Canadian establishment doubles down on its efforts to “move on” from parliament's hailing of Ukrainian Nazi SS veteran

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28 September 2023

Canada’s political establishment and corporate media are now desperately seeking to move on from any discussion, let alone serious probing, of how the federal parliament came to give a hero’s welcome to a 98-year-old Ukrainian veteran of the Nazi Waffen-SS, Yaroslav Hunka.

Hunka was given a unanimous standing ovation by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and MPs and Senators from all parties when he was introduced to a special Sept. 22 sitting of Canada’s parliament devoted to a bellicose address from Zelensky.

The head of Canada’s armed forces and the six ambassadors to Canada from the G-7 cabal of imperialist states, including Germany’s Sabine Sparwasser, also joined in the standing ovation for Hunka. The Nazi veteran has boasted that he spent the “best two years” of his life in Hitler’s SS, the organizer of the Holocaust and countless other unspeakable crimes and atrocities.

The theatrical calling out of Hunka by House of Commons Speaker Anthony Rota—“a Ukrainian war veteran from the Second World War who fought for Ukrainian independence against the Russians and continues to support the troops today … a Ukrainian hero, a Canadian hero”—is now conceded to have been a “shameful” blunder.

But only because it has cut across and is impeding the efforts of the NATO powers to dramatically escalate their war on Russia, in the wake of the failure of Ukraine’s much-vaunted spring/summer offensive.

Parliament’s hailing of Hunka was a provocation aimed at sending a message to Putin and the Russian oligarchs he defends that there are no limits the NATO powers are not prepared to breach in their drive to impose a “strategic defeat” on Russia—that is, its subjugation to neo-colonial domination.

But it catastrophically backfired. It unwittingly exposed the ultra-reactionary forces and fascist political-ideological traditions the imperialist powers and their client regime in Kiev have mobilized to prepare and wage their predatory war.

In the six days since, Canada’s political elite and media have been desperately trying to exculpate themselves and bury the entire affair as quickly as possible. Indeed, Government House Leader Karina Gould, who herself met privately with Hunka at the conclusion of the Sept. 22 special parliamentary session, tried to push through a motion to have all evidence of the honouring of Hunka expunged from the parliamentary transcript and audio-visual records.

On Sunday, long after the political firestorm ignited by parliament’s honouring of an SS veteran had erupted, Rota put it out that he alone was responsible for the invitation and honoring of Hunka. This is absurd. Zelensky’s address to parliament was a major and heavily-scripted political event, for which all the invitees, above all those to be feted, would have been closely vetted by the security services and government.

Moreover, just from Rota’s description of Hunka, those on the parliamentary benches and in the gallery would have known right away that he was a fascist—for only the Nazis and their Ukrainian fascist foot-soldiers and allies fought “Russians” in Ukraine during World War II. Yet, led by Trudeau, Zelensky, and Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, whose maternal grandfather was a prominent Ukrainian Nazi collaborator, every man and women present at the special sitting rose in unison to applaud Hunka.

On Tuesday, Rota dutifully fell on his sword and resigned. But important sections of the ruling class and political establishment deemed this woefully inadequate.

Dangerous light had inadvertently been shone on the foul fascistic and anti-Semitic traditions of Ukrainian nationalism as developed in response to the 1917 October Revolution. The celebration of Hunka also drew unwelcome attention to Canada’s role in providing a safe haven to him and up to 2,000 like members of “the all-Ukrainian” Waffen-SS Galicia Division, as well as tens of thousands of other Ukrainian fascists after the Third Reich’s inglorious collapse at the end of World War II.

The *Globe and Mail*, the traditional voice of Canada’s financial oligarchy, and the opposition parties urged Trudeau to issue an apology on behalf of Canada’s parliament to President Zelensky. His regime is infested with devotees of the Ukrainian Nazi accomplice and war criminal Stepan Bandera, but central to imperialist war propaganda are the twin false claims that the fascist presence in Ukraine is a small, politically insignificant fringe, and that the NATO powers are pouring weaponry into Ukraine not to pursue their predatory interests but to defend “democracy.”

The trade union-backed NDP, which is in a governmental “confidence and supply” alliance with Trudeau’s Liberals, implored the prime minister to counteract the self-inflicted blows

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to the imperialist powers' fraudulent pro-war narrative. "Russian propaganda is weaponizing this incident to harm President Zelensky," declared the NDP House Leader, Peter Julian, Tuesday. "The Prime Minister has to apologize and help mitigate the harm that this has caused Ukraine and its leadership."

On Wednesday, Trudeau issued such an "apology." Conspicuously absent from it was any mention of the Russian people, who as the largest constituent of the Soviet Union, suffered the majority of the casualties at the hands of the Nazis' "war of annihilation" against the USSR and "Judeo-Bolshevism."

This apology is meant to bookend the cover-up of the extraordinary events that unfolded in Canada's parliament last week. No sooner was it given than the Trudeau government and the other phony "progressive" parties—the NDP, Greens and Bloc Quebecois—indicated they are now eager to move on.

Underscoring the cynical political calculation behind Trudeau's apology, the CBC reports that the prime minister told a meeting of the Liberal parliamentary caucus shortly before he issued it, that "(T)hey should avoid speaking to the press about Hunka's invitation and the subsequent fallout, and that the media frenzy would die down if they stay tight-lipped."

Canada's media are more than happy to help bury the affair. Throughout the conflict they have peddled war propaganda, presenting the Russian invasion as entirely "unprovoked." They have covered up such basic facts as Kiev's suppression of all political parties opposed to the war and its imposition of a brutal regime of conscription, and presented as brilliant Ukrainian counterstrokes missile strikes and other operations entirely dependent upon NATO weaponry and intelligence. As for the *New York Times*, the *Guardian* and other leading western newspapers, they have provided only the most perfunctory reports on the Hunka affair, pushing the official cover story that this was all due to Rota's unfortunate "mistake."

Underscoring the media's effective transformation into a war propaganda arm of the state, no one in the press has taken note of the deafening silence from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) about parliament's honoring of a member of the Waffen-SS's Galicia Division and the wave of popular revulsion this has provoked.

In the late 1940s the UCC campaigned for Canada to open its doors to members of the Waffen-SS's Galicia Division and it has advocated on their behalf ever since. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has extensively documented, the UCC has long been at the centre of a reactionary alliance between Canadian imperialism and the Ukrainian far right. Ottawa gave safe haven to many of the Nazis' Ukrainian accomplices in order to use them as tools of its Cold War policy: to attack the labour movement and to foment a rabidly anti-Communist, virulently anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalism in concert with the CIA and British intelligence. In recent decades, as the Canadian government, along with Washington and its NATO partners, has worked ever more aggressively to harness Ukraine to NATO and the European Union, the alliance with the UCC and the Ukrainian far-right has become ever more important to Canadian foreign policy.

Freeland has a lifelong association with the UCC and Taras Zalusky, the chief of staff to Defence Minister Bill Blair, is the former CEO of the UCC.

For their own reactionary reasons, Pierre Poilievre and the Conservative Party may try for a few more days to continue to feign outrage over the honouring of Hunka.

Poilievre won the leadership of the Official Opposition Conservatives by touting himself as the most strident supporter of the far-right "Freedom Convoy,"—which menacingly occupied Downtown Ottawa in January-February 2022, and was seized upon by powerful sections of the ruling class as a means to bulldozer through public opposition to the scrapping of all anti-COVID measures and push politics far to the right.

To state the obvious, the furthest thing from Poilievre's mind is to expose the imperialist character of the NATO instigated war with Russia or the Zelensky regime's and Ottawa's own ties to the Ukrainian far right.

His aim is solely to inflict political damage on Trudeau. Thus, unlike the other opposition leaders, he has been willing to challenge the government's claim that it didn't know about Hunka's invitation to the Sept. 22 special sitting and shouldn't have the right to vet the Speaker's list of invitees. Specifically, he is demanding Trudeau take personal responsibility for the fiasco and apologize in his own name.

Trudeau has responded by pointing to Poilievre's own refusal to apologize for several of his MPs—including the party's infrastructure critic, Leslyn Lewis—meeting with Christine Anderson, one of the most right-wing and bigoted representatives of Germany's neo-fascist AfD.

Such is the reactionary and degraded character of the debate between the Canadian ruling class' two traditional parties of government.

Among those who enthusiastically applauded Hunka and was conspicuously photographed and videotaped doing so as he was seated close to him was the head of Canada's armed forces, General Wayne Eyre. Yet Eyre, as reported by the *Ottawa Citizen*, has refused to issue any apology in his name or that of the military, saying Rota's will suffice.

This is no small matter. Under the direction of Eyre and his predecessors, Canada's military has worked since 2015 to reorganize and strengthen Ukraine's armed forces, including through the incorporation of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion and other fascist militia. When pictures were taken of CAF personnel alongside Azov members, the military's sole concern was managing the public relations fallout.

As in other imperialist countries, there is growing support for the far-right within Canada's armed forces, something Eyre has had to acknowledge even while downplaying it. In 2020 a member of Canada's reserves attempted to assassinate Trudeau while on active duty. In January 2022, the military top brass had to issue explicit instructions to members of its elite Joint Task Force-2 Special Forces not to publicly support the far-right Convoy.

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