

Right-wing nationalist party wins Polish parliamentary elections

By Clara Weiss
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The right-wing nationalist party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, PiS) won Sunday's parliamentary elections in Poland with around 37 percent of the vote, according to unofficial results. The Citizens Platform (PO) was punished for its policies of social cuts during a period when it has been the largest party in parliament for 10 years. PO obtained just 24 percent of the vote.

At 51.5 percent, turnout was the highest in 26 years. Around 30 million people out of the population of 38 million were registered to vote.

The, PiS won 235 seats in the Sejm, more than any party since 1989. PO will retain only 138 seats. The Farmers Party (PS), which governed in a coalition with PO, lost 22 seats and retained just 16 seats.

PiS leader Beata Szydło will now replace Eva Kopacz as prime minister.

The United Left (Zjednoczona Lewica), a collaboration between ex-Stalinists, Social Democrats and Greens, missed out on parliamentary representation with just 7.55 percent of the vote. The hurdle for entry into parliament is 8 percent for alliances and 5 percent for individual parties in Poland. The newly founded party Razem, modeled on Spain's Podemos and Greece's Syriza, also failed to enter parliament, with just 4 percent of the vote.

Alongside PiS, Kukiz15, founded by former punk musician Paweł Kukiz, with nearly 9 percent of the vote, and Nowoczesna, a business party with 7.7 percent, were the beneficiaries of hatred towards the government. Kukiz15 won its support above all from young people under 24. The founder and chairman of Nowoczesna, Ryszard Petru, is a businessman and banker with close ties to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The fascist KORWiN party failed to clear the 5 percent hurdle,

with 4.76 percent of the vote.

The outcome of the Polish election will mean an intensification of national conflicts within the European Union (EU) and a continuation of Warsaw's militarist policy towards Russia. PiS is pushing for greater independence for Poland within the EU, particularly in relation to Germany, and is aligned more closely than the PO to the United States. Several media outlets in Germany and English-speaking countries warned that Poland could become a second Hungary within the EU.

PiS was able to profit above all from deep social anger at the austerity policies imposed by the PO-PLS government, which included increases to the retirement age and sales tax, and wide-ranging privatisations. The severe losses for PO and PLS, with both parties together obtaining less votes than PiS, express broad popular hostility to the EU.

Since PO has been the largest party in parliament since 2005 and involved in a series of coalitions, voters associated it most closely with the EU's policies. Through its accession to the EU, Poland has become a cheap labour platform, above all for German companies. Although the Polish economy has grown by 50 percent over the past decade following the total collapse of the 1990s, 2 million people of a total population of 40 million have left the country during the same period to work for higher wages elsewhere. Social inequality has continued to grow. Particularly young people, who confront youth unemployment of 25 percent and low-paid jobs, have few career prospects.

PiS draws its strongest support from the rural population. According to World Bank figures from 2013, around 38.8 percent of the population, or approximately 10 million, live in rural areas. Of the working age population, 17.8 percent are engaged in

the agricultural sector. The Polish Catholic Church, which has considerable influence in rural areas, gave its full backing to PiS, making available its newspapers and radio station Maria, which in some rural areas is the only broadcaster. PiS was thus able to appeal to the hatred towards the EU among farmers and agricultural workers, whose social misery has worsened still further since joining the EU in 2004.

Maria Kulesza, a 69-year-old village resident, explained her reasons for voting PiS to the *Guardian*, "At the end of each month, I have several customers who can only afford to buy bread if I offer it to them on credit.

"Here in the village, we look after one another, so my shop can survive. But in bigger towns and cities the foreign supermarkets have taken over. The small shops have closed. I want a government that will invest in homegrown industry so that the young people stop leaving Poland to work elsewhere."

Around 24,000 Polish immigrants in the US of a total of 10 million voted. Of these, an overwhelming majority (18,000, or 75.4 percent) cast their votes for PiS.

In industrial areas like Silesia, where there have been repeated strikes by miners over recent months, PiS also came in first.

According to figures from the local newspaper *Dziennik Zachodni*, PiS obtained 36 percent of the vote in the region, while PO got 25.5 percent. Kukiz15 received more than 11 percent and Nowoczesna almost 7 percent. The United Left and Razem obtained somewhat less than their national averages.

It is above all the responsibility of the Solidarno?? trade union that PiS, with its deeply reactionary programme, was able to win support here. Piotr Duda, the union's leader, backed PiS candidate Andrzej Duda in the presidential election and urged people not to vote for the government parties.

He declared that his union had a "programmatic agreement" with President Duda and spoke out in favour of a "stable" government. Solidarno?? assisted the government over recent months in suppressing the miners' strike. One of PiS's central election promises was to keep the coal industry alive and avert bankruptcy at Kompania Weglowa, Europe's largest coal producer.

The ability of Solidarno?? and PiS to channel social

anger behind the right-wing appeals of PiS under conditions of a deepening social crisis can only be explained against the background of the decades of political confusion and disorientation created by Stalinism. Under the banner of Marxism and communism, the Stalinist bureaucracy has promoted nationalism in Poland for decades, until ultimately leading the way to the restoration of capitalism.

In truth, PiS's programme is deeply hostile to the working class. The party orients itself to the authoritarian regime of Józef Piłsudski, which functioned in the interwar years as a bulwark of imperialism in Eastern Europe against the Soviet Union, while at the same time brutally suppressing the Polish workers' movement.

PiS plans to establish an authoritarian presidential regime by changing the constitution. A draft constitution from 2010 proposed to equip the president with wide-ranging powers and to significantly reduce the power of the Sejm.

PiS also intends to eliminate the balance of power between the executive, judicial and legislative branches. To this end, posts such as the attorney general will be eliminated and its powers taken on by the justice minister. PiS recently declared it would clean up the state apparatus, and it is expected that there will be significant changes in personnel in business and other areas.

In addition, PiS plans to introduce a ban on abortions and do away with the separation of church and state. Many party representatives have publicly made racist and anti-Semitic statements.

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