How Canada emerged as a haven for Ukrainian Nazi collaborators

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Earlier this month, Canada hosted the third Ukraine Reform Conference, a gathering of diplomats and officials from over 100 countries aimed at bringing Kiev even more directly under the geopolitical and economic domination of the western imperialist powers.

After meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on the conference sidelines, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau vowed “to stand with Ukraine against Russian interference and aggression,” and to support it in the struggle to end Russia’s “illegal annexation” of Crimea.

Trudeau’s portrayal of Russia as the aggressor in Ukraine and Eastern Europe turns reality on its head. It conceals the fact that Canada played a major supporting role in the US-orchestrated, fascist-spearheaded February 2014 coup that chased Ukraine's elected president from power and brought a far-right, pro-western regime to power in Kiev; and that the 2014 coup was the continuation of a longstanding US-led, Canadian-backed drive to expand NATO to Russia's borders and harness Ukraine to the West.

Moreover, Canadian imperialism has been playing a leading role in the subsequent US-NATO war drive against Russia. This includes supporting Washington's withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia; taking command and providing the bulk of the troops for one of NATO's four new “forward deployed” battalions in Poland and the three Baltic states; and deploying 200 Canadian Armed Forces personnel to Ukraine since 2015 to help prepare its army and National Guard to, in Trudeau's words, “liberate” Ukrainian territory.

But Canada’s intimate alliance with far-right Ukrainian nationalists did not begin in 2014, or even Dec. 1991, when Canada became the first western country to recognize Ukraine as a sovereign state. In the decades following World War II, Canada became a haven for far-right Ukrainian nationalists, many of whom had collaborated with the Nazis both in their drive to find “lebensraum” (living space) through the conquest of the Soviet Union and their genocidal “final solution to the Jewish problem.”

Under conditions of the postwar US-led military-strategic offensive against the Soviet Union—what euphemistically came to be known as the Cold War—these ultra-reactionary political forces came to be seen as useful allies due to their virulent anticommunism and hostility to anything and anyone associated with the Soviet Union.

In the immediate postwar period, Canada’s then Liberal government, working in close cahoots with US and British intelligence, opened Canada's doors to Ukrainian Nazi collaborators. These included members of the infamous 14th Grenadier Division of the Waffen SS, also known as the Galicia Division.

Among the beneficiaries of this policy was Mikhail Chomiak, the grandfather of current Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland. Chomiak served as editor of a pro-Nazi Ukrainian nationalist newspaper during the war, *Krakivs ’ ki Visti*, which used publishing equipment commandeered by the Nazis from a Jewish newspaper they had shut down. Chomiak emigrated to northern Alberta after fleeing to Vienna in late 1944 in the face of the advancing Red Army (see: Canadian media denounces exposure of foreign minister’s grandfather as Nazi collaborator).

The scale of the influx of Nazi collaborators only became public knowledge in the 1980s. A comprehensive study carried out by Alti Rodal on behalf of the federal government-appointed Deschênes Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals in Canada uncovered records proving that US intelligence agents in Europe had funneled Nazi collaborators from Eastern Europe through the Canadian immigration system using false papers. Rodal revealed that large numbers of identically typed applications were received by Canada's immigration department from one address in West Germany. On closer inspection, this address turned out to be a US military base.

The Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney established the Deschênes Commission in 1985, in response to a mounting public outcry over exposures of Nazis and Nazi accomplices who had found a safe haven in Canada and tasked the inquiry with identifying Nazi war criminals residing in Canada.

Around the same time, the Simon Wiesenthal Center estimated that upwards of 2,000 Nazis and Nazi collaborators emigrated to Canada in the years after the war. A quarter-century later, in 2011, it would give Canada an “F minus” in its annual report ranking countries on their efforts to prosecute war criminals. This placed Canada on a par with Ukraine and the former Baltic republics, i.e. countries where the right-wing, nationalist regimes that have emerged since the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union openly venerate the ultranationalists who aligned with the Nazis when they invaded the USSR.

War criminals in Canada

A significant number of those who made their way to Canada were members of the Nazi SS’s Galicia Division, which was made up of Ukrainian nationalist volunteers who fought on the side of the *Wehrmacht* against the Red Army during the Nazis’ war of annihilation against the Soviet Union. This preplanned onslaught—launched in June 1941 when a 3 million-strong force comprised of German troops, their Axis allies and fascist volunteers invaded the Soviet Union—led to the deaths of 27 million Soviet citizens and the Holocaust.

In waging war, suppressing the population, and pursuing the annihilation of the Jews, across Eastern Europe and above all in the USSR, Hitler’s Wehrmacht and SS shock troops relied on the loyal collaboration of ultraright-wing, anti-Semitic forces. Among the Ukrainian nationalists, in both occupied Poland and the USSR, the Nazis found eager collaborators. The Galicia Division was formed in 1943 out of a faction of the Stepan Bandera-led Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists Bandera (OUN-B) and fought with the Nazis against the Red

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Army throughout 1944.

Massacres perpetrated by the division against Polish and Jewish civilians have been well documented, including at Huta Pieniacka, Podkamien, and Palikrowy. At Podkamien, 100 Polish civilians were massacred in a hilltop monastery, and at least a further 500 in surrounding villages as the Red Army approached the German-occupied area in March 1944.

Members of the Galicia Division were initially prohibited from entering Canada due to their membership in the SS. But in 1950, Britain made an appeal to the Commonwealth for volunteers to accept a total of 9,000 division members who were at that time residing in the UK after being disarmed by British troops at the war's end.

When Canada's External Affairs Department, prompted by complaints from the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), raised concerns about the division's ties to the Nazis and role in Nazi atrocities, the British government insisted that it had carried out background checks. "While in Italy these men were screened by Soviet and British missions and neither then nor subsequently has any evidence been brought to light which would suggest that any of them fought against the Western Allies or engaged in crimes against humanity," claimed the British Foreign Office. "Their behaviour since they came to this country," added London, "has been good and they have never indicated in any way that they are infected with any trace of Nazi ideology."

With this letter serving as political cover, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent and his cabinet declared that Galicia Division members would be permitted to immigrate to Canada unless it could be proved that they had personally committed atrocities against civilian populations based on "race, religion or national origins." Simply having been a Galicia Division member would not be considered a valid reason to prevent entry, even though after the war all Waffen-SS members had been deemed complicit in war crimes.

The immigration of Nazi and Nazi-allied war criminals continued for more than a decade after the war and was a significant factor in Canada's emergence during the Cold War as a political-ideological centre of far-right Ukrainian nationalism.

Speaking to a CBS "60 Minutes" programme in 1997, Canadian historian Irving Abella, who is currently Professor for Canadian Jewish history at York University, bluntly summed up the political climate of the time. "One way of getting into postwar Canada," he said "was by showing the SS tattoo. This proved that you were an anti-Communist."

Ottawa carried out this policy in close collaboration with US authorities, who similarly permitted ex-Nazis to settle in the US and recruited hundreds to act as spies against the Soviet Union and the Soviet-allied regimes in Eastern Europe. According to investigative reporter Eric Lichtblau, up to 1,000 former Nazis were made use of by the CIA in Europe, within the US itself, the Middle East, and in Latin America.

The open-door policy towards Nazi collaborators stood in stark contrast to the cold shoulder given by Canada to Jews desperately fleeing persecution. Abella coauthored a well-known book, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe*, which was published in 1983 just prior to the establishment of the Deschênes Commission. Abella and Harold Troper detailed how Canada accepted a mere 5,000 Jewish refugees between 1936 and 1945. Most infamously, Canada was among the countries to refuse to provide asylum to the 900 Jewish refugees on the ship the *MS St Louis*, which sailed from Hamburg for the Americas in April 1939. Canada's refusal to accept any of the refugees forced the St. Louis to return to Europe, where over 200 of its passengers later died in the Holocaust.

Exoneration of the Galicia Division

Due to the continued high-level protection members of the Galicia Division enjoyed from the government and other establishment circles, the Deschênes commission granted the Brotherhood of Veterans of the First Division of the Ukrainian National Army (Galicia Division) special intervener status in its hearings. This meant it was able to cross-examine testimony from witnesses, as well as make use of the standard right to submit legal documents and provide its own testimony.

The Nazi War Criminals commission also refused Soviet offers to gather testimony in the USSR, on the purported grounds that Moscow had refused to allow Canadian officials to interrogate witnesses in accordance with Canadian rules of evidence.

Outrageously, the Deschênes commission exonerated the Galicia Division of any wrongdoing in its December 1986 final report. Its most important findings in this connection read: "The Galicia Division (14 Waffengrenadierdivision der SS [gal. Nr. 1]) should not be indicted as a group," and "Charges of war crimes against members of the Galicia Division have never been substantiated, either in 1950 when they were first preferred, or in 1984 when they were renewed, or before this Commission."

The commission also summarily dismissed the charge that hundreds, if not thousands, of Nazi and Nazi-allied war criminals had immigrated to Canada, declaring these figures to be "grossly exaggerated."

Another Ukrainian nationalist outfit given special representation rights before the Deschênes commission was the Ukrainian Canadian Committee (UCC), which has since renamed itself the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. In 1950, the UCC had successfully campaigned for the lifting of the ban on Galicia Division veterans entering the country.

The UCC continues to uphold the legacy of the Galicia Division. On Remembrance Day in 2010, the organisation saluted Ukrainian veterans of the Waffen SS as fighters for "freedom of their ancestral Ukrainian homeland." The press release came from Paul Grod, the current head of the UCC. Grod has accompanied both Trudeau and his predecessor, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, on their trips to the Ukraine.

The case of Vladimir Katriuk

Nobody should believe that the Canadian ruling elite's defence of pro-Nazi war criminals is a thing of the past.

In 2015, Vladimir Katriuk, a Ukrainian and member of the SS during World War II, died in Quebec at the age of 93. His personal fate exemplifies how the Canadian state actively connived to ensure Nazi war criminals escaped justice.

Katriuk, who came to Canada under a false name in 1951, was accused of war crimes, the most documented of which was his participation in a the Khatyn massacre, carried out in what is now Belarus, in early 1943. In the last years of Katriuk's life, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre placed his name near the top of its list of the ten most-wanted war criminals.

Katriuk's case first came to prominence in 1999, when a federal court ruled that he had gained Canadian citizenship on false pretenses, because he had neglected to inform Canadian immigration officials about his Nazi past. After a lengthy period of deliberation, the Conservative government decided in 2007 that it would not revoke Katriuk's citizenship and claimed there was insufficient evidence for him to be charged with war crimes.

Katriuk, who later joined the SS, was identified by multiple sources as being a machine gunner at the Khatyn massacre, which occurred on 22 March 1943. A total of 149 villagers were either burnt alive or shot by members of Battalion 118, a volunteer auxiliary police battalion of which Katriuk was a member, with the support of a Waffen SS unit. Evidence of

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his participation in other lesser known crimes has also been documented, as mentioned in a 2012 article by Swedish academic Per Anders Rudling.

Even in the last weeks of his life, when a Russian extradition request was submitted for the Ukrainian-born Katriuk, a spokeswoman for the Conservative government justified Canada's refusal to allow Katriuk's extradition to face trial on the basis of the political situation in Russia and its alleged "aggression" against Ukraine. "While I cannot comment on any specific extradition request, to be clear, we will never accept or recognize the Russian annexation of Crimea or the illegal occupation of any sovereign Ukrainian territory," a spokeswoman for then Justice Minister Peter McKay declared.

Nothing has changed under Justin Trudeau's Liberals. Anxious to cover up the ultraright-wing character of the forces Ottawa and Washington have allied with in their drive to harness Ukraine to western imperialism and these forces' ties to the Ukrainian nationalist collaborators with the Nazis, Foreign Minister Freeland has denounced the revelations of her grandfather's ties to the Nazis as Russian-orchestrated "disinformation."

When Trudeau visited Ukraine in 2016, he was accompanied by a strong UCC delegation and members of the Army SOS group, set up to procure military equipment for the pro-Kiev volunteer militias, which are drawn overwhelmingly from far-right, fascistic groups.

This author also recommends:

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