

POLAND

Homophobia and antisemitism as extremists prepare for election

From Rafal Pankowski for *Nigdy Wiecej* and Antifa-Net in Warsaw

THE EXTREME RIGHT-WING League of Polish Families (LPR), assisted by its skinhead-dominated youth wing, All-Polish Youth (MW), has been arguably the most active political party in Poland in the run-up to this autumn's general election. Opinion polls indicate the LPR will receive around 15% of the vote but past results have generally exceeded predictions.

The LPR and MW received a temporary boost after leading a campaign against a Gay Pride march in Warsaw on 11 June. Mayor Lech Kaczynski bowed to their pressure and threats and banned the event for the second consecutive year. A few weeks later, an appeal court determined that Kaczynski's ban was groundless and the march went ahead with the participation of numerous defenders of human rights and several senior left-wing politicians.

Thugs from the MW opposed the march physically and a week later staged their own 1,000-strong "Normality Parade" through the streets of Warsaw without any attempt by the mayor to ban it. At the rally, Wojciech Wierzejski, an LPR MEP and MW veteran, called for discrimination against homosexuals "in all spheres of life" and vowed to ban all homosexual organisations "when the LPR comes to power".

The general public was outraged by a statement by an MW activist to a TV news programme in which he praised Hitler's solution to the "gay problem". But it must be said that the LPR's violent homophobic campaign has won the party some sympathy among certain sections of

society, including elements of the Catholic Church.

Despite its rabidly extremist politics, the LPR is part of the Independence/Democracy Group in the European Parliament together with the UK Independence Party and the Dutch Christian Union among others. Earlier this year, the head of the Dutch Christian Union's Service and Development department approached *Searchlight's* Polish sister organisation, *Nigdy Wiecej* (Never Again), for information about the LPR's antisemitism. Afterwards he wrote, "You have confirmed my concerns". Despite this, no action seems to have been taken to expel the LPR from the group.

At another recent rally, the LPR officially presented its presidential candidate, Professor Maciej Giertych, son of Jędrzej Giertych, the hardline antisemitic ideologist of the 1930s. Speeches at the rally were peppered with antisemitic references to the alleged "Talmudic morality" of the LPR's opponents. Maciej Giertych is the leader of the LPR's contingent of MEPs.

In mid-July the LPR suffered a serious political blow when half of its 10-strong group of MEPs left the party to join a rival group on the far right, the Patriotic Movement (RP). The RP is a new organisation created with the support of Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, the notoriously antisemitic director of Radio Maryja, a Catholic-nationalist radio station with a mass audience. A pilgrimage of Radio Maryja supporters to Czestochowa in July gathered around 200,000 participants.

It is doubtful, however, whether Rydzyk's new political outfit can replace the LPR, which has already secured a strong foothold in the Polish parliament and has realistic hopes of being part of a new governing coalition. In fact the LPR is slowly parting company with its former core support base of elderly listeners of Radio Maryja and its parliamentary candidates include several young activists from the MW. One of them is the MW leader in Gdansk, Gregory Sielatycki, a man closely associated with nazi skinhead circles.

A pluralist Coalition against the MW, formed by the Never Again association, the left-wing Workers Democracy and feminist groups organised a picket against the "Normality Parade" under the slogan "Fascism is not normal". The picket received sympathetic coverage in almost all the national media.

The next months will prove decisive for the future of the extreme right in Polish politics and anti-fascists have pledged to continue watching, exposing and combating the LPR and other far-right groups.

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