

The 80th anniversary of the fall of Nazism in Ukraine

How the Ukrainian government is trying to ban and erase the Victory Day holiday

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In World War II, an estimated 5 million Ukrainians, among them around 1.5 million Jewish Ukrainians, were murdered by the Nazi forces that invaded the Soviet Union. Their fascist collaborators in the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) actively participated in this mass murder, which was only brought to an end by the heroic struggle of the Soviet Red Army. For decades, the official end of the war in the former Soviet Union, May 9, has been celebrated as “Victory Day,” including in Ukraine. However, in 2023, the Zelensky government, which is now waging a proxy war against Russia on behalf of NATO, moved back the Victory Day to May 8, in line with the West European calendar, in an effort to undermine historical consciousness and promote anti-Russian chauvinism.

But despite these official attempts to suppress the holiday, searches for “Victory Day cards,” “80 years of Victory Day” and “May 9” became the most popular search queries on the Ukrainian site of Google on May 9. The list of top searches also included “Victory Day song” and “parade in Moscow 2025.” Ukrainians laid flowers en masse at Soviet memorials in Odessa and Kiev, which were cordoned off by police.

In Odessa, the police and the National Guard only allowed people to approach the monument after checking their documents, which was clearly an attempt to significantly reduce the number of visitors to the monument—after all, few people would have thought to bring their passport to a mass public holiday that has been celebrated for 80 years.

In Kiev, the police harassed any visitors who dared to commemorate the victims of the Nazi attack in any way other than laying flowers. At the Memorial of Eternal Glory, police tried to detain two women for playing the popular Soviet song “Victory Day” on their phones.

They successfully detained one of them, even though she followed their instructions and tried to de-escalate the conflict. The police justified the ban on playing this song, written in the Soviet Union in 1975, by saying that it was a “Russian song” and that it was sung in Russian. After the woman asked if she would also be arrested for praying in Russian, two police officers grabbed her and put her in a police car. Apparently, the

second woman managed to avoid arrest only because she was protected by bystanders.

An elderly man who was singing songs at the monument on Victory Day was also harassed. He was detained for singing “Vragi sozhgli rodnuyu khatu” (“The enemies burned down our native home”), a popular Soviet song about the Nazi-Soviet war written in 1946. When they tried to detain him, he and two pensioners who had come with him grabbed hold of each other to prevent him from being dragged away. Then one of the police officers began to aggressively pull him by the arm, causing all three elderly people to fall to the floor. In the end, the elderly man was successfully detained, and official news sources, including Channel 24, demonized the pensioners, calling them “supporters of the ‘Russian world’” and accusing them of starting the “fight” (which is how they described the pensioners falling to the floor).

But the police harassment did not end there. A pensioner who came to the monument wearing a Soviet cap was detained for a small red star on her headdress—one of many Soviet symbols that have been banned by the reactionary “decommunization” policy that was introduced in 2015, after the US-EU backed coup in Kiev in February 2014. According to the elderly woman, she had already been detained six times, apparently for the same type of “violations.” In its report on the incident, Channel 24 demonized this pensioner as a Russian propagandist.

The political gravity of the state harassment of banned Soviet symbols cannot be overstated. Technically, fascist symbols are also banned in Ukraine, but in reality, various neo-Nazi groups such as Azov, which are closely integrated into the military apparatus of the Ukrainian state, are allowed to wear various Nazi symbols on their uniforms and bodies any day of the year. Symbols associated with the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists have been integrated into official state symbols, and the fascist salute “Slava Ukraini” [Glory to Ukraine] is routinely used by President Volodymyr Zelensky and NATO politicians.

With such brutal measures, the Ukrainian government, acting under the direct orders of the oligarchy, is trying to erase

Victory Day from collective memory. This is part of its attempts to erase the Soviet Union from the memory of the Ukrainian working class. The increasing brutality of these attempts is explained by the fact that the oligarchy is afraid of the Ukrainian working class, which is becoming radicalized in the conditions of war.

It is also this fear that motivated the arrest of our comrade, the Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk. More than a year ago, on April 25, 2024, the Ukrainian secret service, the SBU, arrested him on trumped-up charges of “state treason.” In reality, the essence of Bogdan’s “crime” is that he wrote articles on the WSWS and spoke out for the unity of the Ukrainian and Russian working classes against the war and the oligarchies. The Ukrainian oligarchy feared that, against the backdrop of the war, the ideas of Trotskyism would quickly catch on among the working class and influence a revolutionary movement, leading not only to the overthrow of Zelensky’s dictatorship and the end of the war, but also to the overthrow of capitalism—the economic basis of the oligarchs.

But simply attempting to erase history and suppress any resistance to the oligarchs is not enough—they also need to confuse the working class with their propaganda and promotion of Ukrainian nationalism and anti-Russian chauvinism. The epicenter of Ukrainian propaganda on Victory Day was the Kyiv Security Forum, which was held on May 8 and 9. In addition to the ubiquitous calls for the European Union to directly enter the war against Russia (which were the central theme of the forum) and the usual propaganda about “democratic values,” the speakers made several chauvinist remarks against the “Russian people.” One of the most striking examples was the speech by the forum’s chairman and former Prime Minister of Ukraine in 2014-2016, Arseniy Yatsenyuk. He stated,

We must know that this war is not just about Putin. We are talking about the Russian people and the deep-rooted causes that prompted Putin to attack Ukraine. *Russians have always hated Ukrainians. Russians have always tried to eradicate the Ukrainian nation.* This began back in the days of the Russian Empire, hundreds of years ago. And when it comes to Putin, he truly reflects the feelings and attitudes of the vast majority of Russians. So they must also bear responsibility for everything that Putin and his regime do. [Emphasis added]

Every word uttered by this representative of the oligarchy is steeped in lies and deceit. Realizing that his nationalist rhetoric was torn to shreds by the history of the 1917 October revolution, the ensuing civil war and the war against fascism, during which Ukrainian and Russian workers fought side by

side, this charlatan shifted the focus to the Russian Empire. Despite the fact that the policies of the Stalinist bureaucrats led to the suffering of various peoples, nothing even remotely resembling attempts to “eradicate the Ukrainian nation” by the “Russians” took place during the existence of the Soviet Union. By contrast, attempts to eradicate Ukrainians were made by the Nazis and their Ukrainian accomplices, the followers of Stepan Bandera, in honor of whom the state is building monuments.

While the Ukrainian oligarchy is trying to erase everything related to the Soviet Union, it is simultaneously trying to fill the collective mind with various rubbish—first and foremost, Ukrainian nationalism. By dividing the international working class along national lines, nationalism simultaneously equates the working class of each individual country with the oligarchic state of that country, uniting them into one “people” and trying to erase the class boundaries between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

But the working classes of Ukraine and Russia have nothing in common with the oligarchies that rule and oppress them. The process of world production unites them with all sections of the international working class. This is not to mention the historical fact that the Ukrainian and Russian working classes were closely united in all the revolutionary struggles of the 20th century. Even more important is that the interests of the working class are directly opposed to the interests of the oligarchy, which squeezes all the blood and strength out of the workers in order to increase its own wealth.

The attempts of the Ukrainian oligarchy to erase any public memory of the Soviet Union indicate not the strength of its position, but its weakness. The Ukrainian oligarchy is mortally afraid that the Ukrainian working class will return to the traditions of the October Revolution and overthrow it. But this is exactly what is needed.

The war in Ukraine, which has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, is a particularly stark manifestation of the fact that capitalism as an economic system outlived its progressive role more than a hundred years ago and is now returning to its death throes. Wars, economic crises and fascism are reappearing throughout the world. The Ukrainian and Russian working classes must revive their socialist traditions, draw the lessons of the struggle by the Trotskyist movement against Stalinism, and once again unite in the battle against war, capitalism, imperialism and the oligarchies of both countries!



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