

Historians capitulate to war propaganda over Ukraine

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The war is having a devastating impact on historians. There are entirely principled and leftwing grounds upon which the Russian invasion of Ukraine should be opposed, and which do not require adapting to the US-NATO coverup of fascism in Ukraine's past and present.

But, unfortunately, even historians who have written major works on the fascist Stepan Bandera, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-B) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) are renouncing their own scholarship to suit the needs of the US-NATO propaganda campaign.

The "Statement on Ukraine by scholars of genocide, Nazism and WWII" is a disgraceful example of the intellectual and moral capitulation of significant segments of the academic community to the demands for historical falsification.

The statement begins with a reference to World War II, bizarrely attacking Putin for being "obsessed with the history of that war," as if it is abnormal for a Russian president to be "obsessed" with a catastrophe that cost the lives of approximately 30 million Soviet citizens.

One must assume that the statement's signatories, who have devoted their professional lives to the study of genocide, are also "obsessed with the history of that war," whose central event was the Holocaust in which Bandera and OUN-B played a critical role.

The statement's signatories declare: "We do not idealize the Ukrainian state and society. Like any other country, it has right-wing extremists and violent xenophobic groups. Ukraine also ought to better confront the darker chapters of its painful and complicated history."

In the context of its history, this statement is indeed an idealization of the Ukrainian state and society. Ukraine is not "like any other country" which has "right-wing extremists and violent xenophobic groups."

As the historians know, despite the horrific genocidal crimes committed by the OUN, under the leadership of their "Providnyk" (*fuehrer*) Stepan Bandera, the legacy of the fascist nationalists continues to exert an immense political and cultural influence in Ukraine.

Among the statement's signatories is the historian Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, who is the author of an important 652 page scholarly work, titled *Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist—Fascism, Genocide, and Cult*.

This book not only documents the crimes committed by Bandera's movement. Rossoliński-Liebe also examined his cult-like status among broad segments of contemporary Ukrainian society.

In the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR, he writes: "Many monuments devoted to the victims of the Ukrainian nationalists or to heroes of the Soviet Union were replaced with monuments devoted to Bandera and the OUN and UPA 'heroes.'"

"Bandera and Ukrainian revolutionary nationalists again became important elements of western Ukrainian identity.

"Not only far-right activists but also the mainstream of western Ukrainian society, including high-school teachers and university professors, considered Bandera to be a national hero... whose memory should be honored for his struggle against the Soviet Union."

Rossoliński-Liebe made the following significant and troubling observation: "The post-Soviet memory politics in Ukraine completely ignored democratic values and did not develop any kind of non-apologetic approach to history."

How is this damning commentary on the post-Soviet intellectual life of Ukraine reconciled with the statement's cynical and historically apologetic reference to "independent and democratic Ukraine"?

Rossoli?ski-Liebe also called attention to the significant international connections forged by Bandera's followers with the United States and other imperialist powers during the Cold War.

Iaroslav Stets'ko, who "had written letters to the Fuhrer, the Duce, the Poglavnik [the top Croatian Nazi], and the Caudillo [Franco], asking them to accept the newly proclaimed Ukrainian state, was in 1966 designated an honorary citizen of the Canadian city of Winnipeg."

The historian continues: "In 1983 he was invited to the Capitol and the White House, where George Bush and Ronald Reagan received the 'last premier of a free Ukrainian state,'" i.e., which had existed under the control of the Third Reich.

"On 11 July 1982," recalls Rossoli?ski-Liebe, "during Captive Nations' Week, the red-and-black flag of the OUN-B, introduced at the Second Great Congress of the Ukrainian Nationalists in 1941, flew over the United States Capitol.

"It symbolized freedom and democracy, and not ethnic purity and genocidal fascism. Nobody understood that it was the same flag that had flown from the Lviv city hall and other buildings, under which Jewish civilians were mistreated and killed in July 1941..."

Given the history of Ukrainian fascism and its truly sordid contemporary significance, the apologetics in which the historians are engaged is as contemptible as it is cowardly.

The Russian government is engaged in its own propaganda-style falsification of history, which must be exposed. Putin—a bitter opponent of the internationalism of the October Revolution—counterpoises Russian nationalism to Ukrainian nationalism.

The competing nationalist narratives must be exposed—in the interests of uniting Russian and Ukrainian workers in a common struggle against the US-NATO imperialists, their fascist allies within Ukraine, and corrupt regime of capitalist restoration in Russia.



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