Mass demonstration in Warsaw against right-wing Polish government

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Hundreds of thousands demonstrated in the Polish capital Warsaw Sunday for the removal of the far-right PiS (Law and Justice Party) government. Under the slogan “Marsz Miliona Serc” (March of Millions of Hearts), opposition leader Donald Tusk of the right-wing Citizens’ Platform (PO) called for the demonstration two weeks before the parliamentary elections. The leaders of the social democratic Nowa Lewica, W?odzimierz Czarzasty and Robert Biedro?, and the peasant movement Agrounia, Micha? Ko?odziejczak, also supported the demonstration. Thousands took to the streets in other cities such as Krakow, Szczecin, Toru? and Lodz.

The organizers declared that a million had participated, while the police estimated hundreds of thousands. According to the organizers, the demonstration was twice as large as the one held on June 4, one of the largest since the end of the Stalinist regime and the reintroduction of capitalism in 1989. The trigger for the June protest was the adoption of a repressive law to establish a special commission against “Russian influence.”

The PiS government’s repressive policies played a central role in the latest demonstration. At the end of July, it was revealed that Joanna, a young woman, had been denounced in Krakow by her psychiatrist and mistreated by the police for taking an abortion pill. Three years ago, the PiS government tightened the abortion law in order to strengthen its followers in the arch-Catholic and right-wing extremist milieus. Prior to that, Poland was already one of the countries with the strictest abortion laws. Since the new law, legal abortion is almost impossible.

At the time, hundreds of thousands across the country spontaneously demonstrated for weeks against the ban on abortion. Again, widespread disgust with the government’s far-right agenda drove masses onto the streets. The PiS, which has led the government since 2015, has been working systematically to establish an authoritarian regime by forcing the courts and the media into line. At the same time, it strengthens fascist and antisemitic forces in particular, most recently with the smear campaign against film director Agnieszka Holland.

But the platform of former EU Council President Tusk, who was Polish head of government from 2007 to 2015, offers no alternative. To call Tusk’s party, the PO, “liberal” would be an absurd euphemism. As the election campaign has confirmed, he too is pursuing an ultra-right agenda. He supports NATO’s war against Russia, fully supports the European Union and attacks the social policy of the PiS from the right. As the election campaign comes to an end, he has become increasingly aggressive against refugees and presented himself as a “better” nationalist and militarist.

Tusk accuses the PiS of not closing the border with Belarus effectively enough, not effectively rearming, insulting Polish officials and secretly serving Russia. Like all parties in the Polish parliament (Sejm), the PO also voted in favour of the governments multibillion-dollar rearmament programme, which also provides for the militarisation of society. At the same time, the PO criticized the PiS’ limited social measures, such as the child benefit.

At the core of its economic program are extensive tax breaks and deregulation in favor of the corporations. For example, companies with a turnover below a certain annual limit would be exempted from continued payment of wages in the event of illness. This responsibility is to be taken over by the state social security program (ZUS), whose additional expenditure would serve as a pretext for further cuts.

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The coronavirus pandemic has shown that the Polish health system is largely broken, provoking mass protests and strikes by doctors, nurses and paramedics in 2021. The same goes for the Polish education system. The entire working population is ultimately being made to bear the enormous costs of rearmament and war in full. Inflation, which rose to 18 percent at its peak, is still above 8 percent.

According to official OECD figures, the average purchasing power of Polish wages has fallen by 7 percent in the past year alone. Increased food and energy prices exacerbate the consequences of these massive real wage cuts.

All parties in the Sejm, from right to left, agree on these attacks on the working class. This also applies to the Polish left-wing Lewica party, which according to surveys could win around 10 percent of the vote. The party has subordinated itself to the right-wing PO to such an extent that even the news magazine *Polityka* describes its campaign as "silent and lackluster." It merely pursues the goal of not losing too much and staying in the Sejm.

Trzecia Droga (Third Way), an electoral alliance of the right-wing peasant party PSL and the new party PL2050 of Szymon Ho?ownia, distanced itself from the demonstrations of the PO and has positioned itself in the election campaign between PiS and PO. It could serve to secure a majority for either of the larger parties given the 9 percent of the vote it is expected to win, according to the polls.

Support for the fascist Konfederacja is fluctuating between 8 and 15 percent in the polls. It benefits from the discrediting of the old political establishment and, according to surveys, attracts an above-average number of young voters. The two new leaders of the fascist party, S?awomir Mentzen and Krzysztof Bosak, are both in their mid-30s and enjoy constant media attention.

The rise of 34-year-old young entrepreneur Mentzen is strongly reminiscent of Marine Le Pen and Giorgia Meloni, who gave their fascist parties a modern facelift and were embraced by the media. He sums up the party's program with the formula: "We want a Poland without Jews, homosexuals, abortions, taxes and the European Union."

Konfederacja is the only major political group in Poland to question support for Ukraine. It also leads a campaign against Ukrainian refugees and attacks German leadership in the EU even more sharply than PiS. It calls for far-reaching relief for companies and attacks the PiS' coronavirus policy, which has claimed 120,000 lives, from the right because the government-imposed lockdowns at certain stages.

Whoever wins the elections in two weeks and forms the new government will continue the war policy, social attacks on the working class and the profits-before-lives pandemic policy. Any incident at the border with Ukraine could be used as an excuse to "enter the conflict," as Poland's ambassador to Paris, Jan Emeryk Ro?ciszewski, explained in March.

Polish workers and youth need their own party aligned with the international working class in order to avert the danger of a third world war and fascist barbarism. We call on all Polish readers to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* with the aim to build a Polish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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