

Randi Weingarten covers up the role of Ukrainian fascism in the Holocaust

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Nothing reveals the pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist character of the AFL-CIO as starkly as the deliberate cover-up of the historical crimes of Ukrainian fascism by Randi Weingarten on her pro-war tour to Ukraine this week.

In tweeting on her trip to Ukraine, Randi Weingarten claimed that she was there “on behalf” of the 1.7 millions teachers who are members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). This is a shameless lie. She toured Ukraine not as a representative of teachers, but as a loyal servant of the American state apparatus, of the military and of the war profiteers who have raked in record profits from the multi-billion-dollar arms deliveries to Ukraine’s army and fascist paramilitaries.

None of her discussions have anything to do with the interests of workers in Ukraine, let alone the United States. During her trip, Weingarten met with US-backed trade union officials who are now called upon to impose massive attacks on the Ukrainian working class by the Zelensky government. On Friday, she is speaking with representatives of the Polish teachers unions in Warsaw, which are scrambling to contain growing working class anger amid skyrocketing inflation.

Her war tour in Ukraine culminated with a trip to Lviv, where Weingarten had the audacity to refer to the fascist massacre in the city to justify her support for the US-NATO war against Russia. On Thursday, she tweeted, “Spent time today walking through the Jewish Quarter of Lviv and the Memorial at the Jewish ghetto. 140,000 Jews were killed from 1941-1943. That equated to 98% of Jewish population—which was 30% of Lviv’s then population.”

What Weingarten failed to mention is that the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists under Stepan Bandera (OUN-B) played a critical role in the extermination of the Jewish population of Lviv. This omission was not an accident. The day before, Weingarten met with Lviv’s mayor Andriy Sadovyi. While Weingarten tweeted that “three words guide him — ‘unbroken, resilience and survival’”, Sadovyi is, in fact, an outspoken admirer of the fascist Bandera.

In 2011, Sadovyi praised Bandera and his fascist ally Roman Shukhevich as “our heroes” who had “defended our soil” and should be honored by “children and youth.” On February 26, he urged residents to defend the city with what he called

“Bandera smoothies”—his term for Molotov cocktails.

Under Sadovyi’s administration, large parts of Lviv have become transformed into something of a fascist theme park. The city is littered with monuments to Ukrainian fascists and Nazi collaborators, and numerous streets and buildings are named after them. In 2012, the Simon Wisenthal Center criticized Sadovyi directly for attempting “to cover up very strong manifestations of anti-Semitism” in Lviv, and denounced the city administration for continuing “to countenance anti-Semitism,” including by awarding a prize dedicated to Bandera.

According to historian Per Anders Rudling, *Kriyvka*, perhaps the most popular local restaurant, is themed after the armed wing of the OUN-B, the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army). Its motto is “The fight continues” and it claims to attract 1 million visitors per year. On their menu, they offer dishes such as “Cold boiled pork ‘*Hände Hoch*’, and “Combat serenade”. Their guests are seated in dining rooms decorated with “larger-than-life portraits of Bandera”, while the toilets are plastered with Russian and Jewish anecdotes. This is just one restaurant in a series of “fascist pop” cafes and pubs that are run by one of the city’s most successful entrepreneurs.

The National Lviv Ivan Franko University, where Weingarten met with officials from the main Ukrainian teachers’ union, is, in the words of Rudling, “explicitly committed to ethnicizing its student body and to producing a nationally conscious elite.” It is one of the most important hubs of Ukrainian academia where the lines of what is deemed “legitimate” scholarship and ultra-nationalist propaganda are systematically blurred.

Weingarten’s promotion of these far-right politicians and institutions and her deliberate silence about the crimes of the Ukrainian fascists against the Jewish population of Lviv and Ukraine have the most sinister implications.

Because of its geostrategic and economic significance, German imperialism occupied and sought to subjugate Ukraine in both world wars. But it never did so without substantial collaboration from the nationalist bourgeoisie and local far-right forces. In World War II, this collaboration assumed monstrous proportions. The Ukrainian fascists of the OUN, which arose out of a violent, nationalist reaction against the socialist October Revolution of 1917, became a central pillar of

the Nazi war against the Soviet Union and especially the Holocaust. They were imbued with racist, fascist ideology in which anti-Jewish hatred was fused with the most violent anti-Communism.

Although Lviv was then a multi-ethnic city of Poles, Jews and Ukrainians, it emerged as the heartland of the Ukrainian far-right. It was here, on June 30, 1941 at 8PM, that Yaroslav Stetsko from the OUN-B proclaimed an independent Ukrainian state “under the leadership of Stepan Bandera” and pledged Ukraine’s cooperation with the “National Socialist Great Germany, which under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, is creating a new order in Europe and the world, and is helping the Ukrainian nation liberate itself from Muscovite occupation.” All over the city, the Nazis and OUN-B put up yellow-and-blue as well as swastika flags, along with posters with slogans such as “Long Live Stepan Bandera, Long Live Adolf Hitler.”

As the OUN-B was proclaiming its “independent Ukrainian state”, the most horrific pogrom in Western Ukraine under Nazi occupation was underway. Starting in the early morning of July 1, 1941, members of the Ukrainian militia that had been set-up by the OUN-B began dragging Jews from their homes to prison yards, where they were forced to engage in rituals that supposedly showed their responsibility for crimes by the Soviet secret service NKVD. Then, they were brutally beaten to death. Jewish women were kicked, beaten, stripped naked, and raped; pregnant women were kicked and hit in the stomach. The perpetrators of the pogrom were above all Ukrainian nationalists, but also German occupation forces, as well as elements from the local Ukrainian and, to a lesser extent, the Polish population.

Historian Grezgorz Rossoliński-Liebe, who wrote the authoritative biography of Stepan Bandera, stressed that the pogrom was “a well-organized action” in which “the Ukrainian militia established by the OUN-B collaborated closely with German formations...” (Grezgorz Rossoliński-Liebe, *Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist: Fascism, Genocide, and Cult*, Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2014, p. 212).

The pogrom resulted in an estimated 7,000 to 8,000 deaths. Less than two months later, from July 25 through 28, the Ukrainian nationalists staged the next pogrom in Lviv, killing another estimated 1,500 people. Historians put the overall number of those murdered in anti-Jewish pogroms spearheaded by the OUN-B in the first months after the Nazi invasion in West Ukraine at 39,000.

Horrible as these numbers are, they form but a relatively small part of the crimes of the Ukrainian fascist forces during World War II. Members of the OUN-B were integrated *en masse* into the police under the German occupation authorities which played a central role in the Holocaust in Ukraine. At least 1.6 million Ukrainian Jews were killed in this genocide.

The crimes of Ukrainian fascism were not limited to the

Jewish population. In 1943-1944, the OUN-B and the UPA engaged in genocidal massacres of the Polish population that had lived for centuries on what is now Ukrainian territory. Eastern Galicia, where Lviv is located, along with Volhynia, again became the center of the OUN-UPA massacres. Between 70,000 and 100,000 Polish men, women and children were murdered by the OUN-UPA, often with the same torturous methods that the Ukrainian fascists had learned from the Nazis and earlier deployed against their Jewish victims.

Teachers might wonder why Weingarten is spending so much effort promoting a war that Biden himself has said could lead to “Armageddon,” under conditions in which teachers confront an ongoing pandemic and escalating austerity that is aimed at destroying the institution of public education.

In reality, teachers in the US are the victims of the same pro-capitalist and war policies that Weingarten and the AFL-CIO are imposing on workers in Eastern Europe. Weingarten postures as a defender of Ukrainian “freedom,” while she and the AFT have played an indispensable role in enforcing the “herd immunity” response of the ruling class to the COVID-19 pandemic by pushing for the unsafe reopening of schools on behalf of Wall Street and against the opposition of teachers and parents. As a result of these murderous policies, more than one million Americans have died, among them at least 8,000 teachers and 2,000 children.

To the American ruling class, the build-up of fascist forces not only in Ukraine but also at home is a necessary component of the drive of US imperialism to subjugate first Russia, then China, and eventually the entire globe to its unrestrained domination, and to prepare for a violent confrontation with the working class. Within this strategy of war both at home and abroad, the union bureaucracies play the critical role of suppressing the class struggle and subordinating the working class to the state machinery and the interests of the ruling class.

Randi Weingarten’s visit to Lviv and her cover-up of the crimes of Ukrainian fascism make two things abundantly clear: First, a movement to put an end to the war must involve a rebellion by workers in the US and across the world against these reactionary apparatuses, and the establishment of an international network of rank-and-file committees to organize workers’ struggles in an internationally unified and coordinated manner. Second, a socialist anti-war movement in the working class must be prepared by and rooted in a defense of historical truth and the assimilation of all the key political lessons of the great unresolved issues of the 20th century.



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