

The crimes of the Banderovites against the Ukrainian people: Notes by a Ukrainian Trotskyist

Stepan Geller
8 April 2023

The Nazi accomplices of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its paramilitary wing, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and their leaders were involved in many crimes, including against the Ukrainian people. Yet today, to many in Ukraine, their ominous names are not synonymous with criminals, but with the names of national heroes. Streets, stadiums and cafes are named after them, and monuments are erected in their honor throughout the country.

Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists have always argued that the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was not a legitimate state like today's bourgeois Ukraine, and therefore Soviet Ukraine was not Ukraine at all.

For them, the liberation from fascist occupation through the Red Army in October 1944 and the victory over fascism in Germany in May 1945 did not constitute a liberation, not a victory, but a new occupation of Ukraine by Soviet Russia. They only accept as legitimate the Ukrainian state that was proclaimed in the summer of 1941, when the SS division "Nachtigall" and Stepan Bandera's detachment "Roland" entered Nazi-occupied Soviet Lvov (Lviv), and the Ukrainian capitalist state that emerged as a result of the restoration of capitalism and the liquidation of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy [in 1991]. Those who did not or do not share their vision of a capitalist Ukraine will be subject to political repression by the Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists.

From 1944 to 1953, a civil war raged in newly Sovietized Western Ukraine between the OUN-UPA, on the one hand, and the Stalinist-led Red Army, on the other. Throughout this period, the OUN-UPA, which had earlier collaborated with the Nazis, received funding, arms and other support from the imperialist powers and their secret services, including the newly founded CIA.

Historians now believe that almost 25,000 Soviet servicemen, policemen and frontier guards, two and a half thousand party workers, and about six hundred chairmen of collective farms and village councils were killed in this civil war by the OUN-UPA in the western areas of Ukraine. Among those murdered were 30 secretaries of district committees, 32 chairmen and deputy chairmen of the district executive committees, 37 secretaries of the regional party and Komsomol committees and hundreds of deputies of the local Soviets. According to historian Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, the OUN-UPA also murdered more than 20,000 Ukrainian civilians.

This does not include the many tens and even hundreds of thousands of Jews and Poles in Ukraine who were slaughtered by Ukrainian fascists during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine. Alas, the total numbers of people murdered by the Banderites have been silenced by history but the memories of their atrocities and the blood they spilled of the Soviet people in Ukraine are deeply engrained in the consciousness of the working class.

You will not find these memories in any books, even though you should. I have had the good fortune to speak with some who survived these atrocities and thanks to the WSW, their memories can now be related to

an international audience.

In my life I have met many people who have shaped my opinion of the Bandera people more than any written source. The first accidental conversation I had was with my elderly neighbor, whom I had known for a long time and maintained a friendship with until her death in 2021. During our summer walk in 2012, she told me about an incident that happened to her when she was young.

She recalled how she was once in a café near the train station, sitting at a table with a man she had met there. While chatting with her, he saw a man sitting not far from them. He recognized him immediately as a Banderovite and drew her attention to him. After this incident, she soon learned that her acquaintance had been found in the woods with his throat cut. This happened in Western Ukraine.

My second conversation about the Banderovites and their crimes took place in March 2013. An old man told me and a number of friends about his childhood in a village in the Ivano-Frankivsk region. What he told us about the horrors he had seen as a child was shocking. Four years after that conversation, I suggested we meet again so I could put his memories in writing. Here is what I recorded almost 6 years ago.

I was born in 1934. My cousin was killed by the Banderites only because she went to work in the canteen after the war, cooking food for the Soviet soldiers.

[I also recall that one day] At night there was a knock at the window of our peasant house, my stepfather opened the door, and they shouted at him: "Stop! Do you have a Browning?" And he answered them, "Where should I have gotten one? I'm just a construction worker!"

Then they tied his hands with barbed wire, and the next day, only in another village, they found him in a well, thrown upside down with other ethnic Poles.

The man also recalled how, one day, when he was going to another village,

I saw a man standing near a tree by the road. I shouted at him: "Where are you going, sir? Can you go where I am going?" I shouted again. "Sir!" I then decided to go closer to him, touched him—he had been hanged.

He joined the Komsomol but, as he recalled, "I was afraid to tell my

mother that I had joined the Komsomol, so she wouldn't be worried about me, because they could report me [to the Ukrainian nationalists.]" He continued,

[One day] I was swimming with my friends in the river, and there were two Bandera men sitting next to us. They were sitting there, boasting: "We came to the hut, we had a lot of good stuff [weapons], and felt strong, so we killed them all; and look, the old woman was alive, and we started shooting at her: and she turned around, and we killed her only with the third shot."

He also recalled how at one point the NKVD distributed leaflets among UPA gangs: if you surrender to the Soviet authorities, nothing will happen to you. Many [UPA fighters] did come out of the forests, but they were killed the same night by the Bandera fighters, along with their whole family."

He continued,

I once met a girl in our neighborhood, and shortly thereafter I saw her lying in the middle of the road with her head torn off, next to a Banderovite who was also dead. They had probably fled from NKVD persecution, and the Banderovite blew himself and her up with a grenade. The leading forces of the Banderovites on the ground were mostly well-to-do kulaks, who owned many tithes of land.

The last recollection that I recorded from his words sheds light on the legend that the Banderovites fought against the Nazis during the occupation.

Now they say that the Banderovites fought against the Nazis - in all my memory I remember only one occasion when a German shot a Banderovite. It was when both of them, being drunk, started shooting at each other. The German killed the Banderovite on the spot, while he made it to the hospital. — The Banderovites were not fighting the Germans. If the Germans were shooting somewhere, they were running or hiding. When our troops attacked them, they fought with the Germans against the Red Army.

My third conversation took place with my neighbor, who was born in 1937. After the war, he moved to the north of the Khmelnytsky region for the duration of his father's service in the Red Army. He told me how once his father, together with his soldiers, went to the forest to get firewood. They were attacked by Bandera fighters, and his father was shell-shocked as a result of the attack.

In the house where they lived, the Banderites had hidden weapons. They only discovered this after an accident, when a man of his age blew himself up with a grenade while fishing. He also told me a story he had heard in his village: The Banderites were starving and looking for food. And many in the village, whether because they were afraid or simply did not want to, did not give it to them. One elderly man, in order to protect his cow, slept with her in the stable, tying the cow to his leg. Well, this did not help him —when he woke up, he found only her head tied to his leg and what they had left of her.

The last conversation took place around November 2018. It was a conversation with an elderly woman who told me about the great tragedy

of her life: she was left a widow at 18 because her husband, who had gone to Western Ukraine, was killed by Bandera fighters on a business trip. There were other conversations in which I was told about how the Bandera men took wounded Soviet soldiers from a military hospital and then killed and burned them in the woods. About how they broke into the barracks where Soviet soldiers were sleeping and killed them.

When you hear all these recollections and stories from people who have experienced all this themselves, you realize how true the account of the Ukrainian communist writer Yaroslav Halan was. In his famous pamphlet "What Has No Name?", he wrote,

A 14-year-old girl can't stand looking at meat. When in her presence people are going to fry cutlets, she turns pale and trembles like an aspen leaf.

A few months ago, on a night of sparrows, armed men came to a peasant hut near the town of Sarna and stabbed the owners. The girl looked with horror at the agony of her parents.

One of the bandits put a knife point to the throat of the child, but at the last minute a new "idea" was born in his brain.

Live for the glory of Stepan Bandera! And to make sure that you won't starve to death, we will leave you food. Come on, boys, chop her some pork !..

The "boys" liked this. They were grabbing plates and bowls from the shelves; and a few minutes later, before the desperate girl, a mountain of meat grew from the bleeding bodies of her father and mother.

This is what the degenerate bandits who call themselves "Ukrainian nationalists" — Bandera, Bulbov, Melnikov — have come to. Their activity in recent years is a continuous chain of wild atrocities, monstrously unbridled behavior and unsurpassed provocations.

Halan, who was a Soviet correspondent at the 1948 Nuremberg Trials against the leaders of Nazi Germany, was himself killed in his office by Banderites who struck him eleven times with an axe in his head in Lvov (Lviv) in 1949.

Today, just as then, the crimes of those who call themselves the ideological successors and followers of Bandera are almost too numerous to count. Like then, they are a bloody pack of jackals in the service of capital, running from one capitalist to another. But in changing their paymasters, they do not change their essence. There is nothing but backwardness and animal hatred in their faces and minds. Their ideas are reactionary.

Yet these very ideas of Bandera are today promoted not only by the imperialists and the bourgeois Ukrainian nationalists who want to justify the crimes of OUN-UPA, but also by those who call themselves Ukrainian national-communists, who want to justify all these horrors, by claiming that all this was caused by the policy pursued by Stalin in Western Ukraine.

But is it possible to justify those who turned the towns and villages of Western Ukraine into a real hell, who tortured mothers and children, who filled the wells with corpses of Ukrainians and Russians, Jews and Poles?

Yes, there were many among them who were intimidated, deceived, offended, and unjustly repressed, but there is no basis for portraying the fascist Banderites as fighters for "freedom" against Stalinism.

We orthodox Trotskyists hold that the historical truth about the events that took place in the western Ukrainian lands in the 40s and early 50s has to be established and clarified. The Stalinist bureaucracy refused to fight Ukrainian fascism by mobilizing the working class, and instead engaged in violent bureaucratic repression, often targeting people who were

entirely innocent. As Trotskyists, we have always strongly condemned and condemn to this day Stalinism and the repression and violence associated with it.

However, this can in no way justify the terror and national and political genocide unleashed by the Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists and fascists. Those who sowed death, fear, grief and tears on the Ukrainian land, who poured blood into peasant huts, who filled wells with corpses, cannot be national heroes. One can only say one thing — Shame! — Shame on all those who under the guise of criticism of Stalinism try to justify the crimes of the OUN gangs.

People in Ukraine and all over the world must know and must never forget whose support the imperialists have used and are using in their struggle for their hegemony, for the continuation of the oppression of the workers under the yoke of capital.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)