

ELECTIONS: MIXED FEELINGS

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On the surface, at least, the results of the Polish parliamentary election on 23 September 2001 are clear enough: the Left secured a long expected victory with over 40 per cent of the vote, while the divided Right - including radical nationalists - lost heavily.

The election campaign itself, however, demonstrates that the extreme right has made deep inroads into the mainstream of Polish politics and in the preelection rush to win as many allies as possible, there were mainstream political parties did not hesitate to strike deals with extremists.

Amongst these was the pro-European liberal Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) which formed a coalition with the vehemently anti-European Union Real Politics Union (Unia Polityki Realnej, UPR). The UPR's leader Janusz Korwin-Mikke is the publisher of his party weekly paper *Najwyższy Czas* ("High Time") which has run countless antisemitic articles on its pages, some of them written by Korwin-Mikke himself.

Another UPR leader, known for espousing a particularly zealous form of antisemitism, is Stanisław Michalkiewicz, who was prevented from representing the PO at the election, but many other members of the UPR were accepted by the PO leadership. The PO, incorporating the UPR, subsequently gained 12% of the vote.

The Polish Peasant Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL) likewise had dealings with the far-right, some of its local branches collaborating with the National Party (Stronnictwo Narodowe, SN). In one particularly interesting case, in Szczecin, the PSL candidates' list included members of the nationalist-pagan *Niklot* association, whose leader is Mateusz Piskorski, the translator and promoter of British Nazi David Myatt's Nazi-satanic writings. The PSL won 9 % of the vote, one per cent less than the radical farmers' organisation *Self-Defence (Samoobrona)*, led by Andrzej Lepper. In the past, Lepper has had a long record of expressing his far-right sympathies by citing Joseph Goebbels and Jean-Marie Le Pen as his role models. In the recent years, however, he moderated his utterances and tried to distance himself from the extreme right. Despite that, Nazi skinheads were seen attending his election meetings. The conservative Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) bloc got 9% of the vote and it, too, had a number of extreme right-wing activists as its candidates, most notably through its incorporation of the Right-wing Alliance (*Porozumienie Prawicy, PP*) which meant supporting figures like Marcin Libicki, a long-time member of the extremist National Right (*Prawica Narodowa, PN*) group. The PN is a small but influential organisation with a membership that comes from across the right-wing scene. Libicki, a deputy chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, made his name as a leading campaigner against gay rights. Thanks to PiS support, he was able to win a safe seat in Poznań. Another PN leader, Krzysztof Kawecki, ran on the ticket of the ruling right-wing Electoral Action Solidarity (*Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność, AWS*) led by incumbent premier Jerzy Buzek. Kawecki served as deputy minister of education in the Buzek government. Not long before being appointed, he had been publishing antisemitic articles in his journal *Prawica Narodowa (National Right)*, some of them written by former Waffen-SS general Leon Degrelle. The once-powerful AWS received a pitiful 5% and failed to win a single seat in parliament.

More successful, with 8%, was the newly formed League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin, LPR*) backed by the mass-audience Christian-fundamentalist Radio Maria. The nationalist-Catholic LPR includes the predominantly skinhead organisation *All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska, MW)* and one of its leaders, Professor Ryszard Bender, achieved notoriety for his endorsement of Holocaust revisionism during a Radio Maria broadcast last year.

The fragmented right-wing spectrum was too crowded to allow space for yet another bloc called *Alternative Social Movement (Ruch Społeczny Alternatywa, RSA)*, formed by several nationalist MPs who had defected from the AWS. In contrast to the left-wing connotations of its name, the RSA is the most extreme of the right-wing coalitions and has established links with Le Pen and his fascist *Front National*, a contact previously monopolised by the PN. The RSA also formed an alliance with the Nazi *Rebirth of Poland (Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski, NOP)* which is a part of terrorist Roberto Fiore's *International Third Position* set-up.

The NOP's leader, Adam Gmurczyk, seemingly abandoned his previously much trumpeted national-revolutionary strategy and attempted to join the suit-and-tie arena of parliamentary politics. In the end, however, the NOP became an embarrassment for the RSA whose result was below 0.5%. The Nazi-pagan *Polish National Community (Polska Wspólnota Narodowa, PWN)*, led Bolesław Tejkowski, notorious for its 1996 march at Auschwitz, did not get even that many votes.

Before the election, Leszek Miller, the leader of the *Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, SLD)*, publicly expressed his support for the anti-fascist activities of the *Never Again Association*.

It remains to be seen whether he has enough determination to act against racist extremism which has

become the cancer of the Polish body-politic. Most probably he needs a push from the European Union which, until now, has tended to ignore the steady rise of the far-right in EU candidate countries.