dozens of historians have lost their jobs because of the legal proscription. Leading representatives of the PiS government have marched in demonstrations organized by neo-Nazis and violent anti-Semites. Now, the anti-Semitic ideology of these forces has been systematically deployed as a political weapon in the presidential elections.

There is no question that the far-right character of the campaign was condoned, if not encouraged, by the White House. In an unprecedented move, President Andrzej Duda was welcomed to Washington and openly endorsed by US President Donald Trump, whose administration has encouraged far-right forces in the US.

They met and held a press conference in the White House just days before the first round of the Polish election. The PiS government has been one of the most critical allies of the US in the war build-up against Russia and the growing rivalry with German imperialism.

Jewish organizations and the Polish Council of Media Ethics have issued statements denouncing what they call the "instigation of anti-Semitic sentiments" by state-controlled media. In a statement to Reuters, the American Jewish Committee said it had been shocked by the use of "anti-Semitic tropes" on Polish state television.

Yet the Polish and international bourgeois press and politicians have passed over this anti-Semitic campaign in silence. Trzaskowski himself avoided any denunciation of it, and did not even mention the term "anti-Semitism." Instead, he vaguely referred to "marginalized groups" that he would seek to defend, and insisted that he had a "Polish heart," a "Polish soul" and the "right to Polish patriotism."

With the exception of two online reports by *Politico* and ABC News, not a single bourgeois outlet in the US discussed the whipping up of anti-Semitism in the Polish elections in any detail.

The German president and former defense minister, Frank

Walter Steinmeier, congratulated Duda on his electoral victory, praising him for his “courage and strength in contributing to the unity of the Polish nation.”

The utter indifference of leading bourgeois politicians and the bourgeois press to the PiS’ unprecedented use of anti-Semitism as a political weapon is not a coincidence or aberration. It is a direct result of the extreme shift to the right of the bourgeoisie and the systematic fostering of fascist forces by capitalist states in recent years. German imperialism, to which the liberal sections of the Polish bourgeoisie around Trzaskowski and the PO are oriented, has been at the center of this development.

Last September, speaking in Warsaw on the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, Steinmeier maintained complete silence on the Holocaust. This was an obvious overture to far-right forces in Poland and Germany. In 2014, Steinmeier took a photo of himself with Oleh Tyahnybok of the Ukrainian neo-Nazi party Svoboda, which played a critical role in the US- and German-backed coup of that year.

A network of neo-Nazi terrorists has been operating with state funding within the German military, police and secret service (Verfassungsschutz) for years. The professor of Eastern European history, Jörg Baberowski, has not only been allowed to propagate his far-right historical revisionism and Hitler apologetics, he has received the open backing of the German Ministry of Education.

The only political party in Germany opposing these neo-Nazi views and organizations, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP—Socialist Equality Party), has been vilified and subjected to state surveillance.

Underlying the state-led promotion of the fascist tendencies in Europe and internationally is the profound crisis of the world capitalist system, and, above all, the resurgence of the class struggle, processes that have been dramatically accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic. It is in this context that anti-Semitism, which has historically been a key weapon against a unified movement of the working class, is reemerging as a political weapon of the bourgeoisie.

In Poland, the reactionary myth of a “Jewish conspiracy,” and especially the *ydokomuna* (Jewish commune), i.e., a Jewish Bolshevik conspiracy, has played an especially sinister role in the offensive of both capitalist and Stalinist governments against the working class.

The alleged link between the threat of socialism and the Jewish population was central to the anti-Semitic violence of the Polish right before and during World War II. After the war, the Stalinist bureaucracy, which played a key role in suppressing major social upheavals by the European working class after World War II, also resorted to anti-Semitic campaigns in Poland whenever there was a major upsurge of the working class, above all in 1968.

The ruling Stalinist party, the Polish United Workers Party (PZRP), feared the spread of the working class revolt that had developed in France in March 1968. When student protests began in May of that year in Warsaw, the general secretary of the PZPR, W?adys?aw Gomu?ka, alleged on state television that they had been provoked by “Zionists” (i.e., Jews), and effectively told the Jewish population of Poland to leave the country.

A key figure in this campaign was Boles?aw Piasecki, a former

member of the fascist Falange in the 1930s, whose extremely right-wing Catholic organization PAX was allowed to operate and propagate its ideology.

Hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews were forced to leave the country or dismissed from their jobs. This included many who had survived Nazi concentration camps and fought in the anti-fascist resistance movement. Serious historical work on the Holocaust and the history of Polish Jewry became all but impossible.

When a major working class movement emerged, in the form of Solidarity, to challenge the Stalinist bureaucracy in the 1980s, the question of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism immediately became a major subject of political and historical discussion among workers and intellectuals. However, the enormous political confusion created by Stalinism in the working class and intelligentsia enabled the Solidarity leadership to subordinate this movement to the interests of the Stalinist bureaucracy, which moved to fully restore capitalism in 1989.

Despite the bitter anti-communism of both factions of the Polish ruling class, they ultimately owe their existence to the Stalinist reaction against the October Revolution of 1917. Ideologically, they rely on the legacy of the crimes of Stalinism, including the promotion of anti-Semitism, and the false equation of Stalinism with “communism” and “socialism.”

The resurgence of anti-Semitism today, which is spearheaded by the Polish state and condoned and encouraged by all its imperialist backers, underlines the fact that fascism and anti-Semitism cannot be combated within the framework of bourgeois politics. The only viable social basis for the fight against war, fascism and dictatorship is the Polish and international working class. The strategy guiding the workers’ struggles must be based on the political lessons of the fight waged by the Trotskyist movement against Stalinism.

We urge all readers in Poland who are ready to take up this struggle and discuss these questions to contact us today.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact