

From Despair to Hope

By Rafal Pankowski for *Nigdy Wiecej* and Antifa-Net in Warsaw

READERS OF *Searchlight* in the UK might try to imagine a coalition government consisting of the UK Independence Party, the British National Party and the National Front. The leader of the BNP is the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture. The main opposition party is the Conservatives, while remnants of New Labour occupy the far left of the parliamentary spectrum with 10%. Due allowances being made, this is a rough picture of Polish politics today.

Incredibly, the current situation in Poland has provoked little or no reaction from the international community, in sharp contrast to the inclusion of a far-right party in the Austrian government a few years ago.

The ruling populist-conservative Law and Justice party (PiS) maintains an alliance with two smaller, more extreme, nationalist parties, the League of Polish Families (LPR) and Self-Defence. All three are full of racist and homophobic radicals.

Roman Giertych, leader of the LPR and Education Minister, for example, is hardly ever off TV screens, appearing almost every day to announce new measures to "restore discipline" in schools. His official policy is aptly titled, without any hint of

irony, "Zero tolerance". Radio Maryja, the notorious antisemitic propaganda outlet, has become a favourite forum for government ministers.

The triumphant unveiling of a monument to Roman Dmowski in November 2006 is another sign of the ruling coalition's self-confidence. Situated in the centre of Warsaw, right in front of the main government building, it honours the man who is considered the father of 20th century Polish antisemitism.

The monument was paid for by the Warsaw regional government. Those at the unveiling ceremony included the infamous antisemitic priest Henryk Jankowski and leading politicians from



the coalition parties, giving the lie to the claims of the PiS leadership to be seen as heirs to Jozef Pilsudski, the interwar Polish leader, who was a sworn enemy of Dmowski and his brand of nationalism. Anti-fascists who protested at the monument were later attacked by nazi skinheads who also attended the event to pay tribute to Dmowski as their ideological forefather.

Not all the news from Poland is gloomy. When Giertych was appointed Education Minister in May 2006 the news provoked a wave of protests with numerous demonstrations by students and teachers. A civic coalition under the name Giertych Must Go was formed in their wake, with the participation of the anti-fascist Never Again Association.

The results of local elections on 12 November show some evidence of a reawakening of democratic tradition in a previously apathetic Polish society. Voter turnout was just over 50%. This figure might be considered low in some European countries but it surpassed all predictions in Poland. While the results are difficult to analyse precisely on a national level because of the large number of local "non-political" candidates, it is clear that the ruling right suffered heavy losses, including the election for mayor of Warsaw in which the LPR candidate Wojciech Wierzejski, Giertych's notorious right-hand man, failed especially miserably. With a mere 0.3% of the vote he trailed just behind the joke Dummies and Gnomes party. The LPR polled some 4.5% nationally, not enough to enter the national parliament today as it now has a 5% threshold.

On top of the LPR's troubles, the media ran yet another exposé, on 29 November, of the nazi antics of the party's youth wing, the skinhead influenced All-Polish Youth (MW). A video showing MW members under a swastika, listening to white power hate rock music and bawling "Sieg Heil", was little surprise to anybody who knows how the MW operates internally. The parliamentary opposition called for a ban on the MW, and even an embarrassed Giertych himself felt forced to call for a state prosecutor's investigation of the incident. ◀