

WORLD FASCISM

A HISTORICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

VOLUME 2: L-Z

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with Paul Jackson

A B C  C L I O

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POLAND

Because of its fate during World War II, Poland has traditionally been seen as a victim of fascism rather than as a homeland of indigenous fascist movements, but a number of Polish fascist or para-fascist groups existed throughout the twentieth century. Nevertheless, despite their relative strength they never came close to seizing power. Boleslaw Piasecki's fully fledged fascist National-Radical Movement was popular among university youth in the late 1930s, but its wider influence remained limited. After the re-emergence of Poland in 1918, this Central European country could be seen as a potentially fertile soil for fascism. The new state included some 35 percent of national minorities, and ethnic tensions were a constant feature of the country's political life right until 1939. Popular anti-Semitism in particular was growing, directed against the country's sizable (10 percent) Jewish community. The parliamentary system disappointed many in the early 1920s, appearing unstable and corrupt. Moreover, the economic situation remained difficult for the greater part of the interwar period, and the results of the global Great Depression for Polish industry were particularly devastating. The right-wing nationalist movement *endecja* (National Democracy) was clearly impressed by the success of Mussolini, and the slogan "Long Live Polish Fascism!" was popular among its supporters, not least during the mass demonstrations that preceded the assassination of the liberal president Gabriel Narutowicz in December 1922. Nevertheless, despite the gradual radi-

calization of *endecja* in terms of its antidemocratic and, especially, anti-Semitic ideology, it never transformed itself into a truly fascist movement. One reason was the internal division within *endecja*: its “old” leadership remained committed to economic liberalism and the parliamentary road to power, while the “young” generation, supported by the main ideologue of *endecja*, Roman Dmowski, pressed for a more militant political policy.

After the 1926 coup d'état by Pilsudski, which was perceived as a preventative move from the Left, the frustration at the inability of *endecja* to seize power grew. Dmowski tried to emulate Italian Fascism by setting up the extraparliamentary Greater Poland Camp (Oboz Wielkiej Polski; OWP). The OWP was banned by the authorities in 1932–1933, which contributed to the further alienation of “young” activists who were disappointed by the allegedly passive reaction of *endecja* leaders. In 1934 a breakaway organization was formed under the name of the National-Radical Camp (Oboz Narodowo-Radykalny; ONR). It consisted of some 4,000 former *endecja* activists, mostly university students. The ONR called for the stripping of the Jews of Polish citizenship and criticized the capitalist system. The ONR saw itself as the vanguard in the struggle against the Pilsudski regime. After the ONR was banned in 1934, two rival factions emerged as its successors: the so-called ONR “ABC” and the National-Radical Movement (Ruch Narodowo-Radykalny; RNR), also known as the ONR Falanga (*ABC* and *Falanga* were the titles of rival nationalist publications). Both “national-radical” groups remained active semilegally until 1939. The RNR, led by Boleslaw Piasecki, espoused an overtly totalitarian program, calling for a “National Revolution.” In 1937 the RNR came close to being incorporated as part of the ruling National Unity Camp (Oboz Zjednoczenia Narodowego; OZN), a new mass organization set up by former followers of Pilsudski, which itself gravitated to the nationalist Right. This move, however, was met with a counteraction from the left-liberal wing of the ruling elite. Both ONR factions were responsible for terrorist attacks against Jews and left-wing activists in the late 1930s. They succeeded in forcing some universities to introduce the physical segregation of Jewish and non-Jewish students at university lectures. They gradually radicalized their demands for removing Jewish students from Polish universities altogether. *Endecja* and its splinter groups pledged their strong allegiance to the Catholic faith, and they were supported by a significant part of the clergy. Nevertheless, a neopagan fascist group with a limited appeal also ap-

peared in the late 1930s: the Zadruga group, led by Jan Stachniuk.

There was no political collaboration with Nazi occupiers in Poland during World War II on a scale comparable to France or Norway. Apart from the traditional anti-Germanism of *endecja*, this can also be explained in terms of a lack of interest on the German side: the founder of the short-lived collaborationist National Radical Organization (Narodowa Organizacja Radykalna; NOR), Andrzej Swietlicki (pre-1939 member of the RNR), was eventually killed by the Nazis in 1940. Nevertheless, the level of the involvement of some Poles in the Holocaust has been the subject of a lively debate since the publication of Jan Gross's book *Neighbors* about a 1941 pogrom in Jedwabne. Piasecki himself was arrested by the Gestapo in 1939 and released after intervention by his friends in the Italian Fascist establishment. With a group of followers he continued his activity in the framework of his own resistance organization, the Confederation of the Nation (Konfederacja Narodu; KN). Imprisoned by the Soviet security service, NKVD, in 1945, he agreed to form a procommunist Catholic group that became known as “Pax.” Its ideology blended elements of Catholicism, Marxism, and nationalism.

In the 1990s, extreme nationalist and fascist groups reappeared on the Polish political landscape, most notably the Polish National Community (Polska Wspolnota Narodowa; PWN), led by Boleslaw Tejkowski, and Adam Gmurczyk's National Rebirth of Poland (Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski; NOP), which is a part of the London-based International Third Position (ITP). Neo-Nazi skinhead networks such as “Blood and Honour” appeared in Poland in the late 1990s, too, and found themselves a niche in youth popular culture. A number of skinhead activists joined larger political parties—such as the post-*endecja* League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin; LPR) and the populist Self-Defense (Samoobrona)—that received a combined 18 percent of the vote in the 2001 parliamentary election.

Rafal Pankowski

See Also: ANTIFASCISM; ANTI-SEMITISM; BOLSHEVISM; CAPITALISM; CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE; CONCENTRATION CAMPS; DEMOCRACY; DMOWSKI, ROMAN; FRANCE; GERMANY; HITLER, ADOLF; HOLOCAUST, THE; ITALY; LIBERALISM; MARXISM; MILITARY DICTATORSHIP; MUSSOLINI, BENITO ANDREA; NATIONALISM; NAZISM; NEO-NAZISM; NORWAY; PARAFASCISM; PARLIAMENTARISM; PIASECKI, BOLESLAW; PILSUDSKI, MARSHAL JOZEF; POLAND AND NAZI GERMANY; POSTWAR FASCISM; PROGRESS; SKINHEAD FASCISM; THIRD POSITIONISM; TOTALITARIANISM; WALL STREET CRASH, THE; WORLD WAR II

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