

Polish Neo-Fascists Denounce Jewish Opposition to Holocaust Bill as 'Israeli Aggression' During Warsaw Rally

by Ben Cohen
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One week after the authorities prevented a mass demonstration outside the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw, neo-fascist groups in Poland are again mobilizing against “Jewish smears” and “Israeli aggression,” as the bitter dispute over the country’s new legislation prohibiting discussion of Polish collusion with Nazi Germany showed little sign of abating.

Polish President Andrzej Duda signed the IPN — Institute of National Remembrance Act into law on Tuesday, declaring that the legislation would ensure Poland’s “dignity and historical truth.”

Israel and Jewish groups internationally have been in the forefront of opposition to the legislation, which punishes any public reference to incidents of Poles collaborating with the Nazi occupiers with up to three years in prison.

On Monday night, supporters of the ultranationalist All-Polish Youth (MW) — a constituent of the far right “National Movement” coalition — gathered outside the President Palace in Warsaw to demand immediate signing of the bill into law. Openly antisemitic slogans — including one banner which read, “Take off the Kippah (Jewish skull cap)! Sign the Bill!” — were on display.

Addressing the far-right demonstrators, Robert Winnicki — the leader of the MW and a member of Poland’s parliament — fiercely attacked Israel as he called for the Jewish state’s ambassador, Anna Azari, to be declared “persona non grata.”

“We are dealing with an unprecedented diplomatic and political aggression by Israel against Poland,” Winnicki stated. “We are dealing with an international, global campaign of defamation, and Poland must be equipped with the tools to fight against this Israeli aggression.”

To applause, Winnicki continued: “We must have tools to prosecute the liars, to punish the liars, for the Polish state cannot be left defenseless against the Israeli, Jewish smears.”

Formed after the end of communist rule in 1989, and directly influenced by the pre-World War II antisemitic organization of the same name, the MW played a critical role in bringing 60,000 demonstrators onto the streets of Warsaw to mark Poland’s independence day in November 2017. The demonstration was one of the largest displays of force by the far right anywhere in Europe during the past decade.

On Tuesday, just hours after the demonstration outside President Duda’s residence, the MW released a manifesto carrying the title “Stop Jewish Arrogance” that was widely reported in the Polish media.

Describing Poland as a “vassal of the Jewish circles,” the manifesto asserted that the time had arrived for an examination by historians of the “disloyalty of a large part of Polish Jews to the Polish state” during World War II, including the alleged “denunciations” of Polish citizens to the Soviet occupation authorities by their Jewish neighbors. The MW manifesto went on to denounce the claim that Israel is a “strategic partner” of Poland, using the phrase “fifth column” to describe Poland’s Jewish community.

“We are on opposite sides of the geopolitical barricade,” the text stated. “Jews have always been a distinct civilization, based on different religious and cultural patterns. Suggesting an alleged closeness (with Christianity) is a falsehood.”

The manifesto called on young people in Poland to “awaken our nation from its lethargy by showing the true face of Polish-Jewish relations.”

The MW manifesto “is arguably the most radical stuff since the 1930s, and we are not talking about a small organization,” Rafal Pankowski — the founder of the anti-fascist NGO “Nigdy Wiecej” (“Never Again”) — told The Algemeiner on Tuesday.

While the MW does not publish its membership figures, the level of its support can be gleaned from turnout at its demonstrations, as well as opinion polls. A 2017 survey by the leading polling organization CBOS revealed that 38 percent of Poles aged between 18 and 24 support the MW and other far-right parties. Last November, the European Jewish Congress highlighted “a dramatic rise in recent antisemitic incidents in Poland” and cautioned against the “normalization of antisemitism, racism and xenophobia.”

On Tuesday, Israel’s principal Holocaust commemoration institution said that it intended to carefully “study the new reality” in Poland following Duda’s decision to sign the legislation.

Yad Vashem said in a statement that it had “repeatedly warned Polish authorities regarding the flaws in the wording of the law.”

“These flaws are liable to result in the distortion of history due to the limitations that the law places on public expressions regarding the collaboration of parts of the Polish population — either directly or indirectly — in crimes that took place on their own land during the Holocaust,” Yad Vashem said.

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