

Polonization Is Back: Law and Justice in Katowice After 2018

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In the wake of the 2018 local and regional self-governmental elections in Poland, the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party did not win an outright majority of mandates in the Silesian Region (Voivodeship). With 22 mandates, PiS was destined *not* to govern the region. The pro-Silesian coalition of other parties had at their disposal 23 seats in the Silesian Regional Assembly (*Sejmik Wojewódzki*). However, in an underhand ploy, PiS offered positions and salaries to the coalition's member of this assembly, namely, Wojciecha Kałuża, and his family. He joined the PiS group, and was rewarded with the post of Deputy Regional President (*Wicemarszałek*), while his wife was summarily employed in the management of the state-owned coal mining company, Jastrzębska Spółka Węglowa SA. Regional President (*Marszałek*) Jakub Chełstowski did not see this event as a blatant example of corruption. Law and justice, as peculiarly construed by PiS, finally arrived in the Silesian Region. The slogan of 'good change' (*dobra zmiana*), as propounded by PiS since its electoral victory in 2015, has proved to be none other than money for the hand-picked few, not values; and the growing erosion of the rule of law, instead of upholding the law.

The PiS chairman, Jarosław Kaczyński, is a self-declared 'modest MP' in the Polish Parliament (*Sejm*). In reality, in breach of the Constitution and the basic principles of democracy, he gives orders to the Polish President and Prime Minister. Kaczyński rules Poland with no democratic mandate to do so. Likewise, he was unable to accept that his near-dictatorial monopoly on power in the country, could be incomplete at the level of the self-government in the Silesian Region. It is the second largest and richest region in Poland after Mazovia, which houses the Polish capital of Warsaw. Furthermore, it is well known that Kaczyński holds a dim view of the Silesians, whom he considers to be 'crypto-Germans' (*zakamuflowana opcja niemiecka*). From this perspective, in his view, the Silesian Region is still 'dangerously un-Polish,' as proved by the 2011 census, in which almost 1 million people declared their nationality as Silesians, and half of them indicated that their home language is Silesian.

Obviously, the Polish state administration does not accept these 'Silesian results' of its own census; neither the previous governments, nor the current PiS one. While the former Polish cabinets grudgingly accepted the grassroots development of the Silesian culture, the standardization of the Silesian language, and the nascent publishing industry in this language; PiS appears to have taken up the mantle of etnonationalist polonizers. The PiS regional administration installed in 2018 in the Silesian Region, first of all, cut financing and projects that aspired to help with the development of the Silesian culture and literature.

And now, in 2019, the opportune moment came to liquidate the flagship regional quarterly *Fabryka Silesia*, edited by the renowned Silesian journalist and writer, Krzysztof Karwat. In PiS's typical manner of equivocation, the word 'liquidation' was not

uttered. In early 2019, the publication of this journal was 'suspended,' and recently the editor's email account was made defunct. *Fabryka Silesia* uncovered the multicultural past of (Upper) Silesia, and celebrated the region's continuing multiculturalism, which is such a unique phenomenon in today's ethnolinguistically homogenous Polish nation-state. That was the periodical's undeclared 'sin' in PiS's eyes, for which it had to be 'punished' with this undeclared closure.

The policy of crude and unthinking polonization is back in Upper Silesia. Poland claimed the easternmost sliver of this region at the end of the Great War by proposing that the majority of its inhabitants were Poles. In interwar Poland's autonomous Silesian Region, rapidly disillusioned by the Polish authorities, numerous Silesians wanted to send their children to German-medium schools and voted for regional and pro-German parties. Their wishes were disregarded, and only the pro-governmental parties were allowed access to the region's politics. After World War II, Poland was granted with the German section of Upper Silesia. Almost all the population were retained as 'autochthons' ('ethnic Poles not fully conscious of their Polishness') to be re-educated as self-conscious Poles, that is, polonized under duress. As a result, during the communist period, close to a million left for (West) Germany, as convinced Germans. After the fall of communism, which heralded a democratic and European Poland, the Silesians thought that in line with the 1997 Constitution's very American (that is, civic) definition of the Polish nation, it would be sufficient to be a law-abiding citizen, who works hard and pays taxes. That language and culture would be deemed a person's private matter, like religion. That in the enlarged European Union, polyglotism and the skill of moving between cultures and languages will be cherished. That, at long last, the Silesians, their past, languages and culture would be properly appreciated.

Not really. PiS's 'good change' is the straight way back to the past, relentless polonization under an authoritarian regime. In PiS's Silesia there is no place left for the Silesians and any diversity.