

Canada backing Zelensky regime's efforts to conscript those who fled war and use them as cannon fodder

James Clayton
26 June 2024

Tens of thousands of Ukrainian men admitted to Canada as temporary residents following Russia's reactionary US-NATO-instigated invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 now face forced repatriation and conscription into the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Canadian imperialism, which has long worked with Washington to use Ukraine to threaten and ultimately wage war on Russia, is quietly supporting this criminal policy because their proxy army is losing the war.

For months, videos of conscription squads snatching young men off the streets of Ukraine to be press ganged into military service have circulated on social media. These public kidnappings face growing resistance from workers and their families who oppose the senseless slaughter of their sons, brothers, husbands and fathers in an imperialist bloodbath. Press gangs violently assault Ukrainians who resist.

Faced with opposition at home and the fact that as many as a half-million soldiers have already been slaughtered, Ukraine's far-right government headed by Volodymyr Zelensky has now internationalized its forced enlistment campaign. In late April the Ukrainian government began to refuse consular services to Ukrainian military-aged men resident abroad. Those consular services are now available only in Ukraine. Anyone returning to Ukraine to renew their documents risks being sent to the front.

In order to maintain a valid Ukrainian passport—a precondition for their maintaining their “temporary resident” status under Canadian immigration law—Ukrainians who fled to Canada must now return to Ukraine and risk being seized and forcibly enlisted in the military. Many will thus be compelled to do the very thing they fled Ukraine to avoid: killing fellow human beings on behalf of the Ukrainian capitalist state and their imperialist sponsors.

Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dmytro Kuleba, justified the new policy in April, saying that “a man of conscription age went abroad, showed his state that he does not care about its survival, and then comes and wants to receive services from this state. It does not work this way.”

Many male Ukrainian refugees in Canada are now caught in a Catch-22 situation: they can remain in Canada with a lapsed Ukrainian passport, which would invalidate their legal status as “temporary residents,” or they can return “voluntarily” to Ukraine and face possible dismemberment or death, but with a freshly-minted Ukrainian ID!

Tellingly, a Russian youth, Trofim Modlyi, who fled conscription by the Russian state in 2022, was granted refugee status by Ottawa with all dispatch. At the time, the government and corporate media made a great public show of the Canadian state's supposed generosity in his case.

Ukrainians who fled the conflict and came to Canada, by contrast, have been accorded only “temporary status,” which unlike refugee status can be revoked at any time.

Canada's temporary resident visa program for Ukraine expired on March 31, timed conveniently for the new conscription drive. Those who arrived after that date are no longer entitled to any financial support. For those already accepted under the temporary visa program and whose Ukrainian passport remains valid, Canadian government settlement support is available until March 31, 2025.

A climate of fear and terror is now spreading in the Ukrainian expatriate community, compounded by economic hardship resulting from the cut off of government supports. The Canadian state has spent about \$4 billion on military assistance to Ukraine and more than \$10 billion in all financial aid for Kiev since 2022.

The CBC interviewed Dmytro, a 21-year-old Ukrainian resident in Winnipeg, who described the climate of terror prevalent in Ukraine. Watching one of the countless videos of civilians resisting a press gang, Dmytro remarked, “We do hear the constant screams of women all around, trying to protect this civilian who they don't know... they are seeing their sons, they're seeing their fathers, they're seeing their husbands [in] his place, because no one is really safe [from conscription].”

Dmytro made the important observation that it is “constantly portrayed in media that Russian mobilization is bad, but Ukrainian mobilization is good. Yet there is no difference, currently.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained, Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a reactionary response to imperialist aggression and strategic encirclement. It expresses the interests of the Russian capitalist oligarchy that emerged directly out of the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union. This oligarchy acquired its wealth from the outright theft of the socialized property created by the Soviet working class. Ukraine is similarly ruled by a capitalist oligarchy that arose out of exactly the same process. The dissolution of the Soviet Union left all of its “independent” capitalist successor states vulnerable to imperialist

provocations. Nowhere have those been more active than in Ukraine.

The war in Ukraine arises not from the machinations of Vladimir Putin, but out of the irreconcilable contradictions of world capitalism. Canadian and world imperialism have embarked upon a military campaign to re-divide the world and its resources, faced with the long-term decline of American and European capitalism. Ukraine, and far-right Ukrainian nationalism in particular, have been honed into the “tip of the spear” aimed at Russia. Imperialism has spent tens of billions of dollars to transform Ukraine into a far-right garrison state in the decade since it orchestrated a fascist-led coup to overthrow Ukraine’s elected, pro-Russian president. It has helped rehabilitate Stepan Bandera and other the World War II Nazi collaborators from both of wings of the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists as “heroes” and integrated fascist paramilitaries such as “Azov” into the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Canada, first under Stephen Harper’s Conservative government and then Justin Trudeau’s union-backed Liberal regime, has assisted this process at every step. It has deployed Canadian Armed Forces personnel to help train and reorganize Ukraine’s military, including through the integration of fascist forces, while railing against purported Russian war crimes and “genocide.” In September 2023, the whole Canadian parliament—including all the MPs of the union-sponsored New Democratic Party (NDP)—gave a standing ovation to the Nazi collaborator Yaroslav Hunka, a 99-year-old veteran of the 14th Grenadier Division of the Waffen-SS, applauding him as a “freedom fighter against Russia.” This was the outcome of decades of Canadian ruling class support for Ukrainian fascism, as the WSWS has documented in our series, “Canadian imperialism’s fascist friends.”

This support is now taking the form of silent complicity with the vicious Ukrainian press-gang conscription campaign. With Canadian government support for Ukrainian refugees having dried up, so too have even the two-faced, hypocritical statements of the NDP, which in 2022 made some toothless demands for “visa-free travel” for Ukrainian refugees. With imperialism’s war campaign in jeopardy, such empty sentiments have fallen by the wayside. The NDP’s February 2024 statement on the second anniversary of the war, authored by its foreign affairs critic, Edmonton MP Heather McPherson, an open apologist for Ukrainian fascist forces, attacked the Trudeau government from the right, demanding a more aggressive imperialist confrontation with Russia.

The campaign of enforced conscription and the support offered to it by Canadian imperialism expose the lie that the war in Ukraine is about “defending democracy.” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has refused to call new elections after his mandate expired in May and heads a regime that is ruling through martial law and savagely suppressing the working class. On June 19, the Ukrainian government banned yet another political opposition party, “Nash Krai” – “Our Land”– the parties of the political left having been banned since 2022.

In April, the Ukrainian government arrested Bogdan Syrotiuk, the leader of the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists, which is in political solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth

International, on trumped up charges of “treason.” The Ukrainian state accused the WSWS, for which Syrotiuk writes, of operating as “a Russian propaganda and information agency.” On June 3, Ukraine banned the *World Socialist Web Site*. As the political record of the WSWS shows, these accusations are a pack of lies.

Syrotiuk remains in prison, and the Ukrainian state has threatened several prominent Ukrainian lawyers with violence should they decide to defend him in court. Bogdan’s true “crime” is his principled opposition to the war on the basis of an internationalist and revolutionary socialist perspective, which calls for the political unification of Ukrainian and Russian workers against all the belligerent governments and ruling classes, including Canada’s. This is a message which neither the Ukrainian nor Canadian state wishes workers to hear, and so he has been imprisoned and falsely accused, with the support of American, Canadian and European imperialism.

The WSWS has conducted a vigorous worldwide campaign in Syrotiuk’s defence, receiving support from leading artists, intellectuals, journalists and workers around the world. On June 13, a global day of action was held with pickets conducted outside Ukrainian embassies and consulates in the USA, Britain, Germany, France, Australia and Canada.

While picketing the Ukrainian consulate in Toronto, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with several Ukrainians. These included young mothers with children, the elderly, and several young men. Without exception, they took leaflets in support of the campaign to free Bogdan, reading them with great interest. One young man on his way into the Ukrainian Consulate described President Zelensky as a “political criminal.”

A delegation from the WSWS entered the consulate to deliver an official letter of protest in support of Bogdan Syrotiuk from the Socialist Equality Party, the Canadian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. Ukrainian workers had already taken copies of the WSWS leaflet into the Consulate, where it was being quietly discussed by several people in the long line up.

The warm reception in Canada’s Ukrainian refugee community to the campaign of international solidarity with Bogdan Syrotiuk demonstrates the real basis that exists for the unification of Ukrainian and Russian workers in opposition to the bloody imperialist-fuelled slaughter. An international, revolutionary socialist movement of the working class must be urgently built to stop the imperialist bloodbath in Ukraine, and imperialism’s rapid descent into global war.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact