

Police probe pub gig Nazis

by James McCarthy, Wales On Sunday

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POLICE have confirmed they are investigating an event in which a racist mob making “siege heil” salutes took over a Welsh pub for the night.

As exclusively revealed in last week’s Wales on Sunday, neo-Nazis claimed they were going to put on a night of 2-Tone ska music at the venue in Newport.

But instead, shaven-headed thugs turned up with banners bearing swastikas and “white pride” slogans at a 20th anniversary gig held to commemorate four members of far right Cardiff band Violent Storm, who died in a car crash on the M4 near Bristol.

The event happened as Newport was busy with drinkers celebrating Wales’ 24-3 RBS Six Nations victory over Italy on March 10.

If the joint council and police investigation finds licensing conditions were breached at the Riverside Tavern, the offence could carry a maximum sentence of six months’ jail or a £20,000 fine. The venue’s owners have previously claimed they were duped into booking the gig.

Meanwhile a source has claimed Special Branch – which deals with political extremists that could be a threat to the state – was investigating the matter.

Gwent Police has refused to confirm or deny the involvement of Special Branch.

The force said its own officers were working with the local authority’s licensing department.

A spokesman said: “Together with Newport City Council licensing department we are considering whether any licensing objectives were breached during the event.”

A spokesman for Newport council said: “I have been advised that this incident is now the subject of a police investigation and as such we are unable to comment any further at this stage.”

Unite Against Fascism spokesman Weyman Bennett welcomed the investigation.

Simon Cressy, of anti-fascist group Hope Not Hate, said: “I’m surprised if Special Branch are involved, but I think it is good that they are taking it seriously.”

As reported last week, those attending the event included a man who wore a jacket bearing the name of far-right group Knights Templar.

Norway mass killer Anders Behring Breivik attended the meeting at which the group was founded in London in 2002.

Another wore a Skrewdriver T-shirt with the motto “Our pride is our loyalty” on it.

Skrewdriver were an English white power band whose singer was killed in a 1993 road smash.

Licensing lawyer Maria Guida explained licensees must abide by rules including keeping children from harm, preventing public nuisance, maintaining public safety and preventing crime and disorder.

She said: "In terms of licensing objectives, they are quite rigid. The council would not be permitted to say, 'You have breached a licensing objective, how could you allow such a show?'"

"That does not come into it at all. Unless there was any trouble or anything that affected the licensing objectives."

Riverside Tavern owners Enterprise Inns were contacted, but at the time of writing had not commented.

But last week the company insisted the venue's landlord had no idea of the nature of the gig until it started.

A spokeswoman said: "Our publican accepted a booking for a ska function in good faith and was completely unaware of the true nature of the function intended by the person who made the booking until guests started to arrive at the pub.

"Our publican informed the police who attended the site and have praised our publican for his responsible retailing in this instance.

"It was never Enterprise's or its publican's intention to host a function of the nature that took place at the site, and it is not intended that any events of this nature will take place in the future."