

FAR-RIGHT THINKING PERMEATES NEW GOVERNMENT

FAR-RIGHT THINKING PERMEATES NEW GOVERNMENT The swing to the extreme-right in Polish politics at the end of 2005 has surprised most observers. Although the extreme right-wing League of Polish Families (LPR) polled a mere 8% of the vote in the 25 September 2005 election, it has been allowed to enter into an informal parliamentary coalition with the ruling Law and Justice party (PiS). The radical populist Self-defence party (Samoobrona) is also part of the coalition.

More disturbing, however, are the facts that Law and Justice itself has effectively taken over the Catholic fundamentalist and nationalist ideology of the LPR and that Radio Maryja, the notorious ultra-nationalistic and antisemitic radio station, has become virtually the main medium for the promotion of government policy.

Prime minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz as well as his top cabinet ministers now regularly travels to Radio Maryja's headquarters in Torun, to take part in marathon live broadcasts lasting many hours.

The government has even promised to build a new motorway from Warsaw to Torun for the convenience of the radio station's bosses and the state lottery has announced it will co-finance Radio Maryja's private university.

This kind of intimacy between the country's leadership and the extremists is without recent precedent but, against this background, certain other aspects of the new political landscape may not be that surprising.

The leader of the PiS, for example, the newly elected president Lech Kaczyński claims he is not a nationalist but, in an interview with the weekly *Polityka*, stated "I believe in the need for cooperation with people of national-Catholic [nationalist - RP] views in one political party". While some people in the president's circle are not hardliners, many are most definitely nationalist radicals.

One of the latter is the newly appointed Speaker of Parliament, Marek Jurek. Known for years for his Catholic fundamentalist views, Jurek achieved international notoriety when he made a much-publicised trip to London to meet and support his hero, the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, while the latter was under arrest by British authorities.

Jurek's fellow traveller was none other than Michał Kamiński, whose additional claim to fame includes, among others, mobilising the local population of Jedwabne in north-east Poland against a commemoration of a wartime pogrom in 2001.

Kamiński, now a PiS MEP, is on record as declaring his allegiance to the infamous slogan "Poland for the Polish" which invokes terrible memories of the antisemitic violence of the 1920s and 1930s.

In this context, Kamiński's membership of the fascist National Rebirth of Poland (NOP, now part of terrorist Roberto Fiore's European National Front) in the early 1990s comes as little surprise. Kamiński was among Kaczyński's main campaign advisers and his political significance looks set to grow still further.

Another PiS MEP is Marcin Libicki, until not long ago a leading member of the fascist National Right (PN) group, the official sister organisation of Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National. Libicki recently tried to force the Polish public prosecutor to take legal action against the website of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Los Angeles for alleged "anti-Polish" content in its presentation of WWII history.

Interestingly, Libicki once sat on the board of *Prawica Narodowa* (National Right) magazine that published, among other things, the Holocaust-denying ravings of the late Belgian collaborator and SS general Leon Degrelle.

The new government's first weeks in office have been characterised by hardline law and order rhetoric, anti-Russian bombast and pledges to introduce compulsory "patriotic education" for the nation's youth. The president's twin brother, Jarosław, who is widely believed to be the PiS's real leader, said in a Radio Maryja broadcast in January 2006 he is increasingly convinced that "a form of censorship is necessary" to defend "moral values".

It is appropriate to mention that Jarosław Kaczyński personally belonged to vocal critics of Radio Maryja and of the nationalist-fundamentalist tendency in the 1990s. His strategic U-turn and the virtual adoption of such ideology by the main force on the Polish right is not a promising sign for democracy in Poland.

The government's new far-right orientation found its immediate expression in the prohibition and subsequent violent dispersal of an anti-discrimination march in Poznań on 19 November 2005. Seventy-five people were held for taking part in an "unlawful demonstration" and right-wing politicians and the Catholic Church accused the march organisers of promoting the "unacceptable" ideas of gay rights.

The following week a wave of protests and solidarity demonstrations swept through numerous Polish cities, with a broad coalition of anti-fascists, human rights supporters, intellectuals, artists and various political groups voicing their resistance to the increasingly authoritarian drift of state policy. In some cities such as Elbląg, the demonstrators were violently confronted by fascists, skinheads and football hooligans, some of them belonging to the NOP and the LPR's youth wing All-Polish Youth (MW).

Roman Giertych, the leader of the LPR and of the MW has now become the chairman of the parliamentary committee on special services, further evidence that state structures are increasingly being held hostage

to the extremists.

In sharp contrast to the situation in Austria in 2000, when the European Union loudly protested at right-wing extremist Jörg Haider's influence on the government, the international community has generally expressed little opposition to the new regime in Poland.