



Irving and his friends

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There was quite a lot of discussion recently about the veteran Holocaust denier, David Irving, after Norman Finkelstein, a prominent anti-Zionist writer/academic made surprisingly favourable comments about him at a public Zoom meeting. I make no apology for reacting strongly about this at the time, and I was glad that some others did too. But this was far from universal. One of my main points was that Irving is not just some individual who said bad things a long time ago, but someone who has had continuing relationships with Far-Right groups in different countries.

I quoted the example of Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski (National Rebirth Poland – NOP), who have been very prominent with their distinctive flags in large and menacing fascist contingents on Poland’s huge Independence Day marches in recent years.

NOP are a fringe far-right agitational group in a country where a very right-wing ultra-nationalist government has provided so much breathing space for reactionary and antisemitic discourses, not least when they made crude attempts to outlaw statements of any Polish complicity in the Holocaust (as if the 18,000 strong Polish Blue Police who hunted down Jews being hidden by Polish non-Jews during the Holocaust years didn’t exist...). They have also been mounting attacks on “Jewish claims” of restitution of property owned before the Holocaust.

I’ve been doing a bit more research – and to be honest what I’ve found only gets worse but with an interesting twist.

The NOP are the oldest of the “new” Far-Right groups in Poland going back to the early 1980s, and they see themselves as deeply rooted in the tradition of the very antisemitic National Radical Camp, formed in 1934.

Their association with Irving goes back a few decades too (though not as far as the 1930s!). He has frequently contributed to their magazine *Szczerbiec* (which means a Polish Coronation sword). Irving’s

books have been translated into Polish by Bartek Zborski one of the editors of the magazine. NOP have a front organisation called Instytut Narodowo Radikalny which has promoted the works of several Holocaust deniers.

Although they are obsessively nationalist, the NOP are also active in their own forms of Screen Shot 2020-08-13 at 12.45.10international solidarity. They protested in support of David Irving when he was on trial in Austria for Holocaust denial. They protested in support of the Greek neo-Nazis of Golden Dawn when members of their party were on trial for attacks on anti-fascists, attempted murder, weapons possession, racketeering and other crimes. For a number of years they have had a London branch that has worked closely with the BNP .

NOP's London branch have been assiduously building links with other far right forces here. A few years ago they cooperated in an event with the "London Forum" – an outfit that is an umbrella for various Far Right, antisemitic, and neo-Nazi individuals – where they welcomed a very special guest – David Irving. London activists of NOP were very proud to have their pictures taken with such an eminent Holocaust denier.

NOP describe their ideology as "Third Positionist" – neither socialism nor capitalism, and wholly opposed to "abortion, artificial birth control, euthanasia, divorce, homosexuality, genetic experimentation on humans at any age and vivisection", since, they say, these "contravene God's Law and Objective Truth". They are very strong Catholics. Their opposition to homosexuality is particularly extreme at street level where on demonstrations their supporters shout "Gas the queers".

NOP declare their other main enemy to be multiculturalism. They claim that this is bringing about a "nightmare world" where "the very words Race, Nation and Culture would cease to have any meaning at all. Where the "richness of racial diversity" is replaced with "a rootless mass, lacking identity and history."

In an interview with one of their leaders last year, he was very clear about how Poland can make itself more secure from such forces: "No immigration... African, Asian or Jewish... even a small group of culturally alien people is a threat to the national community. Our home, Poland, needs to be rebuilt, not let hordes of people of other cultures into a politically, economically and ethically damaged country."

Their ultra-nationalism, Christianity, homophobia, opposition to minorities, and their antisemitism ought to make them feel comfortable with many aspect of the ruling PiS (Law and Justice Party), which has strong stands on all of these too, but here is an interesting twist: they condemn PiS as pro-Zionist, while they consider themselves thoroughly anti-Zionist. And indeed, despite some differences over the Holocaust Revisionist laws that PiS have put in place, PiS leaders have built a very positive relationship with Israel's very right wing Zionist leaders.

NOP, in contrast, are Far-Right anti-Zionists who describe Zionism as "a power structure of colossal proportions that straddles the globe. This structure includes not only the illegal Israeli regime, set up on the stolen land of Palestine, but also the power bases that Zionists have constructed in the spheres of Politics, Economics and the Media, especially in the USA and Europe... this power structure exists to serve and extend the interests of International Jewry, and this can only be done at the expense of the indigenous populations who have lost control of their countries to this discriminatory creed."

In this, NOP are much closer to Britain's older far-right ideologues like John Tyndall, who Screen Shot 2020-08-13 at 18.55.55 was fundamentally anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist, than it is to the more modern faces of the British Far-Right like Tommy Robinson, or Paul Golding of Britain First who are both very pro-Zionist, and apparently as comfortable holding Israeli flags as George Crosses or Union Jacks. Tyndall saw what he called "Jewish power", expressed both in diaspora communities and through the State of Israel as the main enemy.

In the light of Finkelstein's David Irving moment, I suspect that more care will be taken on left wing anti-Zionist platforms so that such moments can not recur. But it is also important for leftists, who are rightly opposed to Zionism and its daily repression and humiliation of Palestinians and denial of their rights, also take note of the rhetoric of Far Right anti-Zionists so that they absolutely steer well clear of any similar arguments.

We may generally consider Irving well past his sell-by date but he still has a certain influence on Far-Right/neo-Nazi agitators in the here, there and now.

Rafal Pankowski of Poland's Never Again Association, which monitors developments on the Far Right in Poland very closely, has made some very incisive observations. In a recent lecture he described the re-emergence of antisemitic Far-Right groups there as one of the paradoxes of the freeing up of politics in Poland after 1989. But he has described how commentators on the Left saw antisemitism as mainly confined to an ageing sector of Polish society who had long held such prejudices and were suddenly free to express them. The feeling was that antisemitism was not taking off among younger generations, and it would gradually decline as that older generation passed.

But developments since then have not borne that out. A range of emerging Far-Right groups have established a strong antisemitic ideology among younger people through developing a thriving Far-Right football and music scene. And this has blended well with their homophobic, Islamophobic, and misogynistic themes.

Another factor strengthening and cementing these themes together has been the growing cultural influence of Radio Maria, a far-right Catholic fundamentalist phenomenon, that is a social movement with radio, television, a university, and various front organisations which are strongly xenophobic and deeply antisemitic at the same time.

When PiS took power in 2015 they used a good deal of Islamophobic and anti-refugee rhetoric in their campaigning. Some commentators believed that Islamophobia had replaced antisemitism as a central far-right theme, which was bad enough and needed to be fought. But, especially in the last few days of the recent presidential elections, where the sitting candidate was desperate to gather all the available votes from people further to right than PiS voters, antisemitic themes came very much to the fore.

Irving and his younger friends remain a problem that faces us here, and in Poland. Our anti-fascist consciousness must be both raised and deepened if we are to successfully confront the threats they pose locally and globally.

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