

The ISL's Oleg Vernyk promotes Ukrainian fascist Stepan Bandera and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists

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10 June 2022

On May 17, the *World Socialist Web Site* published an exposure of the International Socialist League's support for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and its fascist shock troops, under the banner of a fight against "Russian imperialism" in defense of "democracy" in Ukraine.

The WSWs wrote:

The false conceptions of "Russian imperialism" and "democratic Ukraine" must be rejected by Marxists. The Russian and Ukrainian states have fundamentally common characteristics as the reactionary product of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Both are ruled by bankrupt capitalist oligarchies—the descendants of the Stalinist bureaucracy and inheritors of the stolen property of the Soviet state—which are fundamentally unable to assert their independent interests from imperialism.

The ISL's rotten orientation to the Ukrainian bourgeois state and NATO is not merely platonic. Their supporters in Ukraine sit at negotiation tables with imperialist agents, make commitments to far-right politicians and build their constituency among the fascistic paramilitary forces.

Unsurprisingly, the ISL has provided no response whatsoever to this exposure.

But subsequent developments have fully borne out this analysis. Over the past two weeks, Oleg Vernyk, the head of the Ukrainian group of the ISL and the Zakhyst Pratsi (Labor Defense) union, has made several posts on Facebook glorifying the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) by Stepan Bandera.

On May 24, Vernyk shared a post of the 1948 pamphlet "Who are the Banderites and what are they fighting for," along with a lengthy excerpt. The quote from the pamphlet, written in the vein of fascist "national socialism," said that the "Banderites" were fighting "For building a classless society, for the genuine destruction of the exploitation of man by man ... For democracy, against dictatorship and totalitarianism, for freedom of speech and assembly ... For ensuring that the national minorities of Ukraine have all rights."

In line with the efforts of the imperialist powers to break up the Soviet Union along national lines and restore capitalism, the pamphlet called on the "Enslaved peoples of the Soviet Union" to join "the liberation struggle against the Bolshevik oppressors."

On June 5, Vernyk shared another post with a passage from a book by Danylo Shumuk, a former member of the Communist Party in West Ukraine (KPZU), who, disoriented by the crimes of Stalinism, joined the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), the paramilitary wing of the OUN, in 1943. The post from Shumuk's memoirs describes his transformation from a supporter of the CP to a member of the UPA, calling the latter a movement of "democratic forces" fighting on behalf of the "common people." The post states: "The KPZU and the OUN are us, these are our people of the [19]20s and 30s."

In yet another post, from May 26, Vernyk shared a comment glorifying a 1953 uprising in a Soviet labor camp (Gulag), which was led by Shumuk and other members of the OUN and UPA who had been imprisoned by Soviet authorities.

Vernyk shared all of these posts on both his personal profile and the group of his trade union without any comments. They speak volumes about the ISL's right-wing political orientation.

The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, founded in Vienna in 1929, was an outright fascist, terrorist organization whose ideology was shaped above all by anti-communism, extreme nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism.

Most of its early members were former soldiers of the army of the Ukrainian People's Republic founded by Symon Petliura, which fought the Red Army after the October Revolution of 1917 and participated in some of the biggest pogroms of the civil war in 1917-1921. Overall, an estimated 200,000 people were murdered in pogroms during the civil war in Ukraine. It was the biggest mass murder of Jews before the Holocaust, and it was only ended through the victory of the Red Army against the imperialist powers and regional nationalist forces.

Throughout the 1930s, the OUN committed terrorist attacks against members of national minorities and political opponents in what was then Poland. In the words of Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, the OUN "regarded assassination as a means of propaganda," and it carried out 830 violent acts against Polish and Polish-Jewish citizens in 1937 alone. As they were carrying out these terrorist attacks, the OUN's members and publications received state-backing from Nazi Germany and the right-wing dictatorship of Antanas Smetona in Lithuania.

In 1940, the OUN split into two wings, one headed by Stepan Bandera (OUN-B), the other by Andrey Melnyk, both of whom had been long-time leaders of the OUN. Both of these wings collaborated intensely with the Nazis, who had invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 and occupied Soviet Ukraine until 1944, resulting in the deaths of at least 27 million Soviet citizens, between 5 and 7 million

of them in Ukraine. The OUN carried out large-scale massacres of both Jews and Poles, murdering tens of thousands, and terrorized Ukrainian civilians who opposed the Nazi occupation.

When it became clear that German imperialism, upon which the Ukrainian fascists had pinned their hopes for the creation of their “own,” “ethnically pure” nation-state, was losing the war, the leaders of the OUN quickly established contact with representatives of US, British and Canadian imperialism. The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), the paramilitary wing of the OUN, began receiving intelligence, logistics support and funding from the US and Canada, in particular, to wage a war against the Red Army and Soviet authorities in Soviet Ukraine that lasted well into the 1950s. According to historian Rossolinski-Liebe, the OUN-UPA killed some 20,000 Ukrainian civilians in this civil war, most of them workers at collective farms and peasants whom they suspected of supporting the Soviet authorities.

The 1948 pamphlet that Vernyk shared was printed as part of this imperialist-backed propaganda campaign aimed at presenting the mass-murdering Ukrainian fascists as a “democratic liberation force” fighting to “free” the Ukrainian people from “communism.”

Vernyk’s promotion of this material is not just a matter of disseminating and legitimizing the OUN—whose propaganda was, in fact, strikingly similar to the current NATO propaganda talking points over the war—as supposedly “left-wing.” Like other pseudo-left organizations in Ukraine that support the NATO proxy war against Russia, the ISL and Vernyk’s trade union Zakhyst Pratsi (Labor Defense) are actively encouraging their members to join the Territorial Defense Forces of Ukraine, the official umbrella for hundreds of paramilitary detachments that are now playing a major role in fighting the Russian army on behalf of NATO and the Ukrainian state. Many of these battalions are run by far-right nationalists and outright fascists.

On its website, the ISL posted a video of one of its members, Kirill, masked and in body armor, who is identified as a member of the UVO, a detachment of the Territorial Defense Forces. The group Sotsialnyi rukh (Social movement), which likewise supports the NATO war as a struggle against “Russian imperialism,” has also on its social media posted pictures of members who have joined these paramilitary forces.

In the Facebook group of Vernyk’s Zakhyst Pratsi union, another member posted a call for the “dismemberment of Russia.” This is the official line of the Ukrainian neo-fascist Svoboda Party, with which the ISL also maintains ties, and the objective logic of the imperialist intervention in the region and in Russian politics.

These ties and the apparent political and ideological identification of Vernyk with the fascist OUN reveal the class character and political orientation not just of the ISL but the pseudo-left internationally.

The ISL and Vernyk are closely connected to these various tendencies across the Americas and Europe. The ISL itself was co-founded by several petty-bourgeois nationalist tendencies in Turkey and Latin America, including the Turkish Sosyalist Emekçiler Partisi (Socialist Laborers Party, SEP in Turkish acronyms), the Venezuelan Marea Socialista (Socialist Tide, MS) and the Argentine Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores (Socialist Workers Movement, MST).

The MST is one of the leading parties of the Argentinian pseudo-left electoral coalition FIT-U (Workers’ Left Front-Unity), which combines a number of Morenoite and Pabloite organizations, including the Partido Obrero (Workers Party, PO) and the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialista (Socialist Workers Party, PTS). Some of

its members are giving full support to the US-NATO led war and are openly promoting the Ukrainian fascistic paramilitaries at its front.

That is the case of the Morenoite Partido de los Trabajadores Socialista Unificado (Unified Socialist Workers Party, PSTU), a member of the International Workers League-Fourth International (IWL-FI). As it sent representatives from Latin America to Ukraine to politically back up their military operations, the IWL-FI wrote a piece titled “Ukraine and Russia: On Fascisms and Fascisms.” In the article they faithfully reproduced the arguments of the defenders of Bandera in order to claim that Ukraine far-right’s record is nothing but a myth. Downplaying, if not outright denying, Bandera’s collaboration with the Nazis, they state: “Bandera’s figure was probably inflated by Stalin to justify the repression, as it is inflated today by Putin to justify the aggression against Ukraine.”

While the PO and PTS seek to somehow distance themselves from the ISL and the IWL-FI, posing as opponents of US and NATO, neither one of them has answered the exposure made by the WSWs of their partner’s ominous connections to fascistic forces in Ukraine. In fact, the role being played by the PTS is to actively cover up the FIT-U’s open support for NATO and the Ukrainian fascists, painting it as legitimate “polemic within the Trotskyist left”!

Vernyk’s Zakhyst Pratsi union is also listed as a member organization of the Progressive International which was co-founded by the Sanders Institute of Bernie Sanders in 2018. It includes, among others, outlets such as *The Nation* and Jacobin, the magazine affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), a faction of the Democratic Party. It also includes the Diem25 umbrella organization of the pseudo-left in Europe, which encompasses the Greek MeRA25 (a split-off from Syriza) and the Polish Lewica Razem. The DSA and Razem are explicitly supporting the arming of Ukraine with the money and weapons of US imperialism.

As the International Committee has warned for many years, these forces are not “left,” much less socialist or Trotskyist. Rather, they represent privileged and fundamentally nationalist sections of the petty bourgeoisie whose social interests tie them to the capitalist state apparatus and imperialism.

Amid the early stages of a new world conflagration, and in the face of a resurgence of the working class internationally, these layers are driven ever further to the right, up to and including an embrace of outright fascist forces. The imperialist proxy war in Ukraine exposes them for what they are: bitter enemies of the working class that are prepared to line up with fascists and take up arms to fight on behalf of the interests of imperialism.



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