

Ukraine: ultra-right groups active in Ukrainian opposition

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In its enthusiasm for the Ukrainian opposition, the Western media has conveniently overlooked the fact that ultra-right groups are active inside the opposition movement known as the “Orange Revolution.”

Members of fascist organizations represent a small minority among opposition supporters and have not played a leading role in the ongoing demonstrations in Kiev. Nevertheless, their participation in the mass rallies is not coincidental. They are neither unwanted fellow travellers, nor troublemakers smuggled in by the regime of President Leonid Kuchma.

Both of the most prominent opposition leaders, former prime minister Viktor Yushchenko and multi-millionaire and former deputy prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, have maintained political relations for several years with organizations that have expressed and defended fascist and anti-Semitic viewpoints.

Alongside anti-communists, neo-liberals and Christian Democratic parties, Yushchenko’s parliamentary group “Our Ukraine” includes an organisation calling itself the “Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists” (KUN).

The KUN was founded in 1992 as the political exile organization of the “Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists—Stepan Bandera fraction.” The followers of Bandera espouse a fascist ideology and a militantly anti-communist, anti-Russian and anti-Polish policy. Bandera’s movement fought in the Second World War—initially on the side of Nazi Germany against the Soviets—and demanded “independence” for the Ukraine in those regions invaded by the German army.

Following the conquest of Ukraine, the Nazis no longer needed the assistance of “Slavic sub-humans.” They rejected independence for Ukraine and began to persecute Ukrainian nationalists. The Bandera faction was forced to oppose the German army, but during and after the war it focused its activities against the Soviet army.

This is the tradition which the KUN represents. Until

the end of the 1990s, it maintained a paramilitary organization named Tryzub, which carried out its activities in the name of the “Stepan Bandera Sports Patriotic Association.”

Up until July of this year, Yushchenko’s “Our Ukraine” included a second fascist group, the “All-Ukrainian Party of Liberty” (Svoboda), led by Oleh Tyahnybok. It was originally called the “Ukrainian National Socialist Party” (SNPU), and used a combination of a trident and swastika as its party symbol.

At the start of 2004, in preparation for the presidential election campaign, the party changed its name and symbol. Nevertheless, in July, Tyahnybok publicly praised nationalist Ukrainian partisans in the Second World War who had “cleansed the country of Russians and Jews.”

“There is a need,” he explained, “for Ukraine to be finally returned to Ukrainians” and liberated from the “Muscovite Jewish mafia that runs Ukraine today.” Media outlets close to the government took up this statement to attack the opposition. As a result, Yushchenko banned Tyahnybok and his group from “Our Ukraine.”

The forces aligned with Yulia Tymoshenko also include extreme right-wing organizations, e.g., the “Ukrainian Conservative Republican Party” (UCRP), which was founded in 1992 by the former dissident Stepan Khmara. The group is fanatically anti-communist and calls for the “overthrow of the Russian Empire.”

In the course of public protests against Russia, the UCRP collaborated with the “Ukrainian National Assembly—Self-Defence” (UNA UNSO), led by Andrei Shkil, which likewise belongs to the bloc headed by Tymoshenko.

The Ukrainian National Assembly was created in 1990, and its paramilitary arm (UNA UNSO) in 1991, following the attempted putsch in Moscow. It is reputed to have

more than 1,000 fighters, who are alleged to have been active in the first Chechnya war on the side of the Chechens, in the Yugoslavia war on the side of the Croats, and also in Georgia.

The English-language section of its web site includes such items as a statement of solidarity with the Chilean ex-dictator General Augusto Pinochet, a report on a congress of the UNA UNSO, at which the organisation signed an agreement for “friendship and cooperation” with representatives of the German neo-Fascist NPD, and a long essay on the ideology and politics of UNA UNSO.

The essay states that Andrei Shkil, the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Nationalist*, sports the emblem of the Ukrainian division of the Nazi SS Galicia. In the *Nationalist*, Shkil not only praises the racist ideologists Count Gobineau and Walter Darré, but also the book *Mein Kampf* and its author (Hitler’s name is not mentioned) for “re-examining these ideas (of Gobineau and Darré) at the highest level.”

It is therefore not surprising that Shkil has used his position as parliamentary delegate to call for the transfer of the bodies of Stepan Bandera and Simon Petlyura. The latter’s troops fought against the Bolsheviks in 1918-19 and killed some 30,000 Jews in pogroms.

In March 2001, Shkil and his organization generated headlines when they fought street battles with the police in the course of protests against President Kuchma. As a result, Shkil was condemned 18 months later to a term of imprisonment. Following the sentencing of Shkil, Yushchenko and other politicians of the opposition condemned the court decision as a political judgment. Speaking in parliament, Tymoshenko called fifteen members of Shkil’s organisation sentenced to prison terms of 2-5 years “the best representatives of the nation.”



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