

Poland: Europe's Neo-Con Nation



The Kaczynski twins then and now

Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in 2005 have brought a group of unpredictable nationalists to power

Introduction

On 23rd October, 2005, Warsaw mayor Lech Kaczynski was elected President of Poland, becoming Poland's third president since 1990. Earlier, on 25th September, Kaczynski's party, Law and Justice (PiS) gained the largest number of votes in elections for the Parliament (*Sejm*) and Senate, just ahead of the free market, Citizens Platform (PO). As his campaign posters proclaimed, Mr. Kaczynski's central pledge was the creation of a Fourth Polish republic which would be founded on the country's moral revival.

The results of both elections also marked the third time that the country's voters had veered from left to right: the outgoing Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD) minority government had been shaken for some time by corruption allegations and popular discontent with its policies which were a continuation of the broad trends set by its predecessors since the first post-Communist government in 1989. Only one prominent SLD member escaped the vitriol heaped onto his party: President Alexander Kwasniewski has always been highly regarded by Poland's Western allies in the EU, NATO and especially by politicians and opinion-formers in the United States.

Despite routine Western media reports about Poland's "booming economy" and its model new democracy, behind the headlines not all is well on the Polish political scene. It is an open secret on the streets in Poland that disillusionment with what was on offer from both politicians and political parties set in some time ago. This is reflected in the declining numbers of those turning out to vote in national elections, a number that diminishes with each successive poll. For example, turnout barely reaching 40% in the 2005 parliamentary poll but with officially 60% voting in the second, decisive round of the presidential election. For millions of Poles there is no difference between 'Right' and 'Left', each has pursued the familiar post-Communist reform policies that have left at least 18% of the working age population unemployed with little prospect of an upturn any time soon.¹ Hundreds of thousands of young Poles have left their country's "economic miracle" to seek menial work in Western European countries like Great Britain or Ireland.

¹ See, Andrzej Ratajczyk "Slower Growth" *The Warsaw Voice*, 2nd November 2005
www.warsawvoice.pl/view/9771

BHHRG monitored the 2001 parliamentary election in Poland and has published analyses of other developments in the country. The Group's observers monitored the parliamentary election in 2005 in and around the northern city of Gdansk. On 9th October, they observed the first round of the presidential election in Przemysl and the Bieszczady region of southern Poland, and, finally they monitored the second round of the presidential poll in and around Krakow.

The Group's representatives met resistance from many polling commissions who were uneasy about the presence of foreign observers. Many officials refused to cooperate at all in giving basic details related to the number of registered voters, turnout etc. in their polling stations. No doubt, Poland is accustomed to being treated as an exemplary democracy and regards election observers as an intrusion even though it is a signature to OSCE agreements that permit monitoring of member countries' polls by citizens' bodies – but since even Polish parties with candidates in the elections were unable to get access to election data maybe BHHRG should not feel victimised!

While official Warsaw is confident that it can control the entities that come to power nationally and keep irksome parties, like Samoobrana and the League of Polish Families at arms length, they are still left having to face the embarrassment that few people support their chosen candidates: only 21% of registered voters supported the PiS and Citizens Union (PO) on 25th September. In such circumstances, suspicions arise that the official turnout figures of 40% for the parliamentary poll and 60% for the presidential election have been massaged to give a rosier picture of what really happened on the three election days. On the basis of their observations, BHHRG concluded that official figures given for the turnout in both parliamentary and presidential polls were inflated by someone somewhere – either at local or national level, meaning there should be no complacency about the conduct of elections in Poland.

On 10th November, a new minority government was sworn in led by prime minister, Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz. Marcinkiewicz was a surprise choice for the post – most observers thought that Lech Kaczynski's twin brother, Jaroslaw, was the leading candidate. PiS with the largest number of votes in the Sejm failed to reach a coalition deal with second favourites PO and declared that it would rely on the support of two smaller parties, Samoobrana and the League of Polish Families. This move underpinned PiS's claim to be a champion of social protection (to satisfy Samoobrana) and family values (to appease the League). However, this may be a short-term, tactical move and PiS will likely revert to supporting Poland's previous liberal, reform economic agenda. Boxed in by membership of the EU and other international bodies, it is difficult to see how it can implement state-sponsored, socialist-style policies. Then, PiS will get into bed with its natural allies, PO, and the ship of state will be back on its previous course.

Election Background: Poland Today

With a population of 38 m. Poland is by far the largest of the 8 countries from the 'New Europe' which joined the EU in 2004. In the 15 years leading up to accession to the union it suffered a profound assault on its economic well – being as 'shock therapy' kicked in and factories were closed putting millions out of work. At the same time, farmers were badly hit as state subsidies dried up. Some of the large state farms in the north of the country managed to convert to modern agribusinesses, often with new Dutch or German owners. But most small farmsteads were pronounced economically unviable, often only providing a subsistence living for their owners. Many of these developments are visible to anyone travelling around Poland even though the media both domestic and foreign foster the impression that the country is 'booming' using statistical sleights of hand worthy of Stalinist "growth" figures.

Commentators and neo-liberal Polish politicians, like PO's Jan Rokita, regularly state that Poland should not follow the 'old European' model of France and Germany.² Its "fast-growing, low-wage and low-tax system is perceived as a threat by the stodgier, high-unemployment economies of France and Germany" says the *International Herald Tribune*.³ But, even the wildest statisticians have never claimed that unemployment in France and Germany is anywhere near Poland's (official) 18% level. Neither do scores of thousands of young, educated French and Germans seek unskilled jobs in other EU member states. Corruption levels in the three countries are markedly different. According to Transparency International's corruption index for 2005, Poland's corruption is at "third world levels" (Germany is rated at 16, France 18 but Poland at 70 in a list of countries).⁴ The Polish 'boom' seems to consist largely of property speculation involving the construction of giant office complexes, something experienced by the UK in the 1970s before the bubble burst.

The ticking time bomb is Poland's budget deficit. All new member states are obliged to meet the Maastricht criteria and work towards membership of the single currency, the Euro. According to the EU's Stability and Growth pact public debt in countries seeking to adopt the single currency must be under 6% of GDP and the budget deficit below 3%, although in March 2005 the EU agreed to relax these strict demands somewhat. Poland's budget deficit is over 6% of GDP and with a deficit of 32 billion zlotys projected for year end 2005, the problem is pretty intractable. But, Poland's new government is sending out mixed messages indicating that entering the single currency is not an immediate priority. On the one hand, the new Finance Minister, Teresa Lubinska, has talked of increasing the 2006 budget deficit "to protect social welfare spending" whereas on 5th November, the prime minister said he plans to cut spending by 5 billion zlotys and maintain the budget deficit at 30 billion (\$8.8 billion).⁵ Poland is also a net contributor to the Brussels budget remitting €1.3 billion in 2004.

Although unemployment dipped in the summer months, analysts predict that domestic demand will stagnate and the numbers out of work will not decrease.⁶ Revenues from domestic energy production, for instance, are down as coal from South East Asia is cheaper. Inevitably, membership of the EU has reduced Poland's - and 'New European, countries - appeal as low wage, low cost business environments.

Teresa Lubinska has also called for a halt to the construction of hyper-markets which have done so much to destroy communities in Poland. - even a small town can have two or three shopping complexes on its outskirts.⁷ She was referring, in particular, to Tesco which already has a strong presence in Poland and plans to open 5 new hypermarkets this year. Lubinska said that Poland "should concentrate on creating manufacturing jobs" pointing out that Tesco had only created 20,000 jobs a mere dent in the 18% (official) level of unemployment.⁸

However, hypermarkets and shopping centres have proliferated over the past ten years, spurred on by a generous 7- year tax holidays for foreign investors as well as an exemption from Sunday trading rules. Foreign companies even get financial support from the Polish state: In October 2005, 7 such programmes were approved, including one to cigarette manufacturer Philip Morris which will receive 1.6 m. zlotys from 2006-09.⁹ The payment of

² Ian Traynor: "You're full up but we're still hungry, young guns tell anxious old Europe" *The Guardian*, 17th October, 2005, www.guardian.co.uk

³ Graham Bowley "Poles on ramparts of EU culture war" *IHT*, 24th November, 2005

⁴ See, <http://www.transparency.org/cpi/2005/cpi2005.sources.en.html>

⁵ Jan Cienski and Stefan Wagstyl "Polish finance minister seeks more social spending" *Financial Times*, 5th/6th November, 2005; "Poland plans to cut budget spending by 5 bn. Zloty next year" *Bloomberg*, 5th November 2005, www.bloomberg.com/apps/news

⁶ Andrzej Ratajczyk "Slower Growth" *Warsaw Voice*, 2nd November, 2005
www.warsawvoice.pl/view/9771

⁷ Jan Cienski and Sophy Buckley, "Tesco 'not welcome' in Poland" *Financial Times*, 5th/6th November, 2005

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ "Cabinet clears seven foreign investment support programmes"
www.polish.motime.com/archive/2005-10

'sweeteners' to foreign investors is widespread in the 'New Europe' and seems no different, in practice, to the state subsidies so derided by "shock therapists" who see Poland as their model patient. In Poland's case, it would make more sense to finance improvement of the country's infrastructure rather than provide sweeteners/subsidies to companies like Philip Morris. On 15th November, 2005 Polish Radio reported that 50% fewer regional trains would be running due to lack of money in 2006¹⁰; Poland's atrocious road system is an ongoing headache for both business and commuters but there have been scarcely any upgrades since Communism collapsed in 1989.

It will be very difficult to turn the clock back now or to cancel projects presently underway. In October 2005, BHHRG visited the small south-easterly town of Rzeszow. Unlike neighbouring Przemysl, Rzeszow is a lively place with shops and cafes. It also has some local light industry. All this will change very soon: a 100 unit shopping arcade and hypermarket is under construction on the outskirts of the town and is due to open in the winter, 2006. The economic life will be sucked out of the city centre. Local small businessmen talked about their children's forthcoming emigration from the town as a given fact.

As for Poland's farmers, many hoped that EU subsidies would be their saviour and the Western press has obediently published upbeat accounts from customers, delighted with their CAP cash payouts. For example, in September 2005, the BBC interviewed a Polish apple farmer who had received subsidies worth €1000 in the past year – hardly a fortune. However, when the same farmer met the EU agriculture commissioner Mariann Fischer-Boel in Brussels he received a rude awakening. The reduced level of subsidy allocated to Polish farmers on accession is set for further reduction as new members, Romania and Bulgaria appear in 2007 wanting their share of the cake. She also pointed out that the strong competition from fruit growers in other countries, like Chile and New Zealand had to be taken into account in an already flooded market.¹¹

The only real beneficiaries of EU aid are the larger farmers who can use the subsidy to gobble up their smaller neighbours' land. During the election BHHRG was told that the costs of the bureaucracy entailed in applying for a grant from Brussels was higher than the actual subsidies. Applicants are often perplexed by complex EU paperwork making it necessary to hire 'fund raisers' It is often difficult to find the 'co-funders' required under EU rules for infrastructure projects. The problem is not restricted to the farming sector: all companies applying for EU subsidies must overcome these hurdles and many are unable to cope. 1 billion euros of Brussels funds allocated to Poland were also blocked in 2004 due to "environmental concerns".¹²

The EU and its subsidies were once regarded as the holy grail. One year on from accession, President Kwasniewski told *The Times* that Poles were still 'in love' with the EU.¹³ In one important way, Kwasniewski is right. The EU is popular for providing an escape route for Poland's unemployed, the level of which is even higher among young people (c. 30%) than the rest of the population. The problem is kept at bay for a few years by large scale enrolment at university – the numbers have doubled since 1989. But on graduation, and with few prospects at home hundreds of thousands have left Poland to work abroad.

The numbers have sky-rocketed since the country joined the EU in May 2004. Favourite destinations are the UK and Ireland both of which have an open door policy to workers from the New Europe. Officially, according to the British embassy in Warsaw, 125,000 Polish workers are registered to work in the UK but these figures only cover those who are *officially* employed ignoring the much larger number who free lance and are never recorded in the

¹⁰ "Polish railway faces cut-backs on regional routes" *Polish Radio 1* 15th November, 2005
www.bbcmonitoringonline.com

¹¹ Oana Lungescu "Apple growing Pole feels squeeze" 23rd September, 2005
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4276304.stm>

¹² "Living up to commitments" www.radio.com.pl

¹³ Bronwen Maddox "If they want a politician, we can discuss it, if they want a diplomat, I'm not the right man" *The Times*, 10th November, 2005 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-1865179,00.html>

official statistics. Practically every adult Pole with a family spoken to by BHHRG while observing the 2005 elections said that their children would go abroad to find work once they graduate.

The middle classes in Great Britain love the cheap labour from Poland and other New European countries but they rarely stop to examine what this means for the people back home. What booming economy has shed labour at this rate before in history? Cheap labour for Britain's bourgeoisie – plus cheaper prostitution, another shadow side of Poland's export of its youth – may be all very well for those who can exploit it, but the tragedy of Poland's displaced youth is one of the early twenty-first century's un-catalogued disgraces. Very often housed in unfit dwellings, sleeping in shifts in the same beds like prisoners in Stalin's gulag, the exploitation of post-Communism's lost generation in Western Europe would be a national scandal if so many media types were not boosting their own standard of living on the back of it.¹⁴

The massive outflow of the educated young spells long term problems – for example, with the future tax base. The Polish health insurance scheme is already suffering a shortfall as the 7% threshold for contributions from wages and salaries is insufficient to provide the necessary services. As the birth rate falls and people leave, school roles are falling. In a gymnasium in central Przemysl BHHRG was told that classroom rolls were down from 30 ten years ago to 8 today. In the depressed Beskidy region BHHRG heard that by 2010 the number of pupils in local schools will have halved.

The one area where unemployment in Poland has not fallen is in the administrative structures. Redistricting in 1998 led to an explosion in the number of administrative bodies and, of the 52% of the population officially in work, many are employed in local and state bureaucracies. Researchers point out that this “massive increase in the size of the public administration in terms of both appointed and elected officials”¹⁵ has gone hand in hand with political patronage – in fact, the redistricting legislation only got through the *Sejm* when MPs were assured that their particular party or faction would somehow benefit.¹⁶ It follows from this, that people working in the administration, both locally and centrally, have a vested interest in the status quo and are more likely to vote than others. When Donald Tusk pledged to cut the state bureaucracy he probably alienated the only group of people who vote on a regular basis in Polish elections. Polish democracy has become a Gogolian satire in which the bureaucrats choose the representatives of the people who in turn vote to secure the emoluments of the bureaucracy.

Politics pre-election

The Polish electorate has swung from right to left and back again in each election held since the collapse of Communism in 1989. No government has ever been re-elected. And, during the course of each parliament MPs have often drifted from one party or faction to another while some parties themselves have splintered and spawned new entities. Yet the central lines of government policy never change despite the superficially kaleidoscopic political landscape.

In the 2001 election, the SLD gained the largest share of the vote for the second time since the early nineties. But, by 2004 the party's popularity had waned while a group of

¹⁴ See, e.g. Tom Utley, “The Poles - a boon for me and Britain” in *The Daily Telegraph* (25th November, 2005). Even in the mid-1990s, one of the most assiduous salesmen of the new post-Communist Poland, Radek Sikorski could offer as evidence of the country's new wealth the fact that “guarded car parks are the biggest creators of municipal jobs”, though in practice they are mainly the refuge of the elderly unemployed whose grand children do menial labour further West. See Radek Sikorski, *The Polish House. An Intimate History of Poland* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London, 1997), 237.

¹⁵ Conor O'Dwyer, “Civilizing the State Bureaucracy”, University of California, Berkeley, http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~bsp/publications/2002_01-odwy.pdf

¹⁶ *ibid*

disaffected members left and set up a SLD party 'lite', the Polish Social Democracy party (SdPI) under the leadership of Marian Belka who was also Poland's last prime minister before the 2005 election. Before this he had advised the provisional administration in Iraq.

During its period in office, the SLD-led government faithfully followed the free market policies of its right-wing predecessors. It also successfully guided Poland into the EU in 2004. On the international front, President Kwasniewski, a SLD member himself, committed Polish troops to the US 'war on terrorism' in Afghanistan and Iraq.

But, the government was plagued by scandals. These included a long standing inquiry into allegations that Lev Riwin, a prominent film producer, had promised the leading Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* to get the law that prevented the print media from buying private TV stations changed in exchange for a bribe. A committee set up by the Sejm concluded in 2004 that Riwin had acted on his own but a minority report organized by PiS deputy Zbigniew Ziobro claiming that the SLD was involved was unexpectedly accepted by deputies. Another scandal followed alleging improper share dealings by SLD politicians (including the prime minister Leszek Miller) in the Polish oil refinery, PKN Orlen. When the SLD's popularity plunged, commentators pointed to these episodes as examples of the corruption that turned people against politicians. Miller, was forced to resign before Poland formally entered the EU in May 2004 to avoid 'embarrassment'.¹⁷

Riwingate and the PKN Orlen scandals had a recondite quality that failed to ignite indignation in many ordinary Poles. BHHRG was told that the real reason for the party and the government's loss of support was its failure to do anything to improve people's economic well being, in particular, the continuing high level of unemployment. Of course, people know that politicians are corrupt but doubt that anything very much can be changed.

However, one belated left-wing measure was enacted in August when President Kwasniewski reversed proposals to reform miners' entitlements and signed a law that extended their pensions and allowed for retirement after 25 years work. This followed violent confrontations between the police and Silesian miners in front of the Sejm on 28th July. The measure attracted much criticism from well-paid journalists and economists for the strain it would put on the budget in the future, but it may have been deemed necessary to avoid confrontation in the pre-election period.

It did not mean that the SLD was returning to its roots. In fact, the most significant aspect of Polish politics – mirrored in countries like Great Britain – is the shading of traditional differences between left and right. For example, like Britain's 'New Labour' party the Polish SLD has pursued policies of privatization, increased foreign investment while following the West's foreign policy agenda, making the description 'left' something of an oxymoron. Similarly, the Citizens Platform (PO) is referred to as a liberal-centrist party but the SLD and PO have agreed to cooperate in the new Sejm. Law and Justice (PiS) is a 'right wing' party even though it has committed itself to policies of social protection usually associated with the left. As for Samoobrana, depending on who you read, it is right or left-wing but always 'populist'. For 'populist' read 'popular' but with ordinary, usually poor people who have no access to the Warsaw elite.

BHHRG interviewed Samoobrana representatives in Warsaw and Gdynia both before and after both elections. The Group has talked to the party's representatives on previous visits to Poland as Samoobrana as it is the only significant Polish party without any media support. This means finding out what its representatives think – as opposed to what the Establishment press cares to attribute to them - requires going to Poland to interview them.

Samoobrana is the opposition party which has built up a significant body of support based on policies that resonate with the large number of Poles who have been sidelined by economic reform. But, the party and its leader Andrzej Lepper have always been ridiculed and castigated by the official media for being 'populists' and renegades, voted for by "the more

¹⁷ Anyone concerned for the ex-Politburo member's lonely old age need not worry – the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington has taken Leszek Miller under its well-funded wing.

desperate" in society. According to the party's spokesmen, this has meant that Samoobrana is only lampooned and its policies never discussed by the official media – both state and private. During the presidential poll the leading contenders, Tusk and Kaczynski, refused to debate with Lepper on TV. This smacked of bias as Lepper was standing third in the opinion polls after Cimoszewicz retired from the race – there had been no problem debating with him.

Apart from media bias, Samoobrana's representatives complained after the parliamentary election that they were not allowed to see the official protocols from polling stations around the country. However, although they suspected that there might have been foul play, they were unwilling to pursue these suspicions as, in the past, their allegations of fraud were never investigated and only served to heap more opprobrium on the party. BHHRG was told that Samoobrana had representatives in most polling stations but BHHRG found that commissions were made up of local officials claiming to be non-partisan. There were no observers for any of the parties in polling stations visited either.

Samoobrana believed that the low turnouts in Poland's elections were also part of their problem and Mr. Lepper had organized some kind of competition to encourage voters to go to the polls, no doubt thinking that this would benefit the party. But, leaving aside the possible impropriety in doing this, BHHRG concluded that, low turnouts were the only way changes could be made in the long run. If democracy isn't to completely wither on the vine, Poland will have to encourage more genuine competition between political parties.

With an increased share of the vote in the parliamentary election, Samoobrana is the third largest party in the Sejm. It has also agreed to support the PiS led minority government. However, the party is in a difficult situation: if it sticks to its leftist agenda it will be deemed obstructive by PiS and come under attack from the mainstream media; if it compromises too much on 'reforms' it will lose the backing of its grass roots.

The Parliamentary election

To gain representation in the 460 seat Sejm individual parties have to surmount a 5% threshold, which is set at 8% for coalitions. There are 100 members of the Senate. Ten parties were registered in all electoral districts. A parliament runs for 4 years while the president is elected to serve a five year term.

The Democratic Left Alliance - (SLD) the victor of the 2001 elections, albeit in coalition. SLD promised a "return to roots" on the left. The party's new leader Wojciech Olejniczak wants to cut unemployment. It would also take an active part in talks on the EU Constitution.

Polish Social Democracy (SdPI) -Labour Union-Greens coalition - party that broke away from the SLD in 2004 to distance itself from its post-communist legacy.

Polish Peasant Party - Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (PSL) a traditional agrarian populist grouping, led by Waldemar Pawlak who was prime minister in 1993-95, the party was part of the ruling coalition in 1993-97.

Democratic Party - (PD) Free market, liberal party successor to the Freedom Union (UW), which participated in 1989-1993 governments, but which has not had seats in the Sejm since 2001. Previous prime minister, Marek Belka and his former deputy, Jerzy Hausner, both joined.

Civic Platform - Platforma Obywatelska (PO) Centre-right party that emerged in 2000 from sections of the UW. It is the most pro-free market of the major parties and supported a "flat tax" with uniform and low single rates for personal income, corporation and value added tax. Other priorities included further privatization, cuts in spending on the state administration,

laws favourable to small and medium-sized businesses, the holding of state officials legally liable for wrongful decisions.

Law and Justice - (PiS) centre-right founded in 2001 and led by the twin brothers Jaroslaw and Lech Kaczynski. PiS stressed law and order issues and modified economic liberalism. The party is firmly anti-communist and said its first bills on taking office would be to establish anti-corruption and national security offices. PiS wants to maintain a progressive tax system. However, as their proposal was for a 32% band for high earners and 18% for the rest, this effectively added up to a flat tax as 99% of Polls would fall into the 18% bracket.

League of Polish Families - Liga Polskich Rodzin (LPR) Established in 2001 from the merger of many small right-wing groupings, it is seen as nationalist and suspicious of privatization, free markets and the EU. The League wants to restrict the independence of the central bank and renegotiate the EU accession treaty.

Samoobrana registered in all but one electoral district. It grew out of farmers' direct action protests in the 1990s. Commentators feel Lepper's party has latterly been seeking to position itself to takeover the more left-wing electorate of the SLD. Samoobrana wants an increased minimum wage, taxation changes, subordination of the central bank and the use of its reserves "to secure" investments, and the "vetting" of assets and the economy.

Three of the groupings that have achieved national registration are nonetheless marginal and have never won parliamentary seats on their own account:

Patriotic Movement - Ruch Patriotyczny (RP) right-wing grouping of ex-Prime Minister Jan Olszewski and sometime Interior Minister Antoni Macierewicz, who have failed to reach agreement with the LPR, despite having got into parliament on the LPR ticket in 2001.

Polish National Party - Polska Partia Narodowa (PPN) The party of the anti-Semitic activist and journalist Leszek Bubel.

Polish Labour Party - Polska Partia Pracy (PPP) A left-wing grouping led by Daniel Podrzycki. The party manifesto is entitled "Work and Bread."¹⁸

Parliamentary Election: BHHRG observations

BHHRG observed the parliamentary election in northern Poland – Gdynia, Gdansk and the eastern Warmia Mazuria region. As in 2001, the region was plastered with candidates' posters and, again, BHHRG was told by voters that they did not know who most of them were. Election expenditure relative to average incomes must be several times what it is in Britain given the universality of billboard posters, but local campaigning (as in the UK) has given way in Poland to television slots and debates conducted from Warsaw.

Nearly everywhere visited, BHHRG was afforded only the minimum assistance by commission chairmen (and women) during both parliamentary and presidential polls. The Group's observers were not allowed to look at the voters' registers and in some polling stations, officials refused to divulge any facts at all, e.g. number of registered voters, the size of the turnout at the time the observers visited. They were not allowed to be present during the count. The low turnout in both elections was a source of embarrassment to the Polish political establishment which may have accounted for their coyness on the subject. At polling station No. 3 (Gdansk) BHHRG observers were ushered out of the polling station and threatened with the security personnel.

People complained about the size of the ballot paper (A2) which they had difficulty in manoeuvring in the polling booths – many were later invalidated due to tears as people tried

¹⁸ Election data taken from BBC election guides available at www.bbcmonitoringonline.com

to force them into the narrow slit of the ballot box. After the count c.450,000 invalid ballot papers were reported by the CEC. People also seemed confused by the procedure for voting in the senatorial election which allowed a voter to pick up to three candidates. They were worried that if they ticked one name only it would be easy for someone to tick the other two names at a later stage.

In rural regions i.e. Zulawy and Mazuria, residents told BHHRG that at least 10% of the local population had left to work abroad as there were no jobs in the area. Nevertheless, such people's names were still on the electoral register: In Polling station, No. 7 in Gdynia, BHHRG's Polish representative found that his name was still on the register even though he has lived in the UK for the past 8 years and has no "*propiska*". Mass migration and bureaucratic reluctance to remove non-residents from the registers opens up the possibility that unscrupulous officials could top up the turnout with votes from "dead souls" long gone picking cabbages in Norfolk or walking the streets of Birmingham.

Every second person interviewed distrusted the opinion polls and thought they were outright dishonest or plain rigged. 19 out of 24 people interviewed said that the only popular party was Samoobrana but when the official results were produced the party only gained 14% of the votes in the region.

BHHRG is publishing the turnout at the time its observers visited polling stations for both the parliamentary and presidential poll to demonstrate the low level of participation during both elections. On 23rd October, the State Election Commission reported a 8.56% turnout at 10.30 in the morning which mirrors BHHRG's observations that day.

Polling stations visited in the 1st round of the parliamentary elections on 25th September. They visited Gdynia No. 7 and Ostaszewo No. 1 twice during the day.

Gdynia, No. 7, (11.30) 2214 registered voters. 392 have voted

Gdansk No. 3, (12.15) Officials refused to give any information

Nowy Dwor Gdanski No.3 (14.35) 1413 reg., 190 voted (approx. 12%)

Jeglownik No. 2 (15.55) 1616 reg. 216 voted (c. 15%)

Ostaszewo No. 1, (17.15) 1758 reg., 470 voted (approx. 28%)

Gdansk No. 45 (19.50) 1749 reg., approx 50% voted.

Official results and distribution of seats in the Sejm and Senate

	Votes	%	seats	senators
PiS	3,185,714	27	155	49
PO	2,849,259	24.1	133	34
Samoobrana	1,347,355	11.4	56	
SLD	1,335,257	11.3	55	
League	940,726	8.0	34	7
PSL	821,656	7.0	25	
German Minority	34,469			2
Non partisan senators				5

Registered voters: 30,338,316

Turnout: 40.6% 11,804,676

Invalid votes: 451,199

The results basically confirmed pre-election opinion polls, although PO did not do as well as expected, coming second with 24.1% of the vote. PiS probably picked up support by intensifying its commitment to the poor as the campaign drew to a close. BHHRG found voters who had chosen PiS for that reason – although, in many cases, they agreed that they were clutching at straws. The SLD performed better than expected with 11.3% of the vote. The media had predicted that the party would be wiped out, but as one commentator remarked “people keep their left wing views to themselves for fear of being ridiculed”.¹⁹ Such is Poland in 2005.

Presidential Election

The state election commission registered 16 candidates for the 9th October elections. In alphabetic order: Marek Borowski, Henryka Bochniarz, Leszek Bubel, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Maciej Giertych, Liwiusz Ilasz, Lech Kaczyński, Jarosław Kalinowski, Janusz Korwin-Mikke, Andrzej Lepper, Daniel Podrzycki, Jan Pyszko, Zbigniew Religa, Adam Słomka, Donald Tusk and Stanisław Tyminski.

Daniel Podrzycki died prior to the poll and Zbigniew Religa, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz and Maciej Giertych withdrew from the race.

Donald Tusk - leader of the Civic Platform (PO) and Lech Kaczyński - mayor of Warsaw and the candidate of Law and Justice (PiS) led in pre-election opinion polls. Other candidates with significant levels of support were heart surgeon, Zbigniew Religa, Self-defence leader, Andrzej Lepper, and Polish Social Democracy (SdPI) leader, Marek Borowski.

According to the constitution, the Polish president has few legislative powers. However, he runs the country's foreign policy and in this respect Alexander Kwasniewski's ten year tenure has been regarded as a great success – at least, in the West. In particular, Kwasniewski has been loyalty personified to his post-1989 ally, the United States, by providing the third largest contingent of troops in Iraq and echoing Washington's disapproval of Putin's Russia. He also took the leading regional role in bringing the 'Orange revolutionaries' to power in Kiev in 2004. As a former Communist youth leader and, in the regime's dying days, its Sports minister he has a long pedigree of supporting Big Brother. The outgoing president has made no bones about the fact that he would like to be the next UN Secretary General when Kofi Annan retires even though the post should – on past form – rotate to a candidate from the Asian continent.

However, Kwasniewski has not achieved the same level of popularity at home where he is blamed for the negative impact of reforms that have taken place on his watch. Added to which, allegations of corruption haunt both him and his wife Jolanta who, at one time was thought to be his likely successor. The president has always been viewed with suspicion by the church especially after he was captured on film laughing at his state security chief's mocking parody the late pope John Paul II.

The public was less than enthusiastic about the candidates lined up to succeed him if opinion polls conducted in the run up to the election were to be believed. The two leading contenders Donald Tusk and Lech Kaczyński were both former Solidarity activists. Kaczyński and his twin brother Jarosław had been Wałęsa loyalists up to 1990 but later turned on the former president during his turbulent time in office, probably helping to ensure that he wasn't re-elected in 1995. The Kaczyńskis set up a political party, the Centre Alliance which subsequently collapsed, but in 2001, they founded “Law and Justice” (PiS), whose title hinted at its anti-corruption rhetoric and its support for the screening of ex-communists and others for their crimes before 1990.

¹⁹ “The SLD – Still Breathing” *Polish Monthly*, 10/2005

Lech Kaczynski was labelled the 'right wing' candidate, a reputation burnished further in the summer of 2005 when he banned a gay pride march in Warsaw. He was even more anti-Russian than Kwasniewski and vowed to try to overturn a pipeline deal concluded between Germany and Russia that would by pass Poland and deprive it of valuable transit revenues. He promised an even closer alliance with the US – if such a thing was possible - while adopting a cooler, but cooperative, relationship with the EU. Since his election he has been hyped as the Church's favoured candidate but the latter only threw its support behind him after the League of Polish Families' leader, Maciej Giertych, withdrew from the race shortly before the first round of voting on 9th October. PiS and Kaczynski also promised to cleanse the political establishment of its remaining Communist hangovers and set up a Truth and Reconciliation commission similar to South Africa's. Kaczynski's popularity was stronger in the south and east of the country due to PiS's promise to support the poor by continuing social benefits.

The Kaczynski twins had courted controversy themselves in the past. In 2001, Polish TV accused the Centre Union party then run by the Kaczynskis - Lech was Poland's Justice Minister at the time - of receiving \$600,000 from the Foreign Debt Servicing Fund (FOZZ).²⁰ Both Kaczynskis vehemently denied the allegation which was extremely damaging as the FOZZ affair was perhaps the largest financial scandal to hit Poland after the collapse of Communism.

Donald Tusk was portrayed as the more pro-EU, secular liberal candidate. He supported further and more far reaching economic reforms (including accelerated privatizations) and was perceived as the favourite of young, business-orientated Poles. He was allegedly favoured in the west and centre of the country although there are pockets of poverty in these areas to rival anything in the east. On 18th October, Tusk campaigned in the port of Szczecin, on Poland's Baltic coast where, according to TV Polonia, "many large enterprises have gone bankrupt ... while others have changed ownership with many people losing their jobs. Unemployment in this province is significantly higher than the national average."²¹ Despite his credentials as the ultra-liberal, cost-cutting candidate, Tusk received 42% of the vote in the poverty-stricken city of Szczecin which seems about as probable - on the face of it - as Margaret Thatcher coming first in England's depressed north east when British unemployment was at its height in the early 1980s.

Tusk also put forward plans for a flat tax which alarmed many voters although the media occasionally revealed that the plan was never properly fleshed out or understood by the population at large. He also made a melodramatic visit to neighbouring Belarus to offer support to its allegedly beleaguered Polish minority – both he and Kaczynski vowed to come down hard on Lukashenko's regime. [see, later in this report]

BHHRG met few Tusk supporters in the north, south and east of the country. However, they suspected that some former Communists and those who might have been associated with the Party (informers, for example) supported Tusk for fear of 'exposure' by a future PiS-led government's lustration drive. Anti-clerical feeling which is a strong undercurrent in "Catholic Poland" probably also pushed ex-SLD voters into Tusk's camp since the former Communists have no love for the Church, least of all for seeing its moral teaching enacted by law.

Apart from a very small elite, it is hard to see how such an uncompromising proponent of free market policies as Donald Tusk could get any significant support in a poor country like Poland. Added to which, Tusk came over as a dull performer on the media. However, he had a 12 point lead in polls conducted after the first round of the election.

Then, on 11th October, it was rumoured that Tusk's grandfather had joined the *Wehrmacht* at the end of the Second World War²² which, according to the media, caused his support to

²⁰ RFE/RL 21st June, 2001, www.rferl.org

²¹ TV Polonia, Warsaw 18th October 2005, www.bbcmonitoringonline.com

²² "Polish candidate denies Nazi roots", 11th October, 2005
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/10/11/world/main933939.shtml>

haemorrhage. The dubious suggestion was that Poles are so consumed with hatred for Germany that the revelation that a candidate might have a distant relative who fought with the Nazis was enough to destroy him at the polls. The fact that he (Tusk) might be planning to put more of them out of work while selling off the remains of the family silver is, according to this argument, of secondary importance. However, it provided a convenient excuse to explain how his support fell on the eve of the second round of voting.²³

In fact, the establishment media proved to be a willing conduit of smears before the presidential election. The story about Tusk's grand father followed earlier 'revelations' about former SLD prime minister, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz who announced his surprise candidacy on 28th June and who immediately leapt to first place in opinion polls published on 6th July.²⁴ In late July he was polling 30-35%. However, on 14th September he withdraw his candidacy when it was revealed he had failed to declare owning shares in the scandal prone company PKN Orlen. " His reputation was further damaged by a claim, made by a former assistant, that he had initially included the transaction in his declaration but had later instructed her to remove it. The document produced in support of this claim was subsequently dismissed as a forgery."²⁵ In fact, Cimoszewicz had actually lost money on the deal.

On 14th September, he retired from the race.²⁶ However, even though he had never suffered the relentlessly negative press coverage reserved for Lepper and Giertych he was obviously not favoured by Poland's ruling elite. Although he intended to stand as an independent there was probably concern that his candidacy would give a boost to the SLD. In the end, the SLD advised its supporters to vote for Borowski even though he was a member of the SdPI.

Initially, the media presented Kaczynski and Tusk as similar 'reformist' candidates although, later, Kaczynski was painted as the candidate of the 'Right'. According to BHHRG's Polish representative, media debates between them lacked bite. They came across as a harmonious duo regularly offering good wishes to each others' families rather than indulging in the cut and thrust of debate. Tusk called Kaczynski his "political friend" and claims that for this reason he hesitated to take part in the presidential election. On 6th October, he even said that there was "no difference" between himself and Kaczynski on the homosexual issue which must have surprised liberals who sought to paint Kaczynski as a bigot. Both support the Iraq war as well as other foreign policy issues.²⁷ However, despite the Tweedle-dum, Tweedle-dee act, BHHRG suspected early on that the elites wanted a Kaczynski victory which may explain why he was allowed to adopt a more populist stance. While EU representatives tut tutted in response to his remarks about gays and the death penalty, no such criticism has been forthcoming from Washington.

Election Day

BHHRG observed the first round of the presidential election in Przemyśl close to the Ukrainian border and in the towns and villages of the south-eastern Bieszczady region, including Ustrzyki Dolni, Bircza, Lesko, Sanok and Krasiczyn. This is one of the poorest parts

²³ The ambiguous relationship with Nazi Germany and post-war West Germany of many Poles whose families came from what was Imperial German territory before November, 1918 is one of the themes of the memoirs of the new PiS defence minister. See Radek Sikorski, *The Polish House. An Intimate History of Poland* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London, 1997).

²⁴ Poll in Rzeczpospolita 6th July 2005 gave Cimoszewicz 28%, Kaczynski 19%, Lepper 17%, Tusk 11%

²⁵ "Poland, politics: The left's stillborn revival" *Economist Intelligence Unit*
http://www.viewswire.com/index.asp?layout=display_print&doc_id=1259418911

²⁶ The hypocrisy involved in smearing Cimoszewicz is revealed by the fact that former prime minister and SLD leader Leszek Miller who was forced to resign over the PKN Orlen scandal is now a respected Woodrow Wilson scholar in Washington.

²⁷ Marius Heuser "Polish presidential election: play off between two right-wing candidates"
<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2005/oct2005/pola-o14.shtml> 14th October, 2005

of Poland made worse by stricter control of the border with neighbouring Ukraine imposed after Poland entered the EU in 2004. A once thriving cross border trade has reduced dramatically: locals say that the buoyant market in Przemysl is a shadow of its former self.

BHHRG saw huddles of poor Ukrainian women queuing for hours to cross the border with their pathetic wares and encountered local Poles selling what appeared to be moonshine vodka in the back streets of the small town of Lesko. The problem with alcohol in this area was evident after dark as drunks wove their way home along country roads. Przemysl itself a once handsome Austro-Hungarian garrison town is engulfed by poverty and hopelessness. A polling commission chairman told the Group that everything in and around the town had been "liquidated" including its largest plant, Polar, which once employed over 2,500 people.

Most polling stations visited during the day were empty when BHHRG visited. In one or two the odd voter drifted in. Sometimes a small huddle would appear shortly after the Group appeared leading to the suspicion that a few locals had been rounded up and told to come out to vote when word got round that observers were in town. A commission member usually went out - possibly to make a phone call while BHHRG (tried to) gain facts and figures from the chairman.

Not surprisingly, election officials told BHHRG that there was "total disillusionment" At 11.00 a.m. on election day only one young person had voted in Przemysl (No. 21) according to the election commission chairman.

As the day drew to a close, it became almost impossible to gain any information from polling commissions. At 5.50 pm in Sanok (No. 2) the commission chairman refused to say how many voters were registered or how many had voted. At 19.30 pm, shortly before the polls closed BHHRG's observers visited Krasiczyn (No. 1) where they were given some data on turnout, but only after a long wait during which time their passports were checked.

There was no way in which BHHRG could check the accuracy of these figures. In Przemysl (No. 14) the Group's monitors were told by the commission chairman that c.1000 people had voted shortly before 20.00 hours. But a colleague accused her of exaggeration. Two hours after the polls closed BHHRG returned to Krasiczyn. The polling station was shut, the lights were out and everyone had left. Afterwards, politicians and other election workers told BHHRG that they would be very surprised if it would have been possible to count the votes, deal with unused ballot papers and other bits of election bureaucracy, including filling in the protocols, in such a short time.

Presidential election, first round, 9th October, polling stations visited

Przemysl No. 21 (11.00) 335 reg.. 81 voted

Przemysl No. 14 (11.30) 2,232 reg. 229 voted

Bircza No 1 (13.00) 2,217 reg. 20% voted

Ustrzyki Dolni No. 3 (16.30) 890 reg. 30% voted

Lesko a No. 3 (17.15) 2060 reg. 33% voted

Sanok No. 2 (18.30) No information given

Krasiczyn No. 1 (19.30) 934 reg. voters 428 voted

Przemysl No. 14 (19.55) 1000 voted

Results acc. to CEC: : Donald Tusk – 36.33%; Lech Kaczyński – 33.1%; Andrzej Lepper 15.11%; Marek Borowski (Polish Social Democracy) – 10.33%; Jarosław Kalinowski (Polish

Peasants' Party) – 1.8%; Janusz Korwin-Mikke (Janusz Korwin-Mikke's Platform) – 1.43%; Henryka Bochniarz (Democratic Party-demokracy.pl) – 1.26%.

The remaining candidates garnered from 0.21% (Liwiusz Ilasz) to 0.06% (Adam Słomka) of the vote.

Round Two

Observation in Krakow, Nowa Huta, Niepolomice, Klaj, Bochnia

Again, BHHRG encountered few voters in polling stations visited. Poverty and unemployment were the main issues, particularly in Nowa Huta whose steel works once employed 40,000 and where now only 3000 remain. Those who did turn out to vote (mainly the elderly) were choosing Kaczynski as he promised a more socially orientated programme. A polling station chairman in Klaj (Malopolska), expressed surprise at the official 49% figure for turnout in the first round of the presidential election. In her experience (and that of her colleagues from other polling stations in the region) the number voting on 9th October was much lower.

Presidential election, second round. Polling stations visited:

Krakow, No. 6, (12.00) 848 reg. 146 voted.

Nowa Huta No. 391, (1.00) 1607 reg. 200 voted

Nowa Huta, No. 315, (16. 29) 50% voted

Niepolomice No. 1 (2.45) 1956 reg. pm. 500 voted

Klaj No. 7 (15.45) 1166 reg. 360 voted

Bochnia No. 1 (17.00) 2041 reg. 849 voted

Krakow, No 11/12, (18.49) 1280 reg. 400 voted

Official Result

Results: Kaczynski: 54% Tusk : 46%

Post-election

As BHHRG has pointed out, there are mixed messages coming from the new government in Warsaw which at one moment plans to cut the Polish budget deficit while simultaneously promising to increase social spending. PiS will surely face problems with the parties on which it relies to govern - Samoobrona and the League - which could lead to the collapse of the minority government. If that comes about, the 'dream deal' between PiS and PO will be revived to the delight of foreign investors and other reform-minded observers of the Polish scene.

Foreign Policy: turning up the heat on several fronts



Is this the 'power behind the throne'? Radek Sikorski looks over Lech Walesa's shoulder at a conference to celebrate Solidarity's 25th anniversary in Gdansk, 2005

Perhaps the PiS government's most significant appointment so far is that of Radek Sikorski as Minister of Defence. Sikorski has been based in the UK and US almost continually since 1982 although he was, briefly, a deputy foreign minister and deputy defence minister between 1992-3 in the first post-Solidarity government. Although he bought a country house in Poland in the last years of Communism²⁸, Sikorski's journalistic and think-tank career was primarily British and then Washington-based. However, he returned to contest a seat in the Senate in the 2005 elections which he won with over 76,000 votes, a significant level of support even though he must be something of an unknown quantity at local level in Poland.

Mr. Sikorski is, however, no stranger to the power elite in Washington, where he was Executive - Director of the New Atlantic Initiative, an arm of the neo-con American Enterprise Institute, (AEI) from 2002 until the eve of the polls in 2005. During that time he has chaired numerous appearances by and conferences with some of the United States closest allies and supporters. Many ex- Communist turncoats who have found it highly profitable to switch their allegiance from Big Brother in the Kremlin to pay obeisance to an even more powerful and wealthy patron in Washington have been hosted at the AEI, where naïve (or cynical?) Americans receive them rapturously as lifelong fellow travellers in the cause of freedom and the market economy.

However, under Sikorski, the AEI's rhetoric has increased against Washington's (or, in this case, the Republican party's) bête noires - especially Belarus - as well as 'Old European' countries like France and Germany. The AEI is always in the forefront demanding military action against America's perceived enemies and, therefore, is a useful ally of the US defence industry.

In 2002, the AEI hosted a black coffee breakfast to examine the 'case' against Belarus at which various 'dissidents' recounted their woes – although despite the tyranny back home they seem to have had no problem in travelling to Washington to publicise their country's ills and return home afterwards. Sikorski chaired the event and provided a menacing commentary. If a speaker paused for breath, he intoned: "Mr. Lukashenko – we are watching you".²⁹ Could Big Brother hope to find a more energetic disciple?

²⁸ See Radek Sikorski, *The Polish House. An Intimate History of Poland* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London, 1997).

²⁹ "Belarus – next target in the "axis of evil"?" – News item, www.oscewatch.org 27th November, 2002

Although Poland has always dutifully echoed criticism of Belarus's alleged human rights violations, the temperature was raised in the summer of 2005 when it was claimed that the 400,000 strong Polish minority in western Belarus was being mistreated. In particular, Belarusian oppositionists said that the Lukashenko regime had imposed its own candidates to run the local Polish minority organization, the Union of Poles. Presidential candidates like Donald Tusk and Maciej Giertych visited the embattled Poles in the Belarusian regional town of Grodno, promising to release them from tyranny.

BHHRG visited Belarus in September shortly after the fracas and as tens of thousands of local Poles were celebrating the procession and coronation of the Virgin mass. The local police were prominent in attendance – clearing a path through the throng for the clergy and statue and closing otherwise busy main streets so that the procession could pass unhindered!

As the Group has pointed out on previous occasions, Poles in Belarus have full minority status: they enjoy all the rights demanded for minorities by the Council of Europe and EU since they are allowed to use their own language in public institutions and media and attend their own schools. In 2001, local Polish Belarusians told BHHRG that their situation had actually improved under Lukashenko's presidency whereas under the previous regime of Stanislav Shushkevich (another AEI guest) they had been forced to speak Belarusian; Poles, like Russians, saw savage cuts in spending on their education. By contrast, under Lukashenko, new Polish language schools have been built, for instance, in the town of Vavkavysk, the site of the disputed congress of Poles in Belarus at the end of August, 2005. At the same time members of the Group also met Andzelika Borys, the wronged candidate for chairmanship of the Union of Poles in Belarus. But, far from being silenced by persecution, she appeared to be a guiding force in the local media, surrounded by foreign journalists anxious to hear her unflattering opinion of President Lukashenko.

Double-standards about nationalism typify the AEI's approach: When it suits "New Atlantic" expansionism to promote radical nationalism then it is a plucky movement for freedom. When a multi-cultural society with extensive and expensive minority institutions funded by the taxpayer is in the firing line, then it is abused as "nationalist" or "xenophobic" regardless of realities. The indifference to the rampant anti-Semitism in the "New European" Baltic States and Ukraine is just one example of Washington's double-standards. Imagine if Lukashenko's supporters had published anti-Semitic diatribes accusing his opponents of Masonic ties while raising monuments to volunteers in the wartime Waffen SS? Would the AEI or the State Department be able to contain their contempt? Yet, visit Latvia or Lvov and the deafening silence of the New Atlantic order's proponents about anti-Semitism there is shocking.

The concern of the new regime in Warsaw for minority rights abroad would be more plausible, if Poland accorded its Belarusian and other minorities similar rights to those enjoyed by Poles in Belarus. So restrictive is the Polish regime's control over the Belarusian minority there that its cultural institutions – it has no schools! – are subject to the Ministry of Interior! If Poland was not the darling of NATO, a country which subjects its largest ethnic minority to the police ministry would be a public scandal. Unlike, Poles in Belarus, Belarusians in Poland have no right to speak their own language in public institutions or set up their own schools. In fact the organization is intimidated, its newspaper censored and under regular police surveillance. Warsaw uses repeated financial audits as ways of intimidating and crippling Belarusian-language journals and NGOs. Yet the EU, the Council of Europe and US embassy are silent on this repression of an ethnic and religious minority. Meeting an ethnic Belarusian journalist in today's Poland is rather like meeting an anti-Communist dissident a quarter of a century ago. In a tiny office, whispers are exchanged after a lengthy period of gaining trust. Who is to say that the inquisitive outsider isn't an informer? What would the Interior Ministry say if it heard about any criticisms of the "New Europe's" model state?

Belarusians don't seem afraid to criticise their president despite his label as "the last dictator in Europe". But Lukashenko faces elections in 2006 and the international community is determined he should go. The animus directed against Belarus under his leadership is wholly due to the country's failure to embrace the kinds of 'reform' policies demanded by the West; human rights concerns are merely crocodile tears. Such 'reforms' have devastated neighbouring Poland. Crossing the border between the two countries reveals the extent of the

problem: fields are cultivated in Belarus and filled with weeds in Poland. If Lukshenko's Belarus collapses, the situation for the large number of Poles who depend on it for cross border trade, including the importation of cheap, smuggled fuel, will deteriorate further.

But, the arrival of Sikorski could signal a more aggressive policy by Warsaw towards Minsk. He has called for "teeth" to be given to America's Belarus Democracy Act (2004), the law modelled on the Iraq Freedom Act (1998) now being implemented there with the well-known consequences.³⁰ In fact, it can't be ruled out that Poland might launch an attack on Belarus on the pretence of protecting its minority there – very much as Hitler did in Czechoslovakia in 1938 and in Poland itself in 1939. The Polish media is also ratcheting up the rhetoric: on 23rd November, two Polish newspapers blacked out their front pages as a dramatic commentary on the absence of a free press in Belarus.³¹ The recent selection of an ethnic Pole, Alexander Milenkevitch, to be the opposition candidate for the presidency of Belarus against Lukashenko suggests that Polish interference in the elections there could surpass Warsaw's open taking of sides in Ukraine's "Orange" election. Will a *casus belli* be manufactured out of Milenkevitch's candidacy?

Poland's relations with Russia are set to deteriorate. Things started to go sour in the immediate post election period when Russia banned Polish meat imports, claiming that they were unsafe due to the use of falsified veterinary certificates. There are worries, already expressed in the German press, that relations with Poland could become complicated. The new chancellor, Angela Merkel, has stated that she supports the demands of post-war German expellees (*Landsmannschaft*) which includes large financial compensation.³² As if to underscore future difficulties, English language Polish newspapers now contain advertisements offering large swathes of land and property for sale in former German areas of Poland. Perhaps the owners want to divest themselves of such real estate before it loses value under a sustained and possible successful assault from the *Landsmannschaft*.

Further a field, Sikorski pledged to rethink Warsaw's commitment to the withdrawal of Polish troops from Iraq - despite the war's unpopularity with the majority of Poles. However, lately Warsaw has stated that they will, in fact, leave in 2006. Whether Minister Sikorski will ignore the needs of his old friends and patrons in Washington is still open to debate.

In one of his last contributions to the debate about how to reinforce American forces abroad, Sikorski wrote in an AEI publication in the summer, 2005, "With the right incentives... Poland could field substantial forces in Iraq and Afghanistan that could relieve American troops at tolerable expense." Sikorski emphasises the problems the US Army has at home in recruiting young people to serve in hostile environments like Iraq. Instead Central European states like his native Poland can provide "boots on the ground," for instance, "it should be able to send over 10,000 men and women overseas."

The situation there is growing urgent. "The Iraqi insurgency... is in no mood to do the decent thing and go home in time for next year's midterm congressional election... the United States needs to act soon if the [Central European] troops are to arrive on the battlefield in time!"³³ It would be odd for an American commentator to put solving the Republican Party's political difficulties as a US national security priority, but isn't it even stranger that a Polish patriot only months from taking the oath of office as Defence Minister of the Polish Republic should have prefaced his strategic case for recruiting Poles to serve abroad by considerations of political expediency for Washington's wobbling Republican majority?

Since Sikorski's appointment, a proposal has emerged to build, at the behest of Washington, a star wars defence system on Polish soil but critics fear that instead of a genuine defence for

³⁰ See "Interview with Radek Sikorski" in *Belarusian Review* 16/4 (Winter, 2004): <http://www.belreview.cz/articles/2876.html>

³¹ Adam Easton "Polish press in Belarus protest" BBC, 18th November, 2005 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/4463658.stm>

³² "Merkel to prioritize Expellee Center – Deutsche-Welle, 18th November, 2005 www.dw-world.de

³³ See Radek Sikorski, "Defense Reform in Europe: The Case of Poland" The American Enterprise Institute/New Atlantic Initiative (July/August, 2005)

the NATO alliance such a system could be used to cover pre-emptive strikes on real or putative rivals of the United States.

Before returning to active service in Polish politics Sikorski emphasised that the Polish Ministry of Defence should promote using “private contractors for managing bases and training on the scale of the United States.” He has also rushed to offer Poland as an alternative location for US forces should they leave ‘Old European’ destinations like Germany. Although the new Polish government has pledged an anti-corruption struggle to quash the cronyism so typical of post-Communist Poland, as late as the summer Sikorski was arguing that privatised services to the military would become popular with the bloated officer corps when “former officers learn that people like themselves will mostly administer them”³⁴!

On 25th November, Sikorski held a dramatic news conference to reveal 1, 700 previously secret Warsaw Pact documents, including maps, that detailed how the Soviet Union planned to launch a nuclear war on Western Europe that would have caused, according to military experts in Warsaw, the annihilation of Poland.³⁵ It was admitted that this plan was a putative *counter-offensive* to a possible NATO nuclear first strike. In other words, NATO could have obliterated Poland before the Warsaw Pact responded - logic that seems to have escaped the new Minister of Defence. Mr Sikorski’s contempt for Communist-era politicians and commanders ready to sacrifice young Poles for their Superpower patron’s security would ring less hollow if he had not set himself up in the recent past as a potential recruiting sergeant for a Polish occupation force in Iraq.

Sikorski also issued veiled threats against former Communists and those who had participated in Warsaw Pact activities, like the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, saying that it was important for citizens “to know who was the hero and who was the villain”. One such ‘villain’ is General Jaruzelski who has fallen in and out of favour since 1989. Most Poles probably regard him as a ‘villain’ but, for handing them over to the ravages of shock therapy rather than pre-empting (to use a favoured AEI term) a bloody invasion by Soviet troops in 1981. In his memoirs, although Sikorski finds General Jaruzelski “personally decent... by comparison with Walesa’s buffoonery” he condemns him for “helping the Soviets control Poland.” As Jaruzelski’s successor in the Warsaw Defence Ministry, Sikorski damns his predecessor, the author of martial law in 1981, for a strategic blunder: “Holding absolute power, he could have introduced bold market reforms!”³⁶ What kind of society would “bold market reforms” without democracy have produced? Perhaps the growing electoral apathy of Poland’s marginalized people is beginning to reveal it.

Sikorski’s threats of retribution against the former Soviet-backed regime is echoed by PiS and Kaczynski who have vowed to sweep away the “old communist forces that have remained hugely powerful” in Poland.³⁷ But several of Kaczynski’s ministerial appointees once held prominent posts in the Party. The new Foreign Minister, Stefan Meller, was First Secretary of the Socialist Youth (ZMS) in the 1960s. His parents spent the war in Vichy-occupied France but were so devoted to the Leninist cause that they returned to Poland at

³⁴ See Radek Sikorski, “Defense Reform in Europe: The Case of Poland” The American Enterprise Institute/New Atlantic Initiative, July/August, 2005

³⁵ See “Stephen Castle “Soviet plans to annihilate Europe revealed” *The Independent*, 26th November, 2005, www.news.independent.co.uk/europe/article329452.ece

³⁶ See Radek Sikorski, *The Polish House. An Intimate History of Poland* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London, 1997), 211. Although Sikorski lavished praise on Jaruzelski’s nemesis Lech Walesa when he was guest of honour at an AEI bash in Gdansk to celebrate 25 years of Solidarity on 31st August, 2005, in his memoirs he compares Walesa unfavourably with “Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the murderous leader of Afghan fundamentalists... and Jonas Savimbi, the Angolan guerrilla leader accused of burning his enemies at the stake” but “I was appalled by the atmosphere around him in the presidential palace. The language was that of the beer-hall: the ambience that of a gang of racketeers...” In summary, interviewing the founder of Solidarity was “the worst experience of my journalistic career.” *Ibid.*, 199.

³⁷ Marek Matraszek “Lobbying in a new democracy – Poland” www.riskoffreedom.com issue no. 24, July 2005. Here Matraszek, a PiS supporter, puts forward the weird theory that former Communists (not the reformed Communists who are allowed into government) wield more power in Poland than ‘puny’ foreign investors.

the height of the Stalinist period in 1946 with the young Stefan. Until 1968, Meller worked in Polish military intelligence.

When the new Deputy Minister of Justice, Andrzej Krize, was a judge he “sentenced opposition activists to imprisonment for from one to three months for having participated , in a demonstration on 11th November 1979 on Independence Square in Warsaw”.³⁸ However, unlike other “relics” of the old regime, such people (including former president Kwasniewski) transferred their allegiance from one Big Brother to another and are, therefore, exempt from PiS and Sikorski’s ‘lustration’ campaign or examination by a future Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Conclusion

The Washington-based Sikorski has set out an ambitious agenda for a future, “reforming” Polish Defence Minister. However, despite his new and demanding portfolio, it is unlikely that the political ambitions of someone as formidable are yet fulfilled. He will have his eyes on the next presidential election which, at the moment, is five years away. Yet, if Kaczynski falters or ‘corruption’ scandals appear to dog him like other previous Polish leaders, Radek Sikorski’s prospects could be answered sooner rather than later. Whether ordinary Poles fully realise where the aggressive neo-con policies which he represents could lead them remains to be seen.

Poland has enjoyed the mixed blessing of being the original laboratory for the Post-Communist reform agenda. In the 2005 pre-election period lavish ceremonies took place to mark the 25th anniversary of Solidarity. But many of the leading actors in the Gdansk events have long felt betrayed by the high-jacking, as they see it, of what was originally a workers’ movement; they refused to take part in the official celebrations and organised their own ‘fringe’ events. As for ordinary Poles, rather than beat the Solidarity drum many now bask in the nostalgia of a time when there was full employment, proper health care and free vacations.

Such a revelation comes as a surprise to many visitors to Poland who have been exposed to propaganda painting Poles as unreconstructed patriots who will endure any hardship to ensure that their powerful neighbours, Germany and Russia, never again hold sway. This distortion has enabled the ‘reformers’ to downplay the malaise that grips the country. The signs are that Mr. Kaczynski and his PiS led government will further intensify the patriotic myth as they fail to revitalize the economy and cut unemployment, like all previous post-1989 governments. Radek Sikorski has already set the scene for an aggressive policy involving military expansionism, witch hunts for ‘reds under the beds’, and confrontation with perceived enemies like Russia. Could it be that totalitarianism, under a new kind of regime but in a familiar guise, is returning to Poland?

³⁸ “Controversy over past of new Polish deputy minister of justice”, *TV Polonia*, 4th November, 2005