

Canada's prime minister invited Nazi war criminal Hunka to exclusive reception for Ukrainian president

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Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's office sent a formal invitation to 98-year-old Nazi war criminal Yaroslav Hunka for an exclusive reception for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in September 2023. This revelation, reported by the *Globe and Mail* on Monday, underscores that the two unanimous standing ovations Canada's House of Commons gave the Waffen-SS veteran reflected the broad support within the ruling elite for using far-right and outright Nazi forces in the aggressive pursuit of their imperialist interests.

The invitation was contained in a "Dear Yaroslav Hunka" email with the subject "Invitation from the Prime Minister of Canada—September 22, 2023." It stated, "The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, is pleased to invite you to a special event. The event will take place on Friday, September 22, 2023, at 8.30pm in Toronto, Ontario."

In addition to Trudeau, the event was attended by Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, whose maternal grandfather, Mykhailo Chomiak, was a fellow Ukrainian Nazi collaborator with Hunka during World War II. Chomiak was the editor of *Krakivski Visti*, a fascist Ukrainian-language newspaper. It engaged in systematic antisemitic incitement amid the mass extermination of Jews in Ukraine. It also campaigned for the establishment of the Waffen-SS unit in which Hunka served, the 14th Grenadier Division of the Waffen-SS, or "Galicia Division."

In the end, Hunka did not participate in the reception, held at the Fort York Armoury. The most likely explanation for his absence is that the outrage produced by the standing ovations he had received in parliament just hours earlier prompted the Prime Minister's Office to go into damage control.

Canada's political establishment closed ranks at the time around the unconvincing narrative that the standing ovations for a Nazi war criminal by every member of the House of Commons, Zelensky, the head of Canada's military, and the ambassadors of the G-7 in the gallery took place out of ignorance. Anthony Rota—the speaker of the House who pointed out Hunka in the gallery, described him as a Ukrainian

and Canadian "war hero" and called for the standing ovations—resigned from his post and assumed sole responsibility for the incident. Apologizing for the "mistake" in parliament, Trudeau said later, in September 2023, "All of us who were in this House on Friday regret deeply having stood and clapped even though we did so unaware of the context."

In its analysis of parliament's acclamation of Hunka, the *World Socialist Web Site* dismissed this pathetic excuse. The WSWS wrote on September 28, 2023, "This is preposterous. Friday's event was not a routine parliamentary session, but a visit by the head of the Ukrainian state, which Ottawa has backed to the hilt with over \$9 billion in military and financial assistance in the war against Russia. Each stage of the proceedings would have been carefully planned and scripted in advance. To suggest otherwise is to take one's readers for fools..."

"The desperate attempts to deny the obvious—that the celebration of Hunka was a deliberate political provocation which backfired spectacularly—are driven by the fact that the standing ovation given to a Nazi war criminal explodes the propaganda used to sell the US-led war on Russia in Ukraine."

This analysis applies equally to Trudeau's "Dear Yaroslav" invitation. The Toronto event was organized in cooperation with the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC), a far-right lobby group that came to national prominence in the immediate aftermath of World War II, when it campaigned for the admission of Nazi collaborators to Canada. These included Waffen-SS members like Hunka and members of the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) led by Stepan Bandera.

The UCC was established in 1940 with state support and has been supplied in the more than eight decades since with extensive state financing and political assistance. It continues to play an outsized role in Canada's foreign policy. It has worked closely with the Canadian government as Ottawa and the Canadian Armed Forces have helped integrate fascist forces into the Ukrainian army and state apparatus, including the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion.

The Prime Minister's Office continues to insist that everyone

was blissfully ignorant of Hunka's past, although he has publicly boasted about it for years. According to Trudeau's spokesperson, Ann-Clara Vaillancourt, "The Prime Minister had no knowledge of this individual before the independent recognition by the former Speaker of the House of Commons. Last September, there was a community event with the President of Ukraine in Toronto with over 1,000 people invited. Hundreds of Canadians were invited upon the recommendation of groups like the Ukrainian Canadian Congress."

Even if one accepts this dubious alibi at face value, it raises more questions than it answers.

How many organizations have the ability to invite in the name of Canada's head of government "hundreds of Canadians" to an event where the prime minister, his deputy, and an honoured guest from one of Canadian imperialism's closest international allies are in attendance? And if the prime minister really had "no knowledge of this individual," what was the justification for the Prime Minister's Office sending him a personalized "Dear Yaroslav Hunka" invitation?

The only credible explanation for the standing ovations in parliament and the official invitation extended to Hunka is that Canadian imperialism's participation in the intensifying struggle for markets, raw materials and spheres of influence among the major powers on a global scale requires alliances with the most reactionary political forces. The US-led drive to subordinate Russia to the status of a semi-colony necessitates the revival of the same fascist forces used by German imperialism in the 20th century in pursuit of the same fundamental goals, as demonstrated by the far-right political descendants of Bandera dominating official political life in Ukraine.

The unrestrained backing given to Israel's genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza further attests to the readiness of the Trudeau Liberal government, like its counterparts in Washington and the major European capitals, to deploy the most ruthless methods in advancing Canadian imperialism's strategic interests and ambitions.

On the domestic front, the promotion of Nazis like Hunka and his fascist allies in the UCC is aimed squarely at intimidating the working class and all opposition to the ruling elite's agenda of austerity and war.

The Trudeau government aims through its partners in the trade unions and the union-sponsored New Democratic Party to suppress the class struggle. However, Trudeau's invitation to a Nazi war criminal serves as a warning that the "liberal" wing of the bourgeoisie, no less than the explicitly right-wing section led by the far-right provocateur Pierre Poilievre, is prepared to resort to any means necessary to defend its class interests. Poilievre emerged as the leader of the official opposition Conservatives after serving as the most strident advocate of the "Freedom" Convoy that occupied downtown Ottawa two years ago, in January-February 2022. Instigated by fascists who advocated the establishment of an authoritarian junta, the

Convoy was used to bulldoze over public opposition to the scrapping of all remaining COVID-19 mitigation measures.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in its New Year's statement "The working class, the fight against capitalist barbarism, and the building of the world party of socialist revolution:"

The Gaza genocide confirms, on a higher level, a tendency first noted by Lenin in the midst of World War I, more than a century ago. He wrote in 1916 that "the difference between the democratic-republican and the reactionary-monarchist imperialist bourgeoisie is obliterated because they are both rotting alive..." Substitute the term "fascist" for "reactionary-monarchist" and Lenin's analysis is entirely valid as a description of present-day imperialist regimes.

In addition to Trudeau's embrace of a Nazi war criminal, this international tendency finds expression in French President Emmanuel Macron's adoption of the far-right National Rally's anti-immigrant policies and the German government's implementation of key demands of the fascist Alternative for Germany. In the US, President Joe Biden and the Democrats have sought to rehabilitate the Republicans after their complicity in Trump's fascist coup attempt on January 6, 2021, in furtherance of their plans to wage war around the world and establish US global hegemony.

The only social force capable of defending democratic rights in opposition to the growing global fascist threat is the international working class mobilized in political struggle against the capitalist profit system. The same capitalist crisis driving the ruling classes of every country towards world war and dictatorship to preserve their vast wealth is impelling the working class into major class battles that create the objective basis for the emergence of a mass movement for socialism.



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