

Harper's "Victims of Communism" monument and the revival of bellicose Canadian nationalism

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Led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Canada's Conservative government has gone to great lengths over the past two years to push a project to build a memorial for the "Victims of Communism" in the heart of downtown Ottawa.

While some commentators have noted the irony and hypocrisy of the projected memorial and even gone so far as to bemoan its "ideological" character, most have described it as Harper's "pet peeve project" and a mere act of "political gamesmanship." None, even among opponents of the memorial, have linked the promotion of the anti-communist monument to the ruling establishment's recent efforts to "rebrand" Canada's national identity in right-wing, militarist terms—terms which better correspond to the present needs of Canadian imperialism.

Whereas official opposition to the project has mainly focused on the monument's location, size, and price, the profound public opposition documented by national polls—over 82 percent are against—reflects broader opposition towards the Harper government, a government above all characterized by social reaction. A key element of this has been the drive to revive the militaristic traditions of Canadian imperialism, including the promotion of Canada as a "warrior" nation.

A look at the monument's main official backer, the "Tribute to Liberty" foundation, is in itself revealing. The foundation's members are exclusively composed of prominent lobbyists and corporate representatives of the Eastern European and Asian business diaspora. Among the more noteworthy board members is the president of the Ukrainian-Canadian Congress (UCC), Paul Grod, who personally accompanied Stephen Harper on his visit to Kiev in March last year. The UCC has played a key role in assisting the Canadian government in its staunch support for the far-right regime installed in Kiev through the February 2014 coup, including helping arm fascist-militias that are currently allied with the Kiev government through its SOS Ukraine charity.

The UCC celebrates Stepan Bandera, the Ukrainian nationalist and Nazi collaborator, who fought the Soviets during World War II, and includes among its member organizations groups founded by Bandera's supporters who fled to Canada at the war's conclusion. On Remembrance Day in 2010, Grod hailed Ukrainian nationalist fighters who joined the Waffen SS during World War II as "freedom fighters." In the immediate aftermath of the war, Grod's predecessors in the UCC lobbied the Canadian government

to accept at least 2,000 survivors from this force, known as the Galicia Division.

Given such credentials, it isn't surprising to find that Tribute to Liberty claims the notorious anti-communist work, *The Black Book of Communism*, as its main inspiration on its website. As the WSWS noted upon its release, the book is a collection of "every accusation ever made against socialism or communism." (See: "The spectre returns! - A political evaluation of Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus [The Black Book of Communism]")

One of the book's key assumptions, as with anti-communism in general, is the lumping together of Stalinism and communism, as well as the conflation of Stalinism and fascism into "totalitarianism." The German edition of this work, which was originally written by disgruntled French ex-radicals, was published with a contribution by the man who would become Germany's president, Joachim Gauck, and who currently plays a leading role in the revival of German militarism.

As the world capitalist crisis is deepening, more and more governments around the world are reviving right-wing traditions which had been set aside or marginalized during the Cold War. In Germany, the revival of militarism requires a falsification of the past so as to whitewash German imperialism's horrific crimes in the two world wars of the last century. This is why the historian Jörg Baberowski, who attempts to downplay Nazi crimes against the Jews and to justify the Third Reich's eastward expansion as essentially a defensive move in reaction to the so-called excesses of Bolshevism, has suddenly become a media star. As such, the promotion of militarism is closely bound up with the promotion of anti-communism.

In the case of Canada, the revival of the more militaristic and aggressive traditions associated with Canadian imperialism in the first half of the 20th century is bound up with the rejection of Canadian nationalism as it was reformulated in the 1960s and 1970s. Prior to this time, the dominant strand of Canadian nationalism was explicitly right-wing, as exemplified by the official Canadian motto, "peace, order and good government." This included depicting the US as too democratic and too egalitarian.

Under the Liberal governments of Lester Pearson and Pierre Trudeau and in part as a means of harnessing an increasingly rebellious working class, Canadian nationalism was recast. Canada

was now presented as a “kinder, gentler” liberal society in contrast with the “rapacious dollar republic” to the south. This also included promotion of the claim that Canada was a “middle power” with a special vocation as a peacekeeper and mediator in world affairs.

In fact, Ottawa’s so-called “peacekeeping” missions were always carried out in the interests of the imperialist powers, beginning with the 1956 Suez Crisis, when the creation of a UN peacekeeping force helped the US to impose its will in the Middle East over the traditional colonial powers, Britain and France, while preserving the unity of the major capitalist powers against the USSR. Throughout the latter decades of the Cold War, when the myth of Canada as a “peacekeeper” was highly promoted, the vast bulk of Canada’s military was integrated into Washington’s preparations for war with the Soviet Union, through NATO and NORAD.

Since the 1917 October Revolution, anti-communism has always been an essential part of Canadian ruling class ideology. Canada was one of the imperialist powers that sent an expeditionary force to Russia to fight alongside the White armies of the feudal aristocracy and bourgeoisie against the Bolshevik-led workers-and-peasant regime. The use of the military to suppress the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike was justified in the name of crushing a Bolshevik or communist conspiracy. And in the years to follow, thousands of militant foreign-born workers were deported as part of an anti-communist and anti-labor witch hunt. During the first quarter century of its existence, that is roughly until World War Two, the Communist Party of Canada was repeatedly banned and socialists faced the constant threat of ruthless state repression.

The Canadian ruling class’s close alliance with the US ensured that as the Cold War developed in the post-war era, anti-communism remained a central feature of its ideology. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, and with the assistance of the top leadership of the social-democratic CCF, the forerunner of the NDP, the trade unions carried out a purge of communist and left-wing workers.

In this period and as part of the Cold War confrontation with the USSR, the Canadian state admitted an estimated 2,000 anti-Soviet Ukrainian nationalists, many of them Bandera supporters. Hundreds more Nazis and their collaborators were funneled through Canadian immigration with the support of US intelligence, with one renowned historian remarking pointedly that anti-communism was so pervasive that a war veteran could gain entry to Canada by showing their SS tattoo.

But with the reformulation of Canadian nationalism in the 1960s, both Canada’s martial tradition—Canada was a major belligerent in both world wars of the twentieth century—and “Red Scare”-style anti-communism were de-emphasized, with the latter largely set aside.

This is no longer the case. The “Victims of Communism” memorial project received official government endorsement in the October 2013 Speech From the Throne. The speech lists it among initiatives to be undertaken in the run-up to the celebrations marking the 150th anniversary of Confederation. In addition to the Ottawa “Victims” memorial, the speech called for celebrations to mark the centennial of the beginning of the First World War and

the 75th anniversary of the start of the Second World War. Both events, as the WSWS noted last year in a comment on the ceremonies surrounding the anniversaries, celebrated the imperialist carnage as proud and defining moments in Canada’s coming of age as a nation.

The speech also lists “Honouring the proud history of our Canadian Armed Forces by restoring military traditions,” an initiative already anticipated in 2011 with the move to restore the traditional “royal” moniker to the air force and navy, and “honouring the service of our men and women in uniform, including those who made the ultimate sacrifice combating the spread of terrorism.” The glorification of the military and the linking of its past to present interventions is aimed at signaling Canada’s readiness to increase its participation in present and future imperialist wars. Indissolubly tied to the promotion of war abroad, the official promotion of anti-communism at home must be understood as the Canadian bourgeoisie’s rallying cry in the face of mounting social inequality and its common fear of a working class challenge to it.

The fact that the Conservatives have, up until now, spearheaded the effort to develop an explicitly right-wing bellicose nationalism should not foster any illusions regarding the other political representatives of the bourgeoisie. The Liberals and the New Democratic Party (NDP) are in full agreement with the revival of Canadian militarism and both parties have committed themselves to military spending hikes and further modernization, i.e. rearmament, of the armed forces. NDP leader Thomas Mulcair and Liberal chief Justin Trudeau have spent the election campaign seeking to outdo each other in taking an aggressive stance against Russia and declaring their solidarity with the far-right Kiev regime.

All the major parties contesting the October 19 federal election have also expressed their support for the “Victims of Communism” monument. In extending their support to the project’s anti-historical narrative and linking it to current Canadian foreign policy aims, the comments of some candidates are particularly revealing. In a letter published on tributetoliberty.ca, NDP leader Thomas Mulcair extended his support to the memorial project and, in an obvious reference to present-day CAF interventions, added, “[It] will also serve as an important reminder for all persons of conscience that it is our duty to prevent similar wrongdoings from being visited on others.

Similarly, in her letter of support, Green Party leader Elizabeth May expresses enthusiasm for what she terms as a “clarion call for resistance to current manifestations of totalitarian communism.”



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