

RACE

Fighting Fascism

The No More organization, which has hundreds of voluntary members, is working toward a goal which the Polish government, judiciary and police have been unable to achieve—a Poland free of the neo-Nazi disease.



Racial violence:
Scenes like this are (thankfully) becoming rare in Poland

■ Diagnosis

The political freedom established in Poland after the end of communism bore poisoned fruit in the form of parties and organizations openly supporting intolerance, racism, anti-Semitism and fascist ideas. The ominous "Poland for Poles" slogan was one of the loudest of the 1990's. Its supporters included even government coalition parties like the Christian-National Union (ZChN), whose politicians had contacts with Western neo-Nazis.

The most radical fascist party, the Polish National Fellowship, advocates a totalitarian system based on ethnic fellowship and depriving all minorities of their rights. The manifesto of the National Revival of Poland, registered in 1992 as part of the International Third Position neo-Nazi organization, contains a sentence stating that "Jews will be removed from Poland, and their possessions will be confiscated," taken directly from Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. The official greeting gesture used in the party is the Nazi-like gesture of the raised arm.

The Youth Legion, a paramilitary unit of the Polish National Front founded by Janusz Bryczkowski, a candidate in the 1995 president elections, has become famous for its action of "clearing" Legionowo near Warsaw of "defective elements" such as homeless people and beggars. Some were beaten to death.

In the ten first years of the Third Republic of Poland's existence, 29 murders with racial motives were uncovered. Numerous examples of the desecration of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues, as well as assaults on Gypsies, took place. A Polish plague, incredibly virulent in comparison to EU countries, is the phenomenon of anti-Semitic and racist graffiti covering city buildings: "Jude raus," "Gypsies out," and drawings depicting swastikas, or Jewish stars hanging from gallows. These led the fellowship of Łódź Jews in Israel to issue an open letter to the authorities of Łódź, and forced Bill Clinton to write a letter to President Lech Wałęsa.

Another permanent element of the landscape of Polish cities are aggressive groups of

skinheads using Nazi numerology: number 88 denoting "Heil Hitler" ("h" is the eighth letter of the alphabet) and 18 symbolizing the initial letters of Hitler's name.

In the late 1990's, Poland became a European haven for neo-Nazis. Annual international camps of the International Third Position were held in the Lower Silesia region. Participants included members of the



Skinheads in the 1990's
Banner reads "Poland for Poles"

German NPD and the Czech HNS organizations, as well as neo-Nazis from Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, France and Romania. Materials used by German neo-Nazis, prohibited in their home country, were printed in Olsztyn and Szczecin. Albums by foreign bands of the White Power genre were issued; among them, a record by the English group No Remorse, calling for the murder of Jews and non-whites, which was confiscated in Great Britain and its publisher tried. The outrageous events taking place included the legal organization of an event entitled Hitlerfest in Wrocław in 1992 and the "greeting" of the pope in 1997 by a parade of skinheads from the Aryan Survival Front shouting Nazi slogans.

Organizations which monitor racism, anti-

Semitism and neo-Nazism, such as the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, the Roth Institute, the Wiesenthal Center, and the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia, have devoted a considerable amount of space in their annual reports to Poland. The issue criticized most severely by them has been the tolerance of Polish authorities towards fascist associations and anti-Semitic and Nazi publications which, in some cases, openly glorify Hitlerism. Proceedings in the prosecutor's office were often discontinued, considered only "a negligible harm to society."

One of the Wiesenthal Center's publications from 1998 incorporated the bitter statement that there are only two countries in Europe in which neo-Nazi parties and associations operate openly—Poland, where it is prohibited in the Constitution and the criminal code, and Denmark, where it is legal.

Several scandals, such as the desecration of a synagogue in Łódź with swastikas, on the eve of the Czech President Vaclav Havel's visit, threats addressed to Marek Edelman, the last living leader of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto, or the discovery of plans for a series of bomb attacks by the Łódź branch of the National Revival of Poland group, were needed for the authorities to decide that the

by the Batory Foundation, using money from the George Soros Foundation.

No More has been keeping a unique "brown book"—a register of racist behavior, published on the Internet and in the No More quarterly. The annual editions of the "brown book" are sent to the internal affairs and justice ministries.

Both organizations initiated the "Let's Kick Racism Out of Stadiums" campaign, part of the international "Football Against Racism in Europe" campaign, carried out in 15 countries with the support of FIFA. Only after five years of this campaign has the Polish Soccer Association admitted that crowds at Polish soccer stadiums are riddled with racism.

A spectacular undertaking initiated in 2000 by No More and the Polish Union of Jewish Students was "Colorful Tolerance"—an annual campaign during which anti-Semitic and Nazi writings and drawings present on buildings in Łódź are covered with paint. Although in the first year of the campaign the city authorities only bought paints and brushes for the campaign's participants, in the following years they took a more active role. The picture of Łódź Mayor Jerzy Kropiwnicki, leader of the rightist Christian-National Union, painting over swastikas on the walls of a building situated in the city center, was a shock to the pro-fascist and Nazi organizations that had supported his candidature in the elections. "Kropiwnicki betrayed the national interest," say members of the Łódź branch of the National Revival of Poland.

According to the National Revival of Poland's president, Maciej Janicki, the Church was also guilty of betrayal in supporting Poland's efforts to access the "masonic" European Union. "Brown Shirt" organizations encouraged people to vote "no" in the European referendum.

Numerous famous music groups took part in another campaign carried out as part of "Music Against Racism." This campaign has made the subculture of Nazi-skinheads, popular among young Poles in the 1990's, fall out of fashion—membership began to be perceived as risky. In several cities, the GAN groups have fought skinheads with their own methods: simply giving them a hard time, supported by the full approval, and discreet help, of the police.

■ Recovery

According to the Institute for the Study of Anti-Semitism and Racism, a significant drop in the activity of fascist organizations, estimated as one of the biggest in Europe, has been noted in Poland over the last two years. Such a situation stems from a combination of numerous factors—disapproval in the media and public opinion, the work of local government organizations, the loss of support of the Church and of right-wing political parties, as well as the involvement of the police and the secret service in fighting such organizations. Numerous fascist organizations have ceased to exist or fallen into a state of hibernation; those still active have become much less radical. The Łódź branch of the National Revival of Poland, which in the mid-1990's had several hundred activists, has only 20 members today.

The Polish experiences in fighting fascism have been described in the paper *Breaking the Silence: Using Popular Culture to Engage Young People in Human Rights Reporting*, recently published in Minneapolis. The No More association has been invited to participate in the New Tactics in Human Rights Project, whose council includes Nobel Prize laureate Eli Wiesel and the outstanding Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa. The Polish experiences in fighting Neo-fascist and racist organizations are among Poland's contribution to the prosperity of the enlarged European Union.

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