

Yaroslav Hunka, *Politico* and the rehabilitation of Nazi war crimes

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Two weeks after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, German Ambassador Sabine Sparwasser and the entire Canadian Parliament honored Ukrainian Waffen-SS veteran Yaroslav Hunka with a standing ovation, it is increasingly obvious that this was not a misunderstanding. Rather, it was a deliberate provocation.

The logic of the war in Ukraine requires the rehabilitation of the worst crimes of the Nazi regime. After the debacle of the Ukrainian summer offensive, the US, Germany and NATO are not only intensifying the war with arms deliveries worth tens of billions of dollars, they are also preparing to send their own troops to defeat and “fragment” nuclear-armed Russia, as the secretary of the Ukrainian Security Council, Oleksiy Danilov, recently put it.

This is only possible with methods such as those used by the Nazis in their war of annihilation against the Soviet Union (1941-45), when they killed over 25 million Soviet citizens and 6 million Jews, having established a ruthless dictatorship in Germany to stifle any opposition to the war.

While Trudeau and Co. initially presented their homage to Hunka as a misunderstanding and feigned ignorance, the media are now moving to openly defend his membership in the Waffen-SS.

On Monday, the European website of the US daily *Politico*, which is fully owned by the German Axel Springer publishing house, published a commentary that justifies Hunka’s membership in the Waffen-SS, combining lies and falsifications of history that were previously known only to Holocaust deniers such as David Irving.

The author of the article, Keir Giles, who is close to the British military, describes statements that “the SS’s

primary task was genocide” and that Hunka’s membership in the Waffen-SS made him a Nazi as “propaganda narratives that are successfully spread by Russia and its agents.”

“Fighting against the USSR at the time didn’t necessarily make you a Nazi, just someone who had an excruciating choice over which of these two terror regimes to resist,” he claims.

Giles accuses “Canada’s enemies” of having “latched on to these simple narratives to attack Ukraine, Canada and each country’s association with the other.” The claim that Hunka’s unit of the Waffen-SS “committed multiple war crimes, including mass murder,” was “invented out of thin air,” he wrote.

“Repeated exhaustive investigations... led to the conclusion that no war crimes or atrocities had been committed by this particular unit,” he concluded.

In reality, the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg ruled in 1946 that the SS was a criminal organisation and that its (voluntary) members had committed war crimes. Since then, numerous well researched scholarly works – starting with Eugen Kogon’s *The SS State* and Raul Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews* – have irrefutably demonstrated that “the SS’s primary task” was indeed genocide against the Jews. The organization led by Heinrich Himmler had the main responsibility for the planning and implementation of the Holocaust.

But Giles denounces the Nuremberg war crimes trials as a Russian propaganda event, writing: “Russia clings to the Nuremberg trials as a benchmark of legitimacy because as a victorious power, it was never subjected to the same reckoning.”

With attacks on “Jewish advocacy groups in Canada”

and “the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center,” whose charges are more “influenced by misconception and supposition than history and evidence,” he flaunts his own anti-Semitism.

In fact, it is Giles who falsifies the history and the facts. It has been proven that the Waffen-SS Galicia Division, which Hunka voluntarily joined in 1943 at the age of 18, was directly involved in at least three massacres – in Pidkamin, Huta-Pieniacka and Palikrowy. In Huta-Pieniacka, the 4th Battalion of the SS Division “Galicia” murdered all Polish inhabitants on 28 February 1944 – estimates of the number of victims range from 500 to 1,200 – and burned down the entire village.

The SS Division “Galicia” was also deployed in Yugoslavia and on the front against the Red Army, where the Wehrmacht committed countless war crimes.

Hunka’s personal biography leaves no doubt that he deliberately joined a gang of murderers. Eastern Galicia, where Hunka grew up, was a focus of the Nazi genocide. Of the 540,000 Jews who lived there when the Nazis invaded, only two to three percent survived. About one in eleven victims of the Holocaust came from this region, which is only half the size of present-day Hungary.

Eastern Galicia belonged to Austria-Hungary before the First World War and then to Poland. After the German invasion of Poland, it was occupied by the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Ukraine.

In 1941, the Nazis invaded and incorporated Eastern Galicia into the “Generalgouvernement,” where they perpetrated their worst crimes. This is where they set up the mass extermination camps. Around 3 million Jews and 3 million Poles fell victim to Nazi terror in the General Government alone.

In Eastern Galicia, mass shootings of Jewish men, women and children began immediately after the German invasion. The extermination of the Jews lasted over two years. Some 200,000 were deported to Belzec and murdered there. In 1943, the ghettos were dissolved and the remaining Jews shot.

The Nazis were able to count on the support of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). Both the wing led by Stepan Bandera and the wing led by Andriy Melnyk collaborated with them. Most of the volunteers were recruited from the Melnyk wing for the Waffen-SS division “Galicia,” which was formed in

1943 and was joined by Hunka.

It is impossible that Hunka, who attended school in the small town of Berezhany from 1939 to 1943, was unaware of the Nazis’ terror. In Berezhany, where about 4,000 Jews still lived when the Nazis invaded, hundreds of Jews were rounded up in public squares in the autumn of 1941 and September of 1942 and herded into railway cars for deportation in front of the local population. In 1943, SS guards killed 1,180 Jews in a three-day operation at the local cemetery, around the same time as Hunka entered the Waffen-SS.

Hunka later described the years 1941 to 1943, during which the German occupiers went on a rampage in Galicia, as the happiest of his life, in which he enjoyed “the company of charming girls, carefree cheerful friends, fragrant evenings in the luxurious castle park and walks through the city.” That alone defines him as a ruthless anti-Semite and war criminal.

His rehabilitation by *Politico*, an established bourgeois newspaper owned by one of Germany’s most influential publishing houses, must be taken as an alarm signal. It underscores that the threat of war and dictatorship does not just come from the far-right, but from the entire ruling class. The war against Russia in Ukraine, which is supported by all representatives of the ruling class, is linked to the strengthening of the most reactionary political forces. It must be stopped.



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