

Consortium News sues for libel over claims it aided “Russian disinformation” campaign against Canada

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24 January 2020

Consortium News (CN) reported on Tuesday that it has filed libel lawsuits against the Communications Security Establishment (CSE)—the Canadian equivalent of the US NSA—and a major Canadian television network, Global News, in response to a fabricated report last December that said CN was “part of a cyber-influence campaign directed by Russia.”

CN reports that Global News published an article on its website on December 10, 2019 titled “‘Canadian eyes only’ intelligence reports say Canadian leaders attacked in cyber campaigns” that was based on a leaked, secret CSE document. The Global News report claimed that CN was the leader of a cyber campaign aimed at smearing Canada’s then foreign minister and current deputy prime minister, Chrystia Freeland. It stated, “The first attack was a February 2017 report in the ‘online *Consortium News*’ followed ‘in quick succession’ by pro-Russian English language and Russian-language online media.”

Global News also published screen shots of the CN website along with captions linking it to Russia. The caption on its news article read, “A CSE report says *Consortium News* was part of an attack from Russia on Chrystia Freeland’s reputation.” The caption on a Global News video broadcast read, “Intelligence records obtained exclusively by Global News reveal Russia is one of numerous hostile foreign states that have recently targeted Canada with online smear campaigns.”

The Global News report said, “The cyber-campaign directed by Russia involved distortions of facts and was timed, targeted and, according to the CSE, ‘pushed the narrative to suggest that Freeland’s family immigrated to Canada as part of a wave of Nazi-collaborators.’” While the Global News article was referring to the CN article published on February 17, 2017 by Arina Tuskanova entitled “A Nazi skeleton in the Family Closet,” it did not contain a link to that article or quote from it in any way.

Tuskanova’s article documented how Freeland’s maternal

grandfather, a Ukrainian nationalist, collaborated with the Nazis during their occupation of Poland and “war of annihilation” against the Soviet Union. Mikhail Chomiak served as the chief editor of a Ukrainian-language daily, published first from Krakow in Nazi-occupied Poland, and after that city’s liberation by the Red Army in October 1944, Vienna, that published pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic propaganda.

Although the December Global News report did not share the entirety of the leaked CSE document, it published a partial screen shot of one page and said the document is titled “Cyber Influence Events Against Canadian Politicians.” Global News also quoted select portions of the leaked report to bolster the intelligence-concocted narrative that CN initiated a pro-Russian disinformation campaign in Canada.

Quoting the CSE document, Global News wrote, “‘A small number of nation states’ are involved in cyber campaigns against Western democracy, but the national security assessment warns the threat and range of actors involved are growing. And the tactics used by Canada’s adversaries include ‘human intelligence operations,’ online and cyber influence campaigns and the use of ‘state-sponsored or influenced media.’”

Global News then quoted the following passage from the CSE document, “In early spring 2017 and spring 2018, sources linked to Russia popularized MFA (Minister of Foreign Affairs) Freeland’s family history, very likely intended to cause personal reputational damage in order to discredit the Government of Canada’s ongoing diplomatic and military support of Ukraine, to delegitimize Canada’s decision to enact the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Offices Act, and the expulsion of several Russian diplomats.”

Along with the libel lawsuits, which have been filed by a Toronto law firm, CN is demanding a retraction of the Global News story and an apology. CN has also made a

formal Access to Information Request (Canada's freedom of information process) to obtain a copy of the secret CSE report.

The effort to tie CN to so-called "Russian disinformation" stems from its reporting what in fact is significant biographical information about Freeland—a self-described Ukrainian patriot, who had publicly praised her maternal grandparents, saying their experiences "had a very big effect on me," and is the leading anti-Russia hawk in Canada's Liberal government.

By March 2017 the story had been picked up by major Canadian newspapers such as the *Globe and Mail*. When Freeland was asked about the reports about her grandfather at a press conference on March 6, she denounced the reports as part of disinformation "on the Russian side to destabilize Western democracies."

As reported at the time by the *World Socialist Web Site*, the news that Chrystia Freeland's maternal grandfather had edited the pro-Nazi Ukrainian nationalist newspaper *Krakivski Visti* revealed that it was the Liberal foreign minister who had in fact been involved in spinning "disinformation."

Responding to an autobiographical account given by Freeland in which she said her grandfather was "a lawyer and journalist before the Second World War, but they [her grandparents] knew the Soviets would invade western Ukraine (and) fled," Tuskanova and CN published a well-researched report on Chomiak's activities during the war.

Tuskanova gave extensive details about how Chomiak relocated from eastern Poland to Nazi-occupied Poland and went to work "for the Third Reich under the command of Governor-General Hans Frank, the man who organized the Holocaust in Poland. Chomiak's work was directly supervised by Emil Gassner, the head of the press department in the Polish General Government."

Furthermore, Tuskanova reported that "Chomiak comfortably settled his family into a former Jewish (or Aryanized) apartment in Krakow. The editorial offices for *Krakivski Visti* also were taken from a Jewish owner, Krakow's Polish-language Jewish newspaper *Nowy Dziennik*. Its editor at the time was forced to flee Krakow for Lviv, where he was captured following the Nazi occupation of Galicia and sent to the Belzec extermination camp, where he was murdered along with 600,000 other Jews."

Finally, the CN story said, "As the war turned against the Nazis and the Red Army advanced across Ukraine and Poland, Nazi propagandist Emil Gassner took Mykhailo Chomiak in 1944 to Vienna where *Krakivski Visti* continued to publish. As the Third Reich crumbled, Chomiak left with the retreating German Army and surrendered to the Americans in Bavaria, where he was placed with his family

in a special U.S. military intelligence facility in Bad Wörishofen, a cluster of hotels situated 78 kilometers from Munich in the foothills of the Alps."

It is notable that Freeland had previously helped to edit a scholarly article in the *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* in 1996 that revealed details about her grandfather's collaboration with the Nazis as a Ukrainian nationalist publisher and propagandist. The research paper was titled "Kravivski Visti and the Jews, 1943: A contribution of Ukrainian Jewish Relations during the Second World War" and was written by Freeland's uncle, John-Paul Himka, at the time a professor emeritus at the University of Alberta.

While CN has consistently maintained that "the sins of a grandfather should not be visited on his descendants," the publishers have also pointed out that Freeland's attempt to mislead the public on these important historical facts of her family are indicative of "her world view."

The falsification of history, particularly as it pertains to the cover-up or downplaying of the role and the crimes of the Nazis—and their Ukrainian nationalist sympathizers and collaborators during World War II—is a recurring theme internationally. It is part of the deliberate encouragement by all factions of the political establishment of far-right groups and neo-Nazi tendencies in the face of growing mass struggles by the working class on every continent.

Meanwhile, the fabricated state-organized media campaign to label the independent news organization CN as the leader of a "pro-Russian" disinformation campaign in Canada is a warning to the working class and must be exposed. It marks an expansion of the McCarthy-style witch-hunt that is being used by the imperialist powers in an effort to intimidate and silence journalists, like WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange, who are prepared to stand up and report the truth to the public.

The author also recommends:

Canadian media denounces exposure of foreign minister's grandfather as Nazi collaborator
[18 March 2017]

How Canada emerged as a haven for Ukrainian Nazi collaborators
[29 July 2019]



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