

'Civil war is coming': Polish far-right priest Jacek Miedlar to speak at Britain First Telford rally

*By Paul Wright
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Anti-racism campaigners fear 28-year-old's firebrand sermons could radicalise Poles in UK.

A notorious Catholic priest, who has become an icon for the far-right in Poland, is to speak at an anti-Islam rally in Shropshire – in a sign of the growing links between British "extremists" and nationalists abroad.

Jacek Miedlar, branded a "fanatical hate preacher" by anti-racism campaigners in Poland, will march through the town of Telford with activists from Britain First on Saturday (25 February).

Following a 2016 Daily Mail report insinuating that Telford was "the new Rotherham", the protest is a rally against alleged child sexual exploitation in the area.

Miedlar's planned visit is said by Britain First to be part of the far-right party's attempts to build links with foreign nationalists in preparation for "civil war" with Islam.

His appearance has proven controversial both in the UK and Poland, with his critics accusing him of spreading anti-Semitism, homophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment.

The protest has already been condemned by the town's Conservative MP, Lucy Allan. She accused Miedlar and Britain First of "hijacking" the experiences of child sex abuse victims for their own political ends.

Miedlar says his critics are simply "leftists" opposed to "Polish patriotism".

Who is Jacek Miedlar?

Jacek Miedlar, 28, from Wroclaw in west Poland – who is currently suspended by his local Catholic church for his firebrand nationalist sermons – has addressed tens of thousands people at right-wing revival rallies in Poland.

Often clad in black clerical robes and a hooded top, his style of preaching is far from meek. One video, from a 2015 Polish Independence Day rally in Warsaw, sees him address 50,000 fellow "soldiers".

He spouts hatred against the political left, "Islamic aggression" and immigration, with his speech interspersed with dramatic chants of "God, honor, fatherland" and calls for the "warriors of Great Poland" to rise up.

Anti-racism campaigners in Poland say the prospect of seeing similar scenes on the streets of the UK – where he could "radicalise" some of the 800,000 Poles living here – should be a serious concern to the British authorities.

"Miedlar is a radical nationalist on every front: anti-gay, anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic," Rafal Pankowski, a professor at Warsaw's Collegium Civitas and director of Poland's Never Again anti-racism group, told *IBTimes UK*.

"The level of hatred is quite exceptional. He really stands out as a fanatical hate preacher. He appeared on the far-right scene about three years ago, and in those three years he's really made a name for himself as a very outspoken and extreme preacher.

"He has a certain audience among younger Poles in the UK; it's not the first time a Polish far-right speaker has come to the UK [...] but Miedlar stands out. I would put him on the same level as Islamic hate preachers. It's something the British authorities should take seriously."

Miedlar has attracted numerous headlines in the Polish media over the years.

Last year, he was accused of calling Jews a "cancer" who had "swept Poland" during an address to crowds at a far-right rally in Bialystok, north-eastern Poland. He was eventually cleared of alleged hate-speech offences linked with the comments.

Miedlar sparked controversy again by then posting a message to his 10,000 Twitter followers saying: "Bialystok investigation discontinued! Zero tolerance for 'Jewish cowardice'. Salut!"

The tweet, later deleted, saw him attach a picture of Poles in Myslenice performing a Nazi-style salute taken on 23 June, 1936 when a group of nationalists took part in an anti-Jewish riot, the Times of Israel reported.

His controversial speeches, including to followers of Poland's fascist National Radical Camp (ONR), eventually led him to be suspended from his local Catholic church chapter.

But Miedlar says he has been unfairly tarnished by "leftist" critics who are simply ideologically opposed to "patriotism".

"I want to rebuild a Christian Europe"

Denying he was spreading anti-Semitism, he told *IBTimes UK* this week: "Sadly, we live in times when those with Catholic views, or who support patriotism or Polish nationalism which is in accordance with Catholic doctrine, attracts criticism. That's the stick in the hands of the hated leftists."

He added: "If homophobia is standing against deviancy, as well as against the adoption of children by homosexual couples, and anti-semitism is uncovering anti-Polish feeling and being against historical lies propagated by [the Israeli media] which suggests Poles collaborated with Nazis or that Poles helped Jews during the WW2 as a result of greed, not altruism, then Yes – I am an anti-Semite.

"However, if using the real definition, according to which homophobia is the hate of homosexuals and anti-Semitism is the hate of Semites – I stress Semites, because Semites are not just Jews – then calling me an anti-Semite and homophobic is a crime."

He said he accepted Britain First's invitation to speak in the UK to "pool our strength to rebuild a Christian Europe" – a goal he said was endangered by fundamental Islam and immigration.

"It's high time we started working together."

Polish far-right in the UK

Miedlar's invitation to speak in Telford, where Polish is the most spoken language after English, comes after anti-extremism researchers in the UK warned last year that several Polish far-right groups had become active in the UK.

Hope Not Hate, Britain's most prominent anti-extremism organisation, said Miedlar's visit would bring "rabid extremism to Telford".

In a blog post this week, the charity added in no uncertain terms: "Jacek Miedlar is an anti-Semite and disgraced Catholic Priest who last year called Jews a 'cancer' and who claims 'the biggest enemies of the world are Jewish imperialists and masons.'"

Earlier this month, details of a Foreign Office report, released to The Times, were published showing how far right extremists from across Europe had joined forces to take part in a "conservative congress" in Russia.

Britain's delegation included Britain First's founder, Jim Dowson, and former British National Party leader Nick Griffin.

In a stark interview with IBTimes UK, Britain First – a radical Christian party accused by its own critics of stoking up anti-Muslim hatred in towns across the UK – says its invitation to have Miedlar speak is part of efforts to build links with nationalists abroad in preparation for "civil war".

"Anyone who thinks they can go this struggle alone is insane," the party's deputy leader, Jayda Fransen, told IBTimes UK. "I do honestly believe we are heading for civil war and we will need the support of other groups who also believe we are heading for civil war. At that stage we will all need to unite - we have a common enemy, and that is Islam."

Leader Paul Golding, who was last month released from prison after being convicted for one of the party's so-called "mosque invasions" in Cardiff, said his party had forged relationships with right-wing "patriot" groups in Europe, the United States and Russia.

While boasting the largest following on Facebook of all the political parties in the UK, Britain First's rallies have consistently failed to draw significant crowds of supporters.

But talk of Miedlar's arrival in Telford has already spread among the town's Polish community.

Golding and Fransen will be hoping the priest's presence will see the streets filled with Polish fans – fulfilling the party's ambition of attracting Poles living in the UK to its cause.

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/civil-war-coming-polish-far-right-priest-jacek-miedlar-speak-britain-first-telford-rally-1608459>