



POLAND

Madonna concert hit by racism controversyBy Rafal Pankowski for *Nigdy Wiecej* and Antifa-Net in Warsaw

CHRISTIAN fundamentalists cannot forgive Madonna for the quasi-religious associations of her stage name, it seems. An added aggravation of her first east European tour was the choice of 15 August, the Assumption Day holiday, for the Warsaw concert. All that could be dismissed, however, as a marketing ploy.

But the Madonna concert also sparked debate about some less than honourable activities of its main sponsor, Allegro, which has been accused of turning a blind eye to the rampant sale of racist and neo-nazi material on the internet.

Allegro is Poland's biggest internet trader. Its online auctions are full of openly nazi and racist propaganda material such as football hooligan stickers bearing the racist Celtic cross symbol, accompanied by slogans such as "Poland for the Polish" and "F*** the Gypsies".

Although these sales constitute a tiny fraction of the company's turnover, Allegro flatly rejects any attempts to curtail them. Despite numerous approaches by anti-racist campaigners and negative media publicity, the company refuses to address the issue. Polish law forbids the promotion of racist and fascist ideologies, but enforcement is notoriously lax. "Objects do not promote ideas, only people do. That is why we will not remove sales of objects such as cups or T-shirts with swastikas," says Allegro's spokesman Patryk Tryzubiak, echoing the view of his company's legal department.

According to this curious interpretation of the law, only face-to-face nazi propaganda is illegal, while the distribution of racist and nazi newspapers, banners and records is legitimate. Independent legal experts have denounced Allegro's claim. Allegro seems not even to respect its own rules, which theoretically ban the sale of racist material.

Allegro's behaviour is in stark contrast to the more responsible policy of Nasza-klasa.pl, which is comparable to Facebook. Nasza-klasa.pl approached the anti-racist Never Again Association for assistance after it emerged that the site had been used by nazis.

"It is surprising to see how strongly Allegro defends its racist and neo-fascist auctions, even though they

contain so much evil directed against fellow human beings," says Dr Bartek Gutowski, coordinator of the Never Again Association's online Delete Racism campaign.

Several respected writers, artists, academics and humanitarian activists signed an open letter, initiated by Never Again at the beginning of 2009, urging Allegro to halt its sales of racist material. Although the letter resulted in numerous press articles criticising Allegro, the company ignored it.

Poland's leading graffiti artists, the 3 Fala group, took the issue to the streets, painting graffiti in protest. A very popular rock band, Big Cyc (which participates in Never Again's Music Against Racism campaign), started interrupting its concerts to explain what is wrong with Allegro's policy of selling racist material.

The musicians initiated an open letter to Madonna shortly before her appearance in Warsaw, protesting at her sponsor's involvement in touting nazi material. This produced more debate in the national media, including on the main news channel, TVN24, and in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland's major daily.

During a concert in Romania a few days later, Madonna spoke out strongly against discrimination against Roma and gay people. She was met with loud boos from the audience, which clearly contained many racists.

Allegro is owned by Naspers, a multinational media company based in South Africa whose record is tainted by its involvement in apartheid-era policies. Founded in 1915 and until 1994 called Die Nasionale Pers (The National Press), it was one of the pillars of the apartheid establishment and intimately linked with the ruling racist Nationalist Party (NP).

Desmond Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation Commission examined the company in 1997 and 127 of its journalists, though not the company itself, made a submission to the Commission apologising for their role in the apartheid years. It admitted that "Naspers newspapers formed an integral part of the power structure which implemented and maintained apartheid through, for instance, supporting the NP in elections and

referendums".

Today Allegro is expanding into other East European markets including Ukraine, Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Russia, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary.

The 'Never Again' Association together with Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE) is planning a three-year high-profile anti-racist awareness raising campaign in the run-up to the 2012 European Football Championship in Poland and Ukraine. The issue of widespread online racist propaganda targeting football supporters is one of the topics to be tackled. "We are not going to let Allegro go on peddling racist material across the region," Dr Gutowski has warned. ◀

NORWAY

Islamophobes drowned out

From Henrik Lunde for Antifa-Net in Oslo

NORWAY'S TWO LEADING Islamophobic organisations, Stop the Islamisation of Norway (SIAN) and the small right-wing Norwegian Democrats, broke out of their tawdry internet existence by holding two outdoor events over the summer.

The move ended in catastrophe. In June, angry anti-racists chased them off before they reached their assigned gathering place in the centre of Oslo. In an interview SIAN's leader, Arne Tummyr, compared the situation in Norway to the beginning of the Second World War, declaring: "We had the choice to surrender or arm ourselves". He is now under investigation by the Oslo police for hate speech.

Their second attempt in late August was no less a fiasco. A tiny group of racists, who again had police permission to spread their poison in the centre of Oslo, were drowned out by a strong anti-racist counter-demonstration for the whole of the two hours granted for their rally.