

Oppose the arrest of Ukrainian Communist Youth leaders!

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The WSWs unequivocally opposes the arrests of Mikhail and Alexander Kononovich of the Ukrainian Communist Youth and demands their immediate release.

On March 6, media in Ukraine reported that the Kononovich brothers, both members of the youth wing of the outlawed Ukrainian Communist Party, were arrested by the Ukrainian secret service (SBU) on charges of “pro-Russian views and pro-Belarusian views.”

There is no question that the lives of the Kononovich brothers are now in grave danger. Reports suggest that they could face execution.

A report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights documented horrifying cases of torture and sexual assault that were perpetrated by members of the SBU in 2014–2017 as part of the civil war in east Ukraine against pro-Russian separatists. The report found that “Rape, threats of rape, beatings and electrocution of genitals were often used as an interrogation technique” by the SBU. In one incident from May 2016, “four SBU officers forced” a detainee “to kneel, insulted and humiliated him, hit him on the head, kidneys, groin, and applied electric shocks to his tongue. Most of this time he was hooded with a plastic bag, and was denied food and water.”

The arrests are part of a campaign of terror by the SBU directed against opponents of the Ukrainian government, members of pro-Russian parties and even members of the official Ukrainian delegation for the peace negotiations with Russia.

Last week, the SBU killed Denis Kireev, a member of Kiev’s official negotiating team, presumably because he resisted his arrest on charges of national treason. Another negotiating team member, Evgeny Shevchenko, who is a member of the ruling Servant of

the People Party of Volodymyr Zelensky, was arrested by the SBU as he was attempting to cross the Polish border. Several parliamentary deputies who are members of the pro-Russian Opposition Platform For-Life were also arrested on charges of treason and sabotage.

The SBU, the successor of the Stalinist secret service KGB in Ukraine, has long-standing ties to the Ukrainian far-right, including the neo-fascist Azov Battalion, and has been heavily involved in the efforts of the Ukrainian state to rehabilitate the Nazi collaborationist organizations UPA (Ukrainian Insurgency Army) and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). Its former head, Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, declared in 2015 that the SBU “does not need to invent anything new, it is important to build on the traditions of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and UPA in the 1930–1950 years.”

During World War II, Ukrainian fascists of the OUN-B were involved in the massacres of tens of thousands of Jews and Poles, as well as of Ukrainian opponents of fascism. Overall, the Holocaust of the Jewish population in Ukraine claimed an estimated 1.5 million lives, in addition to millions more Ukrainian civilians who were murdered under Nazi occupation.

After the war and well into the 1950s, both the OUN-B and UPA were engaged in an insurgency against Soviet rule, with backing from the US and UK, during which the UPA killed another 20,000 Ukrainian civilians. Their criminal genocidal record has been systematically whitewashed by the Ukrainian state, above all after the US-backed 2014 far-right coup that ousted a pro-Russian government and triggered a civil war with pro-Russian separatists in the East.

This campaign involved the banning of all communist symbols in 2015, including emblems of the

Red Army, which liberated Ukraine from Nazism, and the outlawing of the Stalinist Communist Party of Ukraine. Monuments to Lenin and the Red Army were dismantled across the country, while left-wing opponents of the Kiev regime, journalists and supporters of the pro-Russian separatists were subject to violent assaults and assassination attempts. The Kononovich brothers and their families were reportedly also repeatedly attacked by fascist gangs.

Since the beginning of the war, the website and the communication channels of the Communist Party of Ukraine have been blocked entirely.

The WSWs, the publication of the world Trotskyist movement, has fundamental and well-documented political differences with Stalinism. In contrast to the Communist Party of Ukraine, which supports the Putin regime, we oppose it and its invasion in Ukraine. But this does not change by one iota the duty of every class-conscious worker to oppose these arrests. They constitute a dangerous assault on democratic rights, serve to strengthen fascist forces and further the repression of all left-wing opponents of the government and the imperialist war drive against Russia, which threatens to plunge the entire region and the world into a catastrophe.



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