

Continuity by far exceeds change

Reviewed by Jean-Yves Camus

The Populist Radical Right in Poland. The Patriots.

by Rafal Pankowski

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THE *EXTREMISM and Democracy* series published by Routledge is essential for anyone looking for innovative and scholarly yet accessible studies about lesser-known aspects of contemporary totalitarian ideologies, most notably the extreme right.

When it comes to the Polish variety, Rafal Pankowski is undoubtedly the best-qualified expert, both because he is teaching at Collegium Civitas in Warsaw and because of his impressive work as editor of the anti-fascist, anti-racist magazine, *Nigdy Wiecej* (Never Again).

Today, the Polish extreme right is a pale shadow of its former self, polling about 1% of the vote, but the League of Polish Families (LPR) and the Agrarian Populist Samoobrona (Self-Defense) did hit headlines when briefly part of a coalition government headed by Jaroslav Kaczynski, leader of the mainstream Conservative Party, Law and Justice. As for Radio Maryja, it is one of the very few examples in Europe of a Catholic media having dared bypass the instructions of the Vatican hierarchy in order to continue disseminating its antisemitic, fundamentalist message.

Pankowski's book enables the reader to understand the roots of those movements in Polish history since the 19th century. It also explains why Communism did not eradicate exclusive nationalism, even giving birth to a strange brand of both ideologies: the pre-War National-Radical, proto-fascist leader Boleslaw Piasecki continued his career as leader of the Stalinist regime's puppet Pax Association and eventually played hand in hand with the nationalist, so-called "partisan" faction of the Communist Party, united by a fierce "anti-cosmopolitanism" that led to the 1968-1969 purges and slanderous campaigns against Jewish Communists and Polish Jews as a whole.

Pankowski's book is invaluable in providing clues to the nature and extent of the connections between pre-war and contemporary nationalism in Poland and shows that continuity by far exceeds change.

In the first part of the book, he draws a picture of the four major trends in Polish pre-1939 nationalism: Pilsudski's authoritarian but civic nationalism; Piasecki's; Jan Stachniuk's lesser-known totalitarian paganism and Roman

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Extremism and Democracy

Dmowski's ethno-nationalism embodied in the antisemitic doctrine of the so-called "Endeks", whose heritage lies in the LPR but also left an imprint on the mainstream Right.

His second part about the more complex relationship between the Communist Party and exclusive nationalism then proceeds to look at the heterogeneous ideological trends that composed the Solidarity movement.

Underlining the national-populist, sometimes even Catholic Conservative currents within Solidarity, Pankowski echoes the heated debates that arose in 1980-81 among those who supported and helped it from abroad, and he points to the fact that the dissident movement led Poland to Kaczynski's Law and Justice, much more than to Adam Michnik's liberal Left ideas.

Subsequent chapters of the book offer a thoroughly researched and enlightening approach to the nationalist LPR and the radical populist but now defunct Self-Defence party, both of which both achieved parliamentary representation and briefly participated in government in 2005-2007.

This coalition cabinet existed because, Pankowski argues, the dominant Law and Justice party had large nationalist and authoritarian tendencies and, albeit in a more moderate manner, shared its extremist allies' belief that Polishness equates with Catholicism and exclusive ethnicism.

The author concludes that while LPR and Self-Defence are now marginalised, the impact of the illiberal ideas of Law and Justice or Radio Maryja will remain a significant factor in the country's politics.

Pankowski's book is a must read for all serious scholars of the extreme-right and anti-fascist militants everywhere. ●