

Ukrainian government persecutes pacifist, while Zelensky meets with neo-Nazi leader

Jason Melanovski
17 August 2023

The NATO-backed government of President Volodymyr Zelensky has officially charged Ukrainian peace activist Yuri Sheliazhenko with “justification of Russian aggression.” After the country’s Security Service (SBU) raided his Kiev apartment earlier this month, Sheliazhenko has been interrogated and placed under nightly house arrest as he awaits prosecution.

Sheliazhenko currently serves as the executive secretary of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, which is a member of the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection and World BEYOND War.

The charge against Sheliazhenko is specifically based on a pacifist document taken by the SBU in their raid titled “Peace Agenda for Ukraine and the World.” The document, which was adopted by Sheliazhenko’s organization in September and sent to Zelensky’s office, calls “for peace, condemns the Russian aggression, urges protection of the human right to refuse to kill and appeals for a peaceful solution of the armed conflict.”

Speaking with *Democracy Now!* Sheliazhenko recounted that during his interrogation he realized that the Zelensky government had begun surveilling him over a year ago after he had published a document titled “A Human Right to Conscientious Objection to Military Service.”

He recalled, “During this interrogation, the investigator provided me a copy of the request to the court. He asked the court to apply to me home arrest. He released some materials disclosed, and I must say that from this pile of papers, I saw that, indeed, surveillance was started a year ago, and it was started when I published, as a human rights defender, a legal aid document that called human right [the right] to conscientious objection to military service. And they considered it a threat to national security. They

considered it as a threat to the mobilization of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. And they started to surveil me.”

Despite facing prison time and potential violence from the SBU and infamous fascist militias, Sheliazhenko has vowed to remain in the country to fight the patently undemocratic charges against him.

“I will not run from my home and country,” wrote Sheliazhenko on August 6. “If I will be sent to prison for pacifism, I will find a way to be useful for peace-loving Ukraine in prison too.”

The prosecution of Sheliazhenko is part of a broad crackdown on individuals and groups viewed as insufficiently loyal to the pro-NATO Kiev regime that came to power in the 2014 coup, which was organized by the EU and United States, working in tandem with the country’s far right.

The campaign to hunt down, arrest and prosecute or even kill “traitors” and “collaborators” accelerated following the beginning of the open war in February 2022 with the Russian invasion.

In addition to banning the country’s opposition political parties in May of last year, it is estimated that by the start of this year SBU had initiated 2,500 criminal cases against supposed “collaborators” and detained 600 foreign agents and spies.

Among the more notable cases are the prosecution of peace activist Ruslan Kotsaba and the arrest and prosecution of the anti-fascist brothers Alexander and Mikhail Kononovich.

While antiwar activists such as Sheliazhenko are being prosecuted, Zelensky found the time to meet with Andriy Biletsky, the neo-Nazi founder of the far-right Azov Battalion. Biletsky has made no secret about his neo-Nazi views and in 2010 stated that he believed the “national purpose” was to “lead the white races of the

world in a final crusade ... against Semite-led Untermenschen [subhumans].”

After months in which the Western media fraudulently tried to portray the Azov Battalion as having abandoned its neo-Nazi roots, Zelensky is now openly meeting with the fascist founder of this organization. On his official Telegram channel, Zelensky captioned the video of the meeting with the words, “The command post of the 3rd separate assault brigade, which is performing combat missions as part of the Khortytsia operational and strategic group of troops in the Bakhmut sector. During the open conversation, we discussed the most pressing issues.

“I am grateful to everyone who defends our country and people who bring our victory closer.”

The intensified crackdown on dissent and evermore open reliance on neo-Nazi forces comes amid a deepening crisis of the government whose NATO-backed counteroffensive has been a bloody disaster. It is estimated that over 300,000 Ukrainians have been killed in the ongoing war. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers have been senselessly massacred just in the past two and a half months alone, which has failed to produce any military advances for Ukraine.

Despite this horrific death toll, unseen in Europe since World War II, the NATO-backed Zelensky government is deploying all means at its disposal to continue the war, effectively kidnapping people off the streets and forcing them to the front.

The high probability of being killed at the front has motivated thousands of men to flee the country. Those who can afford it offer bribes to Ukrainian officials in order to avoid military service.

Under conditions where a renewed wave of mobilization is being prepared, with some Ukrainian politicians demanding that as many as 400,000 more men be mobilized, Zelensky on Friday announced the firing of all of Ukraine’s regional military recruitment chiefs.

Last month, it was revealed that military officials had accepted bribes in cash and cryptocurrency in exchange for falsified documents and the exemption of men from military conscription. In some cases, officials collected \$10,000 per person, a huge amount in a country where the average monthly income is just \$400 a month. In other words, those who were able to bribe themselves out of military service were wealthier layers, whereas

working class Ukrainians were the first to be forced to die in the NATO-backed counteroffensive.

Zelensky feigned indignation at the scandal, stating in a social media post that “the system should be run by people who know exactly what war is and why cynicism and bribery during war is treason.” In a separate statement he claimed that the scandal remained a secret until, “during the inspection of the territorial recruitment centers, law enforcement agencies exposed cases of corruption.” In reality, the fact that wealthy Ukrainians are avoiding the draft has been well known since the war first began.

As even the *New York Times* highlighted in its coverage of the scandal “...Andriy, an officer in the Territorial Defense Force, said corruption in recruitment centers was well known, and that rooting out some of those responsible was unlikely to have a big effect on mobilization. Andriy, who discussed political matters on the condition that his surname not be used, said, ‘Those who would like to avoid would do that anyway.’”

By arresting the military recruitment officers, Zelensky no doubt seeks to assuage immense social anger both in the civilian population and among rank-and-file soldiers about the flagrant draft evasion by the wealthy and the war profiteering in sections of the military leadership. But the principal purpose is to create conditions for the ongoing mobilization of even more Ukrainian men as cannon fodder for the imperialist war against Russia. Earlier this week, the Biden administration approved another \$200 million in weapons, the 44th shipment to date, which will be used to fund the continuation of the slaughter.



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