

THE POLISH RADICAL RIGHT IN BRITAIN: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Rob May, 19.11.2018

In an article for the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR) in May 2018, I argued that Poland has become a crucible for the radical right, encouraged and supported by its ruling party – the nationalist, social-conservative and Eurosceptic – Law and Justice (PiS). Since PiS came to power in 2015, the Polish radical right has spread its tentacles across Europe, backed by the Polish regime. This article will examine the recent activity of the Polish radical right in Great Britain.



Britain – in particular – is experiencing a wave of activity undertaken by Polish adherents of radical right ideology. In 2016, responding to a series of disturbances between ‘racist nuts’ from Poland and the police and protestors, a popular British tabloid newspaper ran a feature titled: ‘Polish neo-Nazis invade Britain to unleash terror on our streets’. Polish radicals have targeted London in particular. Swastikas have been sprayed on pavements, street signs and windows in Dollis Hill, north London, leaving Jewish residents frightened to leave their homes. Far right stickers from ‘Hooligans Poland’, labeling themselves ‘anti anti-fascists’, have appeared in Greenford, west London, while posters advertising a talk by, the former vice-president of the far right Polish political party National Movement, Marian Kowalski, have been plastered across the capital. Rafal Pankowski, sociologist and co-founder of the Polish anti-racist campaign group ‘Never Again’, labels this as a ‘conscious effort on the part of various Polish far right groups [to] send their people [and] leaders to the UK, to London.’

Polish extremists are also integrating with British fascists. Britain’s oldest far right party, the National Front (NF), recently commemorated its fiftieth anniversary with a rally held in the West Midlands. As part of a ‘reciprocal agreement’ with the NF, Polish fascists provided security for the event. According to the anti-fascist watchdog Hope Not Hate, approximately 30 Polish Nazis living in London are aligned to the Hitler-worshipping outfits, Combat 18 and Blood & Honour. Ironically, Britain First, one of the country’s most ardently anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic political parties, is targeting Polish immigrants for recruitment; deputy leader Jayda Fransen declared that she would take ‘a million Poles into this country before I took one Muslim.’

The Polish radical right appear to have connections with educational establishments in England. Several Polish Saturday schools appear to have links with Polish extremist groups and individuals: children at the Adam Mickiewicz Polish Saturday school in Blackburn were pictured performing above a banner for, the nationalist and anti-immigration group, Polska Niepodległa; The Julian Tuwima Polish School of Poland-Related Subjects’ (Essex) website features a picture of Marian Kowalski, the vice-chair of the Polish far right political party National Movement; and the Facebook page of the Polish School of the Mother Tongue in Southampton shows a photograph of people with a cake featuring the logo of the violent ethno-nationalist organisation, Ogniwo. When asked about the links to the Polish group, the school’s director, Rafal Sawulski, admitted that ‘a few of our parents in fact are members of Ogniwo’ and claimed that the school occasionally collaborates with groups similar to Ogniwo to organise events. Responding to these accusations, Krystyna Olliffe, chair of the Polish Educational Society, a charity that works with 130 Polish language Saturday schools in Britain, stated that ‘technical guidance’ has been given to all head teachers to ‘rule out any future cooperation with organisations representing radical and extremist views of any kind’. Although promising to tackle the problem, the Polish ambassador to the UK, Arkady Rzegocki, played down the issue, warning against ‘sweeping generalisations’.

Most concerning is the Polish state’s support of radical right activity in Britain. A BBC Newsnight investigation, aired in June 2018, found that the Polish Embassy in London part-funded an event, organised by a UK-based chapter of the ethno-nationalist and anti-immigrant organisation Polska Niepodlegla, that gave a platform to right-wing extremists in Britain. Several hundred Poles attended the Slough Book Fair, chaired by the far right television personality, Marcin Rola, who runs Wrealu24, the popular online TV station in Poland. In a recent broadcast, Rola claimed that ‘Muslim immigrant-invaders’ rape ‘everyone’: women, animals and, bizarrely, ‘holes in the fence’, concluding ‘well, we all know how they behave’. He also branded Muslims ‘savages’, paedophilia being their ‘daily bread’. When confronted by Newsnight, the embassy, which allowed its logo to feature on the event’s poster, said that it financed the ‘fair’ after ‘appropriate assessment’ by Poland’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The documentary also described how Polish extremists considered so extreme by the British government were stopped at the UK

border. However, following consular intervention by the embassy, a number of the prohibited group were let in. The Polish Embassy explained that ‘part of its role is to help all Polish citizens.’

Obviously, the vast majority of Polish people living in Britain do not adhere to radical right ideology. However, the growing menace of extremist activity undertaken by a minority of Polish nationals in the country is a cause for concern. Besides the irony of migrants attacking other migrants, it is disconcerting that supposedly hard line anti-immigrant, nationalist parties are recruiting from amongst Polish immigrants living in Britain. They clearly view the Polish community as fertile soil for their respective missions. Furthermore, far from attempting to combat the problem of Polish radical right activity, the Polish authorities are collaborating with their compatriots who are spreading hate in foreign lands. As Pankowski warns: If the Polish radical right in Britain ‘continues unchecked it could definitely get worse’ – with acts of violence possibly following thereafter.

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