

Canadian media denounces exposure of foreign minister's grandfather as Nazi collaborator

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The *Globe and Mail* and some other Canadian media outlets reported last week that Liberal Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland's maternal grandfather collaborated with the Nazis during World War II. Mikhail Chomiak was chief editor of a Ukrainian nationalist newspaper in Krakow, Poland, *Krakivs'ki Visti*.

The paper, among the most important Ukrainian nationalist publications under the Nazis, was established in January 1940 with the full support of the German occupation. The Nazis provided Chomiak and his staff, drawn from a Ukrainian nationalist society, with printing equipment and their offices, having seized them from a Jewish newspaper that had formerly operated on the same premises. *Krakivs'ki Visti* printed Nazi propaganda, including anti-Semitic diatribes, and political and cultural material on the Ukrainian nationalist movement, which cooperated intimately with the Nazis during the war of annihilation they launched against the Soviet Union in June 1941. *Krakivs'ki Visti* began as a twice-weekly and appeared six-times a week under Chomiak's editorship from November 1940 until the end of March 1945. When the Red Army approached Krakow in October 1944, Chomiak and his staff fled to Vienna, where within a matter of days they resumed daily publication.

When asked at a March 6 press conference about her grandfather's ties to the Nazis, Freeland denounced the story as part of a Russian "disinformation" campaign aimed at destabilizing Canadian "democracy."

"I don't think it's a secret," declared Freeland, "American officials have publicly said, and even [German Chancellor] Angela Merkel has publicly said, that there were efforts on the Russian side to destabilize Western democracies, and I think it shouldn't come as a surprise if these same efforts were used against Canada. I think that Canadians and indeed other western countries should be prepared for similar efforts to be directed at them."

But it quickly became clear that it was Freeland—who has previously praised her maternal grandparents, saying their experiences "had a very big effect on me"—who was the one spreading "disinformation." Moreover, she has long known about this chapter in her family history having co-authored an article two decades ago with her uncle, historian J.P. Himka, dealing with Chomiak's role during the war.

Nevertheless, the corporate media rushed to Freeland's defence. With one voice it declared the story was Russian disinformation aimed at undermining the ability of the Foreign Minister—a staunch advocate of Ukraine's ultra-nationalist, pro-western government—to defend "democratic" Ukraine and otherwise oppose Russian "aggression."

For months Canada's media has echoed the unsubstantiated claims of much of the US military intelligence establishment, the Democratic Party, and leading Republican war-hawks like John McCain that Russian President Vladimir Putin, working with WikiLeaks, surreptitiously

intervened in the US election to favour Donald Trump. While initially a major motivation of the claims of Russian subversion was to divert attention from the substance of Hilary Clinton's leaked emails, their overriding purpose has been to prepare the political ground for an intensification of US-NATO aggression against Russia.

Now faced with the revelation that Freeland's grandfather was a prominent Nazi collaborator, Canada's media has responded in similar fashion. It has dismissed the revelation itself as unimportant, while seeking to transform it into grist for the Canadian ruling elite's anti-Russia propaganda campaign.

Leading columnists have sought to downplay Chomiak's role in assisting the German occupation, with some going so far as to offer up bald apologies for Nazi collaboration. Writing in the *National Post*, Colby Cosh declared, "I doubt whether it is appropriate for any of us to sit in judgment on Chomiak." The *Ottawa Citizen*'s Terry Glavin described *Krakivs'ki Visti*, a newspaper which published a special edition to promote recruitment for the Ukrainian division of the Waffen SS—a force implicated in some of the worst Nazi crimes including the mass extermination of Jews—as "the only intellectual lifeline left to the people of the dismembered Ukraine at the time."

While others have been more critical, all the pundits are insistent that the exposure of the Nazi ties of Freeland's grandfather is a Russian "smear," an irrelevancy having nothing to do whatsoever with contemporary events in Ukraine or Canada—except as a further demonstration that the Russians are bent on subverting "democracy."

Thus, *Edmonton Journal* columnist Paula Simons wrote of Chomiak, "Just labelling him a collaborator oversimplifies a horribly complicated time. But it certainly suits Vladimir Putin and his allies now to insinuate that Freeland's credibility is tainted by her grandfather's past." *Maclean's* columnist Scott Gilmore, who not incidentally is the husband of Canadian Environment Minister Catherine McKenna, titled his comment on the Freeland issue "Russia's coming attack on Canada: The smear job on Chrystia Freeland is only the start. Why Canada is a logical next target in Moscow's desperate clandestine war."

Fellow liberal Michael Harris, writing for *i Politics*, declared, "Russia is working to destabilize democracies. Canada is now in the crosshairs."

Canada and the ultra-right in Ukraine

Freeland and Canada's media are determined to suppress discussion of her grandfather's actions during World War II and downplay if not excuse his role as a Nazi collaborator, because they recognize how damaging it

would be for Canada's ruling elite if working people began to examine the political-ideological character and pedigree of the forces, Ottawa—under Liberal and Conservative governments alike—has been collaborating with in Ukraine.

Working alongside the US, Germany and other European imperialist powers and as part of a strategic offensive aimed at harnessing Ukraine to the west and using it to further encircle and pressure Russia, Canada has worked closely with ultra-right and neo-fascist forces. These forces are the political and intellectual successors of the Ukrainian nationalist movement that collaborated with the Nazis and participated in the Holocaust during World War II.

Indeed many of them, including the current government in Kiev, celebrate the Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera and his Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which engaged in brutal round-ups and mass killings of Jews, Poles and other minorities during the Second World War. Others, like the Right Sector militia, not only hail Bandera, but publicly identify with and pattern themselves in the fascist tradition.

Canada actively supported, including by funneling money to so-called opposition groups, the US-orchestrated “regime change” operation in Ukraine that culminated in the February 2014 coup in Kiev, against elected pro-Russian President Victor Yanukovich. This coup was spearheaded by ultra-right forces like the Right Sector and Svoboda Party, who violently attacked security forces so as to scuttle a compromise agreement between protesters and Yanukovich.

Canada's media is well aware of the extreme right-wing forces in and around the Ukrainian government and the role that fascist militia have played as “shock troops” in the war against pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine. Occasionally, when these forces threaten to cut across the imperialist agenda in Ukraine, the *Globe* or another media outlet will write a worried article about how right-wing militia might topple the Kiev government.

Reports about Chomiak began emerging in the Canadian media the same day that Trudeau's Liberal government unveiled a plan to extend the Canadian army's training mission in Ukraine by a further two years. Since 2015, 200 Canadian troops have been stationed in the west of the country, providing military training to the Ukrainian Army and National Guard to, in Trudeau's words, “liberate” the Donbas region from pro-Russian separatists. This is only the most obvious sign of Canada's staunch support for the far right, virulently anti-Russian regime in Kiev. Ottawa has also negotiated a free trade agreement with Kiev and offered favourable loans to Kiev to enable it to avert bankruptcy and continue the war.

Canada's key role in the US-led anti-Russian offensive in Eastern Europe goes well beyond Ukraine. Canada was among the most vehement supporters of expanding NATO eastward to Russia's borders during the 1990s and first decade of the current century in violation of the commitments given Moscow at the end of the Cold War.

Four hundred and fifty Canadian troops are due to deploy to Latvia in the coming months to assume command of one of four NATO “forward-deployed” battalions to be positioned in the Baltic states and Poland to encircle Russia. The governments in all four of these countries are ultra-nationalist and hostile to Russia, increasing the likelihood that a provocation or unintended clash could trigger an all-out conflict that would rapidly lead to war between the US and Russia, the world's foremost nuclear powers.

Canadian imperialism's readiness to work with such reactionary, ultra-right forces is bound up with the increasingly aggressive, predatory policy it has pursued in alliance with Washington over the past quarter-century. From the bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999 and the neocolonial occupation of Afghanistan to NATO's 2011 regime change war in Libya and the current war in Syria and Iraq, Canadian forces have helped US imperialism raze entire societies. In the process, Canada has joined the US

in working with extreme-right wing political forces, frequently including Islamist militia groups. During NATO's war on Libya, Canadian airmen described themselves as “al-Qaeda's air force.”

In league with Washington, Canada's government and military also collaborated with extreme right-wing forces to oust Haiti's elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004. As a force of ex-soldiers led by former leaders of the *Tonton Macoutes* approached Port-au-Prince, Canadian and US troops occupied key strategic locations in the capital and deposed Aristide. They remained in the country afterwards to train a new police force capable of maintaining a pro-US government in Port-au-Prince and suppressing opposition in the Western hemisphere's poorest country.

Canadian imperialism's turn to militarism and use of far-right forces as proxies on the world stage has been accompanied by a rapid shift to the right in domestic politics. The Canadian ruling elite has slashed public services and social programs, while abolishing core democratic rights in the name of the “war on terror,” which has also served as a pretext for whipping up anti-Muslim bigotry. The Liberal government's determination to establish a close partnership with the Trump administration, the most right-wing in US history, underscores how far the stampede to the right has gone.

Canada's role as a post-war refuge for Ukrainian Nazi collaborators

As important as the contemporary political interests of Canadian imperialist foreign policy are, they do not fully account for the closing of ranks around Freeland in the wake of the Chomiak revelation.

Canada has long served as an ideological center for far-right, Ukrainian nationalism, a process that began following World War II.

As part of its reactionary Cold War anti-communist and anti-Soviet policy, and with Washington's active encouragement, Ottawa opened its doors in the years following 1945 to large numbers of Nazi collaborators drawn from the ranks of Bandera's OUN and the pro-Nazi forces that made up the 14th Grenadier Division of the Waffen SS, also known as the Galicia Division. Chomiak entered Canada as part of this wave of Nazi-collaborator immigrants.

The Canadian government and media systematically covered up and ignored the presence of thousands of these pro-fascist Ukrainian fighters in Canada (an estimate by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in the 1980s put the figure at 2,000), including in an official government-sponsored investigation into war criminals.

The political descendants of these hard-right forces continue to play a prominent role in Canada's policy towards Ukraine today. During his visit to the country last year, Trudeau was accompanied by representatives of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, whose leader is Paul Grod. In 2010, Grod proclaimed on the occasion of Remembrance Day that the Galicia Division were fighters “for their ancestral Ukrainian homeland.”

Trudeau was also joined by UCC members who were involved in the Army SOS group. This organization held private fundraising events with the backing of the Harper Conservative government to supply military equipment, including weaponry, to the volunteer battalions directly on the front line of the Ukrainian civil war. Many of these battalions are drawn from far-right political parties and openly espouse fascistic views.

That prominent media commentators are ready to excuse Chomiak's collaboration with the Nazis as understandable and even justified must be taken as a warning by working people of the erosion of any democratic sensibility within the ruling elite. Even the *Toronto Star*'s resident social-democrat, Thomas Walkom, embraced the arguments of the right-wing in his piece, asserting, “I don't judge Chomiak. War presents impossible

choices. Presumably, he and his wife reckoned they would fare better under a Nazi dictatorship than a Soviet one.”

Such arguments, which portray the Soviet Union as equally or even more menacing than the Hitler dictatorship, have invariably been linked to right-wing efforts to downplay the horrific crimes of the Nazis, whitewash the vile role of their collaborators in Ukraine and elsewhere, and provide legitimacy to the revival of militarism and fascism internationally, including such forces as France’s National Front and Pegida in Germany.



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