

# Change of government in Poland ushers in period of bitter class conflict

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On Wednesday, Polish President Andrzej Duda swore in the leader of the right-wing liberal Civic Platform (PO), Donald Tusk, as the new head of government. This marked the end of eight years in which Jarosław Kaczyński's ultra-nationalist Law and Justice party (PiS) ruled the country.

Tusk leads a coalition of around a dozen parties, which are divided into four parliamentary groups in the Sejm and have a majority of 18. With the exception of PiS and the fascist Konfederacja, the coalition encompasses the entire political spectrum of the country—from conservative to economically liberal, to green and social democratic parties.

They had already declared their intention to jointly replace the PiS before the election and owed their election victory on October 15 to pent-up anger at the latter's attacks on democratic rights.

The PiS government had abolished the right to abortion, clamped down on the judiciary and the media and imposed its ultra-nationalist ideology on universities, schools and museums. In June and October, half a million people took to the streets in Warsaw alone to protest against these reactionary policies, and the turnout in the parliamentary elections was the highest since the end of Stalinist rule in 1990.

In an hour-long statement made on Tuesday before his election as head of government in the Sejm, Tusk endeavoured to build on the hopes associated with the parliamentary election. "When it comes to the freedom of the individual and human rights, Poles never give up," he declared. "The rule of law, the constitution, the rules of democracy" were "things we cannot argue about."

International media outlets also attempted to portray Tusk's return to power—he had previously been Polish head of government from 2007 to 2014—as a triumph of the rule of law and democracy.

Stefan Kornelius wrote in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: "Democracy has survived the attack, it has disempowered the PiS with the remaining constitutional rules, it has fended off their attacks on the judiciary and through far-reaching control of the media, especially over the heads of the

people." It showed "that all the painful injuries to the state system can be healed, that one election day is enough to end eight years of destruction."

What nonsense! The policies of Tusk and his government are not determined by flowery words about democracy but by the war in Ukraine, the capitalist crisis and the associated escalation of the class struggle.

Tusk, who was president of the Council of the European Union from 2014 to 2019, is one of the most tried and tested representatives of the Polish and European bourgeoisie. He chaired the European Council, the EU's most important decision-making body, when it imposed one brutal austerity programme after another on Greece. In contrast to Kaczyński, who fuelled sentiment against the EU and Germany for domestic political reasons, Tusk is unreservedly committed to Brussels and Berlin and their policies of militarism and social cuts. This policy cannot be reconciled with democratic rights in any country.

Tusk is one of the worst agitators in NATO's proxy war against Russia. In his government statement, he promised that Poland would support Ukraine even more in the war against Russia. "We will loudly and resolutely demand the full mobilisation of the free Western world to support Ukraine in this war," he said, declaring that Poland would be a strong part of NATO and a strong ally of America.

Tusk has appointed Radosław Sikorski as his foreign minister, a post he already held in his previous administration. Together with the then German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Sikorski organised the right-wing coup in Kiev in 2014, which ultimately provoked the current war. Sikorski's wife, the American journalist and historian Anne Applebaum, is one of the best-known and most foul warmongers.

The PiS government had also fully supported Ukraine in the war against Russia and had begun to build up the Polish armed forces into the largest army in Europe. Jarosław Kaczyński had developed a pathological hatred of Russia after his twin brother Lech, then Polish president, died in a plane crash in Smolensk in 2010. Nevertheless, the narrow-

minded nationalism of the PiS has led to tensions with Ukrainian nationalists, who are historically deeply hostile to the Poles and have mutual territorial claims.

There are also economic conflicts. Poland closed its borders to Ukrainian grain imports to prevent the low prices from ruining Polish producers. Polish lorries have been blocking the border with Ukraine for weeks because Ukrainian hauliers, who have been allowed to operate within the EU since 2022 due to an EU exemption, are undercutting the slave wages of Polish hauliers.

The PiS government also reacted with mistrust to Germany's growing influence in Kiev. Germany has replaced Poland and the UK as the most important arms supplier after the US and is one of the most important financiers of the Zelensky regime. Germany's growing influence in Kiev has thwarted the *Intermarium*, or "Three Seas" project, which was intended to develop Eastern Europe under Polish leadership as an economic counterweight to Germany. Corresponding infrastructure projects have stalled or have not been completed.

Under Tusk, Berlin and Warsaw now want to work closely together again. However, this does not make military support for Ukraine any less costly. And these costs must ultimately be borne by working people.

In addition, there is a severe economic crisis with devastating consequences for the Polish working class. The PiS had gained influence not least because, following the neoliberal policies of the first Tusk era, it had introduced a relatively high child benefit compared to the low wages, and increased pensions and the minimum wage. In the meantime, inflation has eaten all of this up again.

At 7 percent, the inflation rate is well above the European average; a year ago it was as high as 18 percent. As a result, real wages fell by 7 percent in 2022 alone. The economy temporarily slipped into recession, and domestic demand collapsed by up to 5 percent, driving many smaller companies into bankruptcy.

Tusk, who is far to the right of the PiS on social issues, will try to solve this crisis at the expense of the working class, whose interests are not compatible with democracy.

It is significant that during the election campaign, Tusk had already tried to overtake the PiS on the right on refugee policy, which serves as a spearhead for the attack on democratic rights everywhere. In his government statement, he mentioned "democracy" and "secure borders and a secure national territory" in the same breath and promised that Poland would take on a leading role in the EU and "become a partner in border protection."

The extent to which Poland has now moved to the right was demonstrated by an antisemitic provocation staged by Konfederacja parliamentarian Grzegorz Braun in an

anteroom of the Sejm immediately before Tusk's government statement. He unpacked a fire extinguisher and used it to extinguish the candles of a seven-branched candelabrum, which is lit there every year on the occasion of the Jewish Hanukkah festival.

Although Braun also injured a woman who stood in his way, he was able to sit unhindered in the plenary chamber and insult Judaism as a "satanic cult." Only then was he expelled from parliament. Even though PO and PiS distanced themselves, it is their right-wing policies that have created the conditions for the emergence of such fascist elements.

Tusk's neoliberal economic policy during his first term in government had paved the way to power for the PiS. His return to government does not usher in an era of democracy but rather a period of bitter class conflict.

In the 1980s, when 10 million people organised themselves into the Solidarno?? trade union, the Polish working class proved what tremendous struggles and efforts it was capable of. However, Solidarno?? was steered into a capitalist dead end by the combined efforts of the Catholic Church, the Stalinists, its own leaders and pseudo-left civil rights activists such as Jacek Kuro?.

Private property took precedence over workers' rights. The large factories in which the workers had fought were shut down or downsized. Right-wing parties such as PiS and PO emerged from the leadership of the trade union. It is significant that Tusk quoted John Paul II, the arch-reactionary pope from Poland, in his government statement and thanked Solidarno?? leader Lech Wa??sa for his services to Poland.

Polish workers must prepare themselves for the inevitable class struggles by learning the lessons of Solidarno??'s betrayal, breaking with its nationalist, pro-capitalist perspective and turning to the international, socialist programme of the Fourth International under the leadership of the International Committee.



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