

# POLAND Polish far right making headlines again

By Rafal Pankowski for Never Again in Warsaw

THE POLISH far right is making headlines again, intensifying its activities since the creation of the Nationalist Movement (Ruch Narodowy, RN), the latest incarnation of an extremist political tradition dating back to the 1920s. Simultaneously, levels of hate crime have risen dramatically, according to the 'Brown Book' published by the anti-racist monitoring organisation, 'NEVER AGAIN' association.

The RN's formation was announced in Warsaw in 2012 at a mass rally marking Polish Independence Day.

The RN was born out of an alliance of two groups dominating Polish extreme-right spectrum. The names of both groups point to their roots in the infamous tradition of anti-Semitic violence of the pre-war

period: the National-Radical Camp (Oboz Narodowo-Radykalny, ONR) takes its emblem and name from a fascist organisation banned for inciting hatred back in 1934. The All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska, MW) is named after a notorious anti-Semitic student group active in Polish universities from 1922. Their xenophobic stance is accompanied by an equally virulent homophobia.

The ONR-MW alliance has been responsible for the annual Independence Day marches in Warsaw which attract a growing number of participants representing a broad right-wing spectrum, as well as football fans from all over Poland.

The November 2012 event gathered some 30,000 participants (the organisers

claimed 100,000!), the mob on the street including far-right organisations from abroad, including Forza Nuova from Italy, Nordisk Ungdom from Sweden and a large delegation from the Hungarian fascist party, Jobbik.

RN leaders themselves have been frequent guests at Jobbik events in Hungary and it is Jobbik that provides the principal political model for RN.

Despite the hype surrounding RN, the Polish far right is still a pale shadow of its former self in terms of political impact when compared to its peak in the mid-2000s. For example, the radical nationalist League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin, LPR) – which educated much of the current RN cadre – was the second largest party in the first Polish

European Parliament election in 2004, with almost 16% of the vote.

In 2006-2007, the LPR participated in a government coalition together with the conservative Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc, PiS) and the populist Self-Defence (Samoobrona). Its notorious leader Roman Giertych was simultaneously deputy prime minister and education minister.

Giertych shocked observers with his hardline policies, trying to get rid of "controversial" writers like Kafka and Dostoyevsky from the school curriculum. Scores of young right-wing extremists were nominated to high-level state jobs ranging from television and radio to fisheries.

The participation of



## POLAND KEY FACTS

### Political Parties

**Law and Justice** (Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc/PiS) – started as a centre-right party led by the Kaczynski twins in 2001. Since 2005, it has formed a strategic alliance with the far-right Radio Maryja movement. It played the lead role in the right-wing government in 2005-2007, since then it has been the main opposition party. In the 2011 parliamentary election, it received 29.8% of the vote and 157 seats (out of 460).

**All-Polish Youth** (Młodzież Wszechpolska/MW) – created as a nationalist student group in 1922, reformed in 1989. Acted as the youth wing for the League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin, LPR) in 2001-2007, including during its period in government in 2006-2007.



**National-Radical Camp** (Oboz Narodowo-Radykalny, ONR) – represented the Polish equivalent of the fascist movements in other European countries. Its emblem and accompanying symbolism were used by a group of skinheads in southern Poland. 2009: local branch in Brzeg banned by the regional court for promoting fascism.

**Nationalist Movement** (Ruch Narodowy/RN) – new far-right grouping officially launched in 2012, fusing the ONR and MW.

**National Rebirth of Poland** (Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski/ NOP) – competitor to the RN on the extreme right. NOP has long been integrated into the European neo-fascist scene through terrorist Roberto Fiore's networks (ITP, ENF).

**'Niklot' Association for Tradition and Culture** – a 'New Right' neo-pagan group drawing its activists from the so-called National Socialist Black Metal movement, existing on the fringes of both the LPR and Self-Defence party and participating in RN events.

### Key figures

**Father Tadeusz Rydzik** – priest with the Redemptorist Order, founder and leader of Radio Maryja and its associated media empire and social-political movement.

**Roman Giertych** – third generation heir to a Polish far-right political dynasty, re-formed the MW aged 16 in 1989. Leader of the LPR and deputy PM in 2006-2007. By 2012, he became publicly estranged from the new MW leadership.

**Artur Zawisza** – former PiS MP; main media spokesman for the RN, he has repeatedly defended



radical nationalists in the government came to an abrupt end when the right-wing coalition imploded and an early election resulted in resounding defeat, with both the LPR and Self-Defence losing all parliamentary seats.

Since then, much of the political space once occupied by the LPR has been taken over by the PiS which has

steadily moved to the right.

The PiS is now the main strategic partner of the nationalist-Catholic social movement around Radio Maryja and its anti-Semitic hate preacher, Father Tadeusz Rydzyk. Led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski, twin brother of the late President Lech Kaczynski, the PiS is the main party of opposition to the current

liberal government.

It is prone to conspiracy theories surrounding the presidential plane crash. It is perhaps not surprising the party appointed the veteran right-winger and conspiracy theory champion, Antoni Macierewicz (himself an ex-LPR member), as its main investigator of the crash. Macierewicz, for example, did not rule out the authenticity of the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* when interviewed on Radio Maryja.

Astonishingly, the PiS sits together with David Cameron's British Tories in the European Conservatives and Reformists group (ECR) in the European Parliament. Ex-ECR leader Michal Kaminski MEP eventually left the PiS complaining it was being "taken over by the extreme right".

Memorably, one PiS MP, Artur Gorski, made a speech in the Polish Parliament moaning that Barack Obama's election was "the end of white man's civilization". Despite wide condemnation by the mainstream media he was not ostracised by the party leaders. On the contrary, he

was comfortably re-elected on the party slate in 2011. Gorski and his colleagues are often seen at far-right events.

The lack of a *cordon sanitaire* between the mainstream right and racist extremists remains a discernible feature of Polish politics. Clearly, the PiS leaders believe they can accommodate the far-right surge at street level without legitimising it.

It remains to be seen whether there is any electoral potential for a new far-right force such as the RN while the PiS and Radio Maryja control the vast majority of the far-right vote.

One opinion poll gave the ONR-MW bloc 5 per cent of the vote "for sure" and another 11 per cent as "quite probably".

It seems unlikely RN will actually obtain this level of support at any election in the foreseeable future but the level of its potential support among the young should ring alarm bells.

According to the same poll, in the 18-24 age group it could count on 12% as "solid" votes and another 18% as "probable".

anti-Semitic outbursts by arguing that "judeoskepticism is a legitimate cognitive perspective".

**Krzysztof Bosak** – an RN leader and former MW chairman and LPR MP, his main claim to fame is having participated in the Polish version of 'Strictly Come Dancing'.

**Adam Gmurczyk** – NOP leader since 1994, quoted as saying: "anti-Semitism is the virtue that we must cultivate with great care".

**Mateusz Piskorski** – former Niklot activist and Self-Defence MP; a key figure in East European extremist networks.

(left) Adam Gmurczyk  
(right) Roman Giertych



## MAP

**Bialystok:** once, multi-ethnic, cradle of Esperanto, now the scene of a growing level of hate crime as documented by the 'Never Again' association

**Warsaw:** location of annual Independence Day Marches organised by the MW and the ONR. The last march in 2012 attracted 30,000 participants

**Wroclaw:** a hotbed of NOP activity with an annual March of the Patriots on 11 November. On 22 June, NOP members and Slask Wroclaw football hooligans disrupted a lecture by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman

**Kostrzyn nad Odra:** home of the annual anti-racist Woodstock festival attended by 500,000 people

**Poznan:** 8 August: at a Europa League match between Lech Poznan and Lithuanian club Zalgiris Vilnius, home side fans displayed a nationalist banner reading "Lithuanian scum – kneel down before the Polish lord!".

**Jedwabne:** Site of a pogrom of the town's Jewish inhabitants by their anti-Semitic neighbours in June 1941. In September, 2011, a monument to the victims daubed with large swastikas and inscriptions such as "We don't apologise for Jedwabne"

**Kielce:** site of the infamous post-war anti-Semitic pogrom in July 1946. In July, local public prosecutor ruled that hateful Internet forum entries using language like "Jewish carcass" were simply "humourous" and not offensive

