

Government-backed Ukrainian Canadian Congress chides: Don't "besmirch" the reputation of Nazi Waffen-SS veteran Hunka

Roger Jordan
5 October 2023

The politically influential, state-supported Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) has responded to the political firestorm triggered by the Canadian parliament's standing ovation for the Nazi war criminal Yaroslav Hunka by forthrightly defending him and the "all-Ukrainian" Waffen-SS Galicia Division in which he served.

On the front page of its website, the UCC is prominently promoting a statement issued by the University of Toronto's Chair of Ukrainian Studies, Paul Robert Magocsi, that obscures the relationship between the Galicia Division and the Waffen-SS—the elite Nazi unit principally responsible for the Holocaust, the violent suppression of civilian discontent and countless other atrocities—and that emphatically denies the Division's involvement in any war crimes.

Full of historical distortions and outright lies, the statement culminates with the declaration that it is "not in the interests of Canada" to "besmirch the reputation of an individual," i.e., Hunka, who volunteered for the Waffen-SS in 1943 at the age of 18.

That the UCC should unreservedly defend Ukrainian fascists who collaborated with and participated in some of the most monstrous of the crimes committed by the Nazi regime should come as no surprise. The organization has been the chief Canadian advocate for Waffen-SS Galicia veterans for three-quarters of a century. Following the Third Reich's ignominious defeat, it led lobbying efforts to bring up to 2,000 of these blood-drenched war criminals to Canada.

Relying on funding from and its extensive ties with successive Canadian governments, the UCC has defended the Waffen-SS Galicia veterans against all efforts to hold them to account as part of the organization's broader effort to whitewash the criminal record of the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists—both of whose rival factions, led respectively by Andriy Melnyk and Stepan Bandera, collaborated with the Nazis in the Holocaust and their "war of annihilation" against the Soviet Union.

The UCC prepared the political terrain for its explicit defence of Hunka and the Waffen-SS with a terse, obliquely-worded statement issued six days after parliament's saluting of the 98-year-old Nazi SS veteran and in which none of the words World War II, Nazi, Waffen-SS, Germany or Hunka appear. While ending with a bellicose denunciation of Russia for committing "genocide" against the Ukrainian people in the present war, the UCC statement conspicuously omits any mention of the real genocide perpetrated on Ukrainian soil during World War II by the Nazis, and in which the fascist Ukrainian OUN cadre were complicit.

Magocsi's statement was issued just two days after the September 22 special session of parliament at which Prime Minister Justin

Trudeau, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and MPs from all parties rose as one to acclaim the Ukrainian Nazi collaborator.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained in previous articles, the embrace of a Waffen-SS veteran arises out of the predatory character of the US/NATO war on Russia, which the imperialist powers instigated and are now waging with the aim of reducing Russia to a semi-colony as part of a new redivision of the world. This requires bringing forward and forming alliances with the most reactionary political forces in the world.

Magocsi's statement begins with a gross historical distortion. It portrays the Waffen-SS Galicia Division as an ordinary German army unit. He writes, "The Third Reich had an army (the Wehrmacht)...The German army organized military units comprised of members of the various peoples it conquered in Central and Eastern Europe, including Russians and the unit comprised primarily of ethnic Ukrainians was known as the Galicia Division of the Waffen-SS."

In fact, the Galicia Division was part of the Waffen-SS, the Nazis' elite troop of mass murderers who were most directly implicated in the Holocaust and other horrific war crimes. Membership in the Waffen-SS was entirely voluntary, requiring those who joined to show a political and ideological affinity with the Nazis' fascism and anti-Semitism, including swearing allegiance to Adolph Hitler. So thoroughly implicated was the Waffen-SS in the Nazis' most horrendous war crimes during World War II that at the Nuremberg Trials, it was declared a criminal organization *as a whole*, with membership in the organization sufficient to press war crimes charges.

Two further important facts underscore the utterly disingenuous character of Magocsi's suggestion that the Waffen-SS Galicia Division was comparable to other Nazi-organized divisions of "conquered peoples." First, it ignores how the Melnyk wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists actively campaigned for the formation of a Waffen-SS division as a means to boost support in Berlin for an "independent" Ukraine in a Nazi-dominated Europe.

Second, it glosses over the extent to which the region of Galicia was at the heart of the Nazis' reign of terror. With the enthusiastic support of local Ukrainian nationalists, hundreds of thousands of Jews in the area were exterminated. As the WWSW noted yesterday, the more than 500,000 Jews from eastern Galicia who perished in the Holocaust accounted for one in 11 of the total of 6 million exterminated across the continent.

Magocsi censors all this from his mendacious fact-sheet-style account. He makes just one fleeting reference to the Holocaust and only to falsely claim that the Galicia Division was in no way complicit

in it. He fails to make mention of the Nazis' "war of annihilation" against the USSR, in which the extermination of much of the population was an avowed goal in order to create *lebensraum* ("living space") for the German *volk*. It led to the deaths of at least 27 million Soviet citizens and created conditions for the Holocaust to be carried out.

"There is simply no proof that the Galicia Division engaged in war crimes connected with the Holocaust of Jews or ethnic cleansing directed against Poles," Magocsi continues. In support of this lie, he cites the findings of the 1985-86 Deschenes Commission into war criminals in Canada.

In reality, as the WWSWS noted yesterday, it has been demonstrated incontrovertibly that the Waffen-SS Galicia Division 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 February 28, 1944—estimates of the number of victims range from 500 to 1,200—and burned down the entire village.

As for the Deschenes Commission, it was a whitewash organized by the Tory government of the day and under the influence of the far-right UCC. It refused to accept evidence from the Soviet Union and Poland, where the vast majority of eye witnesses to the war crimes of the Waffen-SS Galicia Division lived.

The Commission found that members of the Galicia Division were not guilty of war crimes due to a legal technicality. Since Canada was not a signatory to the London Statutes establishing the Nuremberg Tribunals, it found that the Nuremberg ruling that all Waffen-SS members were war criminals had no standing in Canadian law.

According to its terms of reference, the Commission was forbidden from investigating the decisions of previous Canadian governments, including the decision to admit up to 2,000 members of the Waffen-SS following the war. Yet it based its ruling that Galicia Division members were not war criminals in part on the supposed "vetting" undertaken by the Canadian government when they were admitted to the country!

In truth, no substantive "vetting" took place. The Canadian state's embrace of the Nazis' fascist collaborators in Ukraine and elsewhere in Eastern Europe was a policy pursued in cooperation with its closest allies, US and British imperialism. Washington cultivated extensive relations with ex-Nazis and their collaborators as part of its anti-communist Cold War policy, which involved the waging of wars and fomenting of bloody coups with the most right-wing political forces around the world.

The UCC played a key role during this period by leading the campaign inside and outside parliament to bring the war criminals to Canada. It disguised the Galicia Division's Waffen-SS origins by describing it as the First Division of the Ukrainian National Army. By 1985, the UCC's influence had grown to such an extent that both it and an organization representing the Galicia Division veterans received official standing before the Deschenes Commission, giving them powers to cross-examine witnesses and aggressively push for evidence to be excluded.

The UCC's political influence within Canadian ruling circles today has never been stronger, owing to the prominent role it has played since 2014 in assisting Ottawa in preparing and waging the war in Ukraine.

In addition to Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, a lifelong UCC associate, the chief of staff to Canada's Defence Minister is a former UCC chief executive. Freeland's maternal grandfather,

Mykhailo Tschomiak, edited the fascist Ukrainian-language newspaper *Krakovski Visti*, which campaigned for and celebrated the formation of the Galicia Division.

This helps explain why Canada's media has had virtually nothing to say about the UCC's Nazi apologetics following the standing ovation for Hunka. For almost a week, the organization said nothing at all and was not pressed to do so, even though a prominent delegation of at least a dozen UCC members was present in the parliamentary gallery and applauded rapturously like everyone else present.

Then came the September 28 statement, which noted vaguely that there are "difficult and painful pages in the shared history of the communities who made their home in Ukraine." The statement continued, "The UCC acknowledges that recent events that brought these pages to the forefront have caused pain and anguish."

Having managed to avoid mentioning the Holocaust or the tens of millions of Soviet citizens—Ukrainians included—who fell victim to Nazi Germany's war of annihilation, the statement got back to the real concern of the UCC, the government, and the political establishment as a whole: urging "unwavering support" for the war against Russia.

The fact that the UCC felt emboldened enough just one week later to openly embrace Hunka's Waffen-SS legacy, with its October 4 republication of Magocsi's September 24 statement, is bound up with broader shifts within the ruling class.

Faced with a wave of public revulsion at parliament's hailing of a Nazi war criminal, the Trudeau government and political establishment quickly rallied round a "cover story." House Speaker Anthony Rota accepted full blame, while everyone else present feigned ignorance.

In recent days, however, the tone has shifted. More and more voices can be heard in the media and in the academy openly defending Hunka and the Waffen-SS. The statement by Magocsi, a professor at one of Canada's most prestigious universities and Royal Society of Canada fellow, is only one of the most glaring examples of how the Nazis and their collaborators are being rehabilitated with the open support or cowardly silence of much of the well-paid, pro-war professoriat.

Having used fascist forces like the Swoboda Party and the Azov Battalion to pursue their predatory objectives in Ukraine, the imperialist "democracies" are increasingly rehabilitating and reviving the most vile 20th century political traditions as they further escalate the war against Russia and move to the direct deployment of NATO forces in all-out war with their nuclear-armed "strategic rival."



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