

# Ukrainian prime minister attends neo-Nazi rock concert

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On October 14, Ukraine's new prime minister Oleksiy Honcharuk appeared on stage as an honorary guest at a neo-Nazi rock concert held to commemorate "Defender of Ukraine Day."

Photos circulating on social media showed him standing on stage completely dressed in black while the neo-Nazi band Sokyra Peruna played alongside him. A Nazi-style swastika flag hangs behind him. The Sokyra Peruna band is Ukraine's most notorious neo-Nazi band. Its music is used to promote the notorious fascist Azov Battalion and the Right Sector, both of which played a central role in the US- and EU-backed coup in Kiev in February 2014.

In videos and pictures posted on Instagram and Facebook, audience members can be seen hailing the band with "Heil Hitler" salutes, some wear T-shirts with swastikas and a number of audience members carrying Nazi flags. Minister of Veterans Affairs and Temporarily Occupied Territories Oksana Koliada likewise appeared at the concert.

After Honcharuk was criticized for appearing at the event he took to Facebook to defend himself, absurdly stating he had no idea who was playing that night and that he simply appeared to demonstrate his government's support for veterans of the ongoing civil war in eastern Ukraine. However ludicrous these justifications, Honcharuk's statement implicitly acknowledged that his appearance at the concert was a calculated gesture, which had been sanctioned at the highest level of the Ukrainian state.

President Volodymyr Zelensky conspicuously refrained from any criticism of his standing prime minister.

It is the second time within weeks that Honcharuk has posed publicly with prominent figures of Ukraine's neo-Nazi scene. In September Honcharuk was

photographed taking selfies with members of the far-right neo-Nazi C14 organization in his office, again alongside Koliada.

Evgen Karas, head of C14, was one of the first to share pictures of the event on Facebook. The event itself was organized by leading C14 figure Andriy Medvedko, who has been charged in the murder of journalist Oles Buzina. Buzina, who was seen as too pro-Russian by the country's far-right, was shot dead near his home in 2015. The case remains open. C14 has also been involved in a number of other violent incidents including attacks on Roma camps in Kiev and L'viv and the gruesome acid-attack murder of politician Kateryna Handziuk.

Honcharuk's public appearances with neo-Nazis are a calculated threat to the working class.

As prime minister, Honcharuk has recently been tasked by Zelensky with carrying out mass privatizations and a land reform that has long been demanded by international finance capital. As part of what will be the most far-reaching privatization scheme in Ukraine since the restoration of capitalism in the 1990s, Honcharuk has drawn up a list of 800 state-owned enterprises that are to be sold, potentially threatening tens of thousands of jobs. Within the past few months, Honcharuk has also cut the number of government ministries from 25 to 17.

His public appearances with the most notorious elements of the country's neo-Nazi scene are meant to send a signal that in implementing austerity and privatization measures he will be backed by the same violent, far-right extremist that have terrorized minorities and political opponents of the Kiev government for years.

A lawyer by training, Honcharuk is a representative of the urban upper-middle-class centered in Kiev that

has been cultivated by Western imperialism and the Ukrainian ruling class since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. He studied law at the Interregional Academy for Personnel Management, which Germany's *Deutsche Welle* describes as "an elite, state-run training center for high-ranking officials."

He later worked in real estate law and supported the right-wing coup in 2014 against elected president Viktor Yanukovich. Honcharuk ran as a leading candidate for the newly created Power of the People Party, but garnered just 0.1 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections following the coup.

Honcharuk obtained a position within the government led by Areseniy Yatsenyuk, working for Minister of Ecology Igor Shevchenko. From there he advanced to become a protégé of Aivaras Abromavicius, the minister of economy and trade under the Poroshenko regime. Until his resignation in 2016, Abromavicius played a central role in mass privatization under Yatsenyuk and Poroshenko and served as a primary negotiator between the IMF and Ukraine.

Honcharuk is not the only member of Zelensky's government to maintain close ties to the far-right. Arsen Avakov, who is notorious for his long-standing ties to the fascist Azov Battalion and its leader Andriy Biletsky, along with its National Corps and National Militia groups, has remained in charge of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Just before the presidential elections in March this year, thugs of the Azov Battalion chased Poroshenko down the streets with the likely backing of Avakov, preventing him from holding campaign events.

The public backing of Ukrainian neo-Nazis by leading government representatives is not only a calculated threat to the working class. It is also an indication and part of ongoing bitter infighting within the Ukrainian oligarchy over questions of foreign policy, in which the different factions vie for the support and allegiance of the substantial armed layer of fascists that has been vastly strengthened since the Western-backed coup of 2014.

Honcharuk's and Koliada's appearance at the neo-Nazi concert took place the same weekend that "No Surrender" protests drew an estimated 12,000 people associated with the far right. The protests, which opposed Zelensky's attempts to implement the measures of the Steinmeier formula, issued multiple

threats and demands aimed at the government, including an ultimatum to Zelensky to back down from his support for the Steinmeier formula.

The formula, which has been aggressively pushed for by Paris and Berlin, provides for a ceasefire on both sides Ukraine conflict, the withdrawal of troops and amnesty for separatists. Zelensky's adoption of the Steinmeier formula is part of his administration's desperate maneuvers between French and German imperialism, on the one hand, and American imperialism on the other.

The far-right protests were openly backed by the former president, Petro Poroshenko, and other figures of his administration who speak for sections of the Ukrainian oligarchy that oppose any lessening of the provocations and war preparations against Russia, and any weakening of ties to Washington, upon which the Ukraine relies heavily for military support. In the summer, the Ukrainian prosecutor general brought charges against Poroshenko over corruption and "high treason."

The mass protests of armed fascists have exacerbated the political crisis in the country and have no doubt prompted fears within the Zelensky government that these layers will turn against it. Shortly after the protests, Zelensky travelled to the town of Zolote in eastern Ukraine where Azov Battalion veterans were stopping the withdrawal of Ukrainian soldiers from the frontlines. The withdrawals have so far been prevented by the far right and by what Kiev claims is continued separatist shelling.

In a video posted to social media, Zelensky can be seen meekly sitting down to beg the far-right veterans to withdraw. At one point, an agitated Zelensky shouts, "Listen, I'm the president of this state. I'm 42. I'm not some loser. I came here to tell you 'take away your weapons.'"



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