

LEWISTON BRACES FOR WHITE SUPREMACIST RALLY

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LEWISTON, Maine - The arrest of white supremacist leader Matthew Hale could boost the chance of violence at a racist rally planned here for tomorrow, the city's police chief said yesterday.

"We're concerned that some of his followers will use this venue to make a strong statement" against his arrest, Chief William Welch said.

Hale, leader of the World Church of the Creator, was arrested Wednesday in Chicago on charges that he attempted to solicit the murder of a federal judge there.

Welch said no changes have been made in security plans for the rally that Hale planned to lead, which is expected to demand that the city's 1,100 Somali refugees be expelled from this mid-Maine community.

The chief said he has been told that Hale's deputy, Jon Fox, will replace Hale, who had intended to deliver a speech titled, "The Invasion of Maine by Somalis and How We Can End It."

Not only will police be on high alert, but the rally has drawn the attention of Maine's new governor, John Baldacci, who lashed out at the World Church in his inaugural address Wednesday.

Only a few dozen of Hale's neo-Nazi supporters are expected at the rally, consigned to a small out-building at the National Guard armory here. But police have planned for several hundred protesters at the site, and for a possible recurrence of the violence that flared at other locations where Hale has spoken.

"He kept preaching to us that he did not advocate violence, but that his message could lead to violence and that his people could defend themselves," Welch said.

A simultaneous counter-rally by the Many & One coalition, which advocates tolerance for diverse people and lifestyles, is expected to attract 3,000 people to the Bates College gymnasium.

Hale's formula - not preaching violence, but praising sometimes-deadly violence by his supporters - has marked his seven-year tenure as the high priest, or "pontifex maximus," of a small group that reveres Adolf Hitler and would remove all minorities and Jews from a "whites-only" United States.

"He's been very accommodating with us, frankly, up to a point where it was concerning," Welch said. "Whatever we wanted was fine with him."

Hale, who received a law degree from Southern Illinois University Law School in 1998 but was denied a state license because of his racist beliefs, is regarded as a shrewd, intelligent manipulator.

Hale can be a paragon of politeness when dealing with authorities such as Welch, but he also is a man who lavishes praise on a racist killer. After a 1999 shooting spree by former church member Benjamin Smith, Hale described Smith as a "martyr to free speech." Two people died and nine were wounded before Smith took his own life after a rampage that targeted blacks, Asians, and Jews.

At his arraignment Wednesday in Chicago, Hale was greeted in federal court by youthful supporters who delivered a Nazi-style salute. Hale, who is being held until a detention hearing Monday, faces up to 30 years in prison if convicted of soliciting murder.

A native of East Peoria, Ill., Hale developed a fascination with Hitler when he was 12 years old. He formed a Nazi group called The New Reich in eighth grade, unsuccessfully tried to organize an American White Supremacist Party at Bradley University, and began the National White Socialist Americans Party in 1992.

Although that group disbanded in 1995, Hale found a new home in the World Church of the Creator. Hale was elected in 1996 to a 10-year term as leader of the organization, which was founded in 1973 by former Florida legislator Ben Klassen.

Although the World Church is opposed to any religion that endorses racial mixing, Hale nevertheless characterizes his group as a spiritual organization devoted to "the survival, expansion, and advancement of the white race."

To his thinking, the white race has been the only source of world culture and civilization. Jews are not included in this grouping, according to Hale, who also describes blacks, Hispanics, and Asians as "the mud people."

Hale's arrest in Chicago this week by agents of an FBI-led terrorism task force occurred as he arrived for a contempt hearing in a trademark-infringement case. Federal prosecutors allege that he solicited the murder of US Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkowitz, who is hearing the case and had ordered Hale to stop using the name of World Church of the Creator, which resembles the title of an Oregon group that advocates racial tolerance.

Although Lefkowitz initially dismissed the Oregon claim, she was overturned on appeal.

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