Trudeau government scrapes all names from “Victims of Communism” monument in attempt to hide Canada’s patronage of Nazi collaborators and war criminals

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The Trudeau government officially inaugurated Canada’s “Memorial to the Victims of Communism” earlier this month. However, no member of the Liberal government was allowed to show their face at the ceremony, for fear it would once again draw public attention to the Canadian state’s longstanding and ongoing patronage of fascist forces.

Yvon Baker, a Liberal MP and former Ukrainian Canadian Congress Ontario Council president, had been expected to address the December 12 inauguration ceremony, but on government orders he instead spoke at an invitation-only, post-inauguration event.

In a damning political admission, the Department of Canadian Heritage previously removed all the names listed on the “Victims of Communism” memorial wall. The move followed the release of a government-commissioned report calling for the removal of the names of over 300 individuals—more than half of the total inscribed on the monument—who were directly or potentially linked to the Nazis or the fascist organizations that collaborated with them during World War Two.

When announcing the official unveiling of the monument, which after its completion had languished for years in the heart of downtown Ottawa, a spokesman for Liberal Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge confirmed that “at the time of the unveiling, there will be no names on the monument’s wall.” Her office released a statement saying that the government “will continue its due diligence to ensure all aspects of the memorial remain compatible with Canadian values on democracy and human rights.”

In fact, the presence of the names of Nazi and fascist war criminals on an anti-communist memorial championed by both Liberal and Conservative governments illustrates quite clearly the shameless hypocrisy and utter cynicism of the Canadian ruling elite’s claim to champion “democracy and human rights.” This is a ruling class whose political representatives rose as one in September 2023 to give a standing ovation to former Waffen-SS member Yaroslav Hunka, in a gesture that epitomized Canadian imperialism’s decades-long funding and promotion of Ukrainian far-right nationalist ideology and groups.

Following the Second World War, the Canadian state enthusiastically welcomed tens of thousands of Nazi collaborators from Ukraine and other parts of Eastern Europe, using them as bulwarks of its anti-communist, Cold War policy at home and abroad. Fascists who fought alongside the Nazis and assisted in the Holocaust were recast as fighters for “national liberation” against Stalinist “totalitarianism”—invariably presented as the continuation and inevitable end result of the 1917 Russian Revolution.

The Canadian state carefully incubated these far-right political forces, leveraging them to promote the revival of nationalism and the dissolution of the USSR, as the Stalinist bureaucracy moved to liquidate state property and restore capitalism in the late 1980s. In recent decades, the political descendants of these anti-communist emigres have played a key role as Canada, alongside the US and its other NATO allies, have sought to transform Ukraine into a NATO-European Union vassal state and used it to instigate and wage war on Russia.

With its iron-clad support of the genocidal Israeli government and the far-right Zelensky regime in Ukraine—which venerates the same Nazi-collaborators honoured by the “Victims of Communism” monument—the Canadian political establishment has enthusiastically embraced present-day fascists and perpetrators of genocide in pursuit of their own predatory imperialist interests.

A monument whitewashing the crimes of fascism

Canada’s “Memorial to the Victims of Communism” was initiated under the Harper Conservative government, working in league with the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and other far-right ethnic/emigré associations, as it sought to revive a bellicose Canadian nationalism better-suited to Ottawa’s imperialist ambitions under conditions of intensifying great-power conflict. Unsurprisingly, the project was greeted by the entire political establishment with enthusiasm. In addition to the strong backing of Harper and his Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, Jason Kenney, the then leader of the social-democratic New Democratic Party, Thomas Mulcair, Green Party leader Elizabeth May, and Justin Trudeau himself penned letters endorsing the monument.

Anti-communism has been a central component of Canadian imperialist ideology for over a century. Canada sent troops to Russia to fight alongside the counterrevolutionary White Armies of the bourgeoisie and feudal aristocracy, as they sought to crush the Bolshevik-led workers’ state in the civil war that followed the 1917 October Revolution. Subsequently, the Canadian ruling class deployed troops to crush the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike and carried out a wave of mass arrests and deportations, all in the name of crushing a “communist” conspiracy, expressing their mortal fear of a radicalized working class. All this was carried out by a proud Dominion of the British Empire, which had just waged world war to ensure the continued brutal colonial exploitation of the Indian subcontinent and much of Africa and the Caribbean and seize new territories in the Middle East.

During World War II, Canadian imperialism shifted its allegiance to the new dominant world power, American imperialism. Ottawa became a

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pillar of NATO as the US-military alliance confronted the USSR and integrated its military closely with the US through NORAD. Though the USSR had for decades been dominated by the counterrevolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy—which exterminated the Marxist opposition to their nationalist policies led by Leon Trotsky, renounced the program of world socialist revolution, and helped stabilize world capitalism after the defeat of the Nazis—the US and its Canadian allies ruthlessly pursued a Cold War strategy of "containment." Working in tandem with Washington, Canada supported brutal right-wing dictatorships that massacred hundreds of thousands across Asia, Africa, and Latin America and sponsored military coups and colonial wars, all the while claiming to be championing "democracy," "human rights," and "freedom." In reality, the only right to which the Canadian ruling class was irrevocably committed was its "right" to privately own the socially developed and operated means of production—that is its "right" to exploit and extract profits from workers in Canada and around the globe.

It was in this context that Canada welcomed tens of thousands of fascists who had fled Eastern Europe and the Baltic States as the Red Army routed the Nazis, sweeping away the Third Reich and various allied fascist government and puppet regimes. They were valued precisely because of their vehement hostility not just to the Soviet Union, but all left-wing politics.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism, the far-right nationalist groups they formed took up the call to memorialize the "Victims of Communism"—arbitrarily lumping together the dead from widely different historical periods. These included the Whites in the Russian Civil War, those who died from the famine triggered by Stalin's disastrous forced collectivization, fascist Nazi collaborators in Europe, and those killed by Pol Pot's nationalist regime in Cambodia in the aftermath of the country's devastation by US carpet-bombing.

This pseudo-historical amalgam has a two-fold purpose: to use the crimes of Stalinism to smear Marxism and all revolutionary opposition to capitalism; and to minimize and relativize the brutalities of capitalist reaction, above all fascism—indeed, to justify them as a legitimate response to the threat of "Communism."

A "Tribute to Liberty" and Nazi Collaborators

Representatives from across the spectrum of anti-communist Eastern European and Asian ethnic associations in Canada came together to form the "Tribute to Liberty" foundation, the main group backing the creation of the Memorial. Its board of directors is currently chaired by Ludwik Klimkowski, an executive and former VP of the Canadian Polish Congress for Canadian Affairs, and includes among others Paul Grod, former president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC), and Ivan Grbesic, a corporate lawyer and member of the Board of Directors of the Canadian-Croatian Chamber of Commerce.

From the beginning, the anti-communist monument was beset by controversy and scandal, as the list of names it proposed to memorialize on its "Wall of Remembrance" included well-known fascists and Nazi collaborators. Prominent among them was the leader of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), Roman Shukhevych, who collaborated with the Nazis and whose forces massacred tens of thousands of Belarusians, Jews, Poles and Ukrainians. The UPA was the armed wing of the faction of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) led by Stepan Bandera, who aimed to establish an "independent" Ukraine as a vassal of Hitler's Third Reich. The Zelensky regime has sought to rehabilitate Bandera and Shukhevych, lionizing the fascist collaborators as heroes and erecting statues of Bandera across Ukraine.

The Memorial Wall of the monument was initially planned to list over 1,000 names, but by 2021 the Department of Heritage hired a historian to review a pared-down list of 550 individuals. The review determined that 50 to 60 of the individuals listed were, like Shukhevych, directly linked to the Nazis, and that more than half the names on the list should be removed, as they were possibly linked to the Nazis or fascist groups.

Diplomatic personnel in the Trudeau government even weighed in, warning that the inclusion of Nazi collaborators in an official Canadian monument would cause an international scandal. They cautioned the Department of Heritage, writing that: "It is important to note that many anti-communist and anti-Soviet advocates and fighters were also active Nazi collaborators, who committed documented massacres."

Even the fundraising efforts of the "Tribute to Liberty" foundation—a registered charity that received thousands in donations from politicians like Harper and Kenney—were replete with tributes to fascists and Nazi collaborators. The "Pathways to Liberty" campaign to fund the monument received donations honouring Roman Shukhevych, as well as Ante Paveli? – the leader of the Ustaše, the Nazi puppet regime that ran the Independent State of Croatia. Another high-ranking Ustaše official, Mile Budak, received a donation in his honour, perversely calling him a "poet." The Ustaše participated in the Holocaust in the Balkans, killing approximately 32,000 Jews, 25,000 Roma and 330,000 Serbs. The Hungarian Knightly Order of Vitéz likewise contributed thousands of dollars. Members of the Order of Vités like László Endre led the Nazi puppet regime in Hungary that organized the deportation of 430,000 Jews to Nazi concentration and extermination camps.

Memorial unveiling postponed after parliamentary standing ovation to Waffen-SS Veteran

The monument was initially scheduled to be unveiled in November of last year. But the ceremony was quietly canceled after Ukrainian President Zelensky's official visit to Canada in September 2023, during which he, Prime Minister Trudeau, Deputy PM Chrystia Freeland, all the members of Canada's parliament and assembled dignitaries gave their rapturous welcome to the 98-year-old Ukrainian SS veteran Hunka.

The open celebration of a volunteer member of the Waffen-SS Galicia Division during the carefully scripted state visit of the Ukrainian President, as he and his imperialist backers planned an escalation of the war against Russia, was a calculated provocation that backfired spectacularly. In the international political firestorm that followed, the Trudeau government hastily claimed the invitation to Hunka was an innocent mistake borne of ignorance, when anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of the history of the Second World War—including Trudeau, Freeland, and Zelensky—would have known that the only Ukrainians who "fought the Russians" at that time did so in collaboration with the Nazis.

The Galicia division of the Waffen-SS, which was made up overwhelmingly of pro-Nazi Ukrainian nationalists, participated in the Holocaust and the massacre of tens of thousands of Poles as they fought the Soviets in German-occupied Ukraine. After the fall of the Third Reich, the Canadian government welcomed tens of thousands of Ukrainian nationalists who had collaborated with the Nazis, including over 2,000 veterans of the Waffen-SS Galicia division like Hunka, and supporters of both factions of the OUN.

This influx of Ukrainian fascist collaborators swelled the ranks of the UCC, which was founded at the government's behest in 1940 to combat left-wing sentiment among the Ukrainian Canadian population – historically, a major source of support for the Canadian Communist Party.

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The state-supported UCC played an important role in Canada's domestic and foreign policy during the Cold War, fostering a bitterly anti-communist right-wing Ukrainian nationalism, and intervening in Ukraine in the late 1980s and early 1990s to push for capitalist restoration and the collapse of the USSR.

This long-standing alliance between Canadian imperialism, the UCC and the Ukrainian far right— documented extensively by the WSWS—has remained a critical part of Canada's foreign policy in recent decades, as it has worked alongside the US to bring Ukraine into NATO and use it as a proxy in its confrontation with Russia. This alliance is embodied in the person of Chrystia Freeland, who until this month served as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister in the Trudeau government. Freeland has been associated with the UCC since her youth. Her maternal grandfather was the editor of Krakivski Visti, the only Ukrainian newspaper allowed to appear under Nazi occupation. It championed the creation of the Waffen-SS Galicia Division and spread vile antisemitism.

Under Trudeau and Freeland, Canada has funneled over $10 billion in aid to NATO's Ukrainian proxies since February 2022, including $4.5 billion in weapons. As undisguised fascists in the Ukrainian military wage war against Russia and its use of US-made long-range missiles threatens a nuclear conflagration, the Zelensky regime has criminalized all political opposition—jailing scores of dissidents. Among them is the socialist and internationalist leader of the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists (YGBL) Bogdan Syrotiuk, who was arrested on the bogus claim that he is a "Russian propagandist" because he called for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers to put an end to the war.

For decades, the Canadian ruling elite has sponsored the fascist war criminals it welcomed after the Second World War and sought to whitewash their crimes, so that they could be used in pursuit of their own predatory goals—to spread anti-communist nationalist poison at home, and fight for imperialism abroad. The Memorial to the Victims of Communism is a material embodiment of this alliance between Canadian imperialism and the ugly fascist underbelly of the anti-communist diaspora in the heart of the national capital. Even though the Trudeau government has removed the names of Nazi collaborators from its memorial wall, this bloody history remains.

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