

Why did Ukrainian President Zelensky visit North Bay, Ontario, home to the Waffen SS veteran Yaroslav Hunka?

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25 September 2026

Amid a massive escalation of the US/NATO war on Russia, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited Canada for three days earlier this month to drum up additional financial support and military equipment for his dictatorial regime. He stopped in Calgary and Banff Alberta, as well as in Toronto and North Bay, Ontario.

In Calgary, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney and Zelensky signed a “100 Year Partnership” and a joint declaration on military-security cooperation that commit Canada to continue supplying the Ukrainian state with weapons and money for years to come. To wage imperialism’s war on Russia, Ottawa will increase Ukrainian drone production, help strengthen its cyber-war capabilities, and reinforce Ukraine’s energy infrastructure. Successive Liberal governments led by Justin Trudeau and now Carney have provided tens of billions of dollars in military and financial aid to Kiev to fund the war and lined up with the European imperialist powers to systematically escalate it over the past 18 months.

In Banff, Zelensky, who continues to rule under martial law more than two years past the expiration of his electoral term, spoke before the Liberal cabinet.

In Toronto, he met with what were described as “senior executives of many leading Canadian companies, financial institutions, and investment funds”—that is, Ukraine’s imperialist sponsors.

Why Zelensky interrupted this busy itinerary to visit North Bay, a small northern Ontario city of 63,000 people raises a number of political questions—none of which were raised by Canada’s capitalist media.

The North Bay stop was shrouded in secrecy. No details about Zelensky’s visit were released to the press beforehand. According to a report published on *Surbury.com* on September 10, “no details of the local visit have been released.” Another report in the *North Bay Nugget* declared, “Zelensky touched down in North Bay after 4:15 p.m. (Friday) and was met by several individuals waiting for him on the tarmac. It’s not known who exactly greeted the Ukrainian President.” Why would the Ukrainian president need to conceal the identities of a small-town community delegation?

North Bay has only a small Ukrainian diaspora community, without, according to the information publicly available on its website, even a branch of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC).

It is, however, home to Yaroslav Hunka, the infamous Ukrainian veteran of the Nazis’ 14th Galizien Waffen SS Division who was given two standing ovations by a joint session of Canada’s Parliament on September 22, 2023, at which Zelensky gave a war-mongering address.

The publicly offered rationale for Zelensky to visit North Bay, a rationale provided only after the fact in Zelensky’s social media at 7:46 p.m. on Friday, was a meeting with more than 60 Ukrainian air force pilots who are being trained by the Canadian Armed Forces to fly F-16s and Saab Gripen fighter jets to advance Canadian and world

imperialism’s plans to redivide Eurasia and its natural resources. All of the Ukrainian pilots appeared wearing black face masks for the cameras.

There are compelling reasons to believe that Zelensky would want to meet with Hunka, but also why both the Ukrainian and Canadian authorities would wish to keep this meeting a closely guarded secret. This is not idle speculation, but a serious and pressing question with significant political implications.

In 2023, Zelensky, the political representatives of the Canadian ruling class and the top brass of its military celebrated the Nazi Hunka as a “Canadian and Ukrainian hero” who had “fought the Russians in WW II.” Those who applauded Hunka, beginning with Zelensky, Prime Minister Trudeau, and Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland (whose grandfather was himself a prominent Ukrainian Nazi collaborator), all know full well that the only Ukrainians who “fought the Russians” in World War Two were fascists; and that NATO’s puppet regime in Kiev is itself riddled with the political descendants of the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN).

Yet when parliament’s honouring of Hunka provoked an international public furor, Canada’s political establishment beat a hasty retreat, for it put the lie to the carefully curated claims that Canada and the other imperialist powers are “defending” democracy in Ukraine. The invitation to Hunka was explained away as a “mistake” by the Speaker of the House and then MP for North Bay, Anthony Rota—only for it later to be revealed that Hunka had been invited to Parliament by Trudeau himself, on the recommendation of the far-right UCC.

For its part, the UCC argued that Hunka had been falsely maligned—defending, as it has during the more than seven decades that it has received the support and patronage by the Canadian state, Hitler’s Ukrainian nationalist collaborators and accomplices as patriots and heroes.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time, “The Canadian parliament’s applauding of Hunka is just the most egregious example of the fact that the escalation of the war has been accompanied by a systematic effort to rehabilitate Ukrainian fascism.”

The Hunka affair forced the Canadian government to temporarily backpedal from its plans to publicly rehabilitate the Ukrainian and other Eastern European Nazi collaborators it has cultivated since World War II, the political descendants of which are a key element of its imperialist war plans.

The Liberal government fought in court against the demands of its close political ally B’Nai Brith Canada that it release the still-secret names of more than 900 Nazi collaborators admitted to Canada starting in 1946, which for 40 years have been buried in the still-classified third section of the Deschenes Commission Report on Nazi War Criminals in Canada. In doing so, it argued that their release would damage the Ukrainian war

effort.

Meanwhile, the misnamed “Monument to the Victims of Communism” in Ottawa was forced to scrub plans to inscribe the names of 553 infamous Nazi collaborators to whom the monument was dedicated.

But the rapidly metastasizing crisis of world capitalism since 2023, which has erupted into a third world war for the redivision of trade routes and resources, has driven the ruling class the world over to bring to the fore the forces of fascism and reaction. This crisis finds a particularly concentrated expression in Ukraine.

While NATO governments and the media are relentlessly stoking the war with the provision of long-range missiles for strikes deep inside Russia and claims of an imminent Ukrainian military victory, the Zelensky regime is mired in crisis as popular opposition to the war swells.

A majority of Ukrainians favour a negotiated peace, but their views find no expression in official politics, as all parties that oppose the war have been illegalized. Press gangs from the hated “TRC” military recruitment agency who round up any Ukrainian man without a connection to the ruling kleptocracy for forced mobilization to the front are increasingly being met with violent resistance, albeit of a politically disorganized and amorphous character. Much of the resistance comes from the wives, sisters, girlfriends and mothers of the men being forcibly mobilized.

To suppress opposition, the Zelensky government is making ever more draconian use of its authoritarian martial law powers, promoting fascist forces within the military-security state apparatus and openly celebrating in its nationalist mythology the far-right Ukrainian forces that collaborated with the Nazis.

This is exemplified in the state persecution of Bogdan Syrotiuk, a socialist opponent of the war who last month was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. A leader of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, Syrotiuk has been convicted of “high treason” for publishing articles on the *World Socialist Web Site* that called for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against the war and all the rival capitalist regimes that are waging it. In condemning Syrotiuk, the Ukrainian court specifically denounced his exposure of the Ukrainian state’s rehabilitation and glorification of Stepan Bandera’s OUN and other accomplices of the Nazis in their war of annihilation against the Soviet Union and the mass extermination of Europe’s Jews.

This glorification is ever more pronounced—a sign of the ever-narrowing social base of the Zelensky regime and the war, and its utter dependence on the support of Canada and the other imperialist powers.

In May, Zelensky re-interred the remains of the leader of the OUN-M, Andriy Melnyk, and declared the infamous Nazi collaborator a “national hero.” It was Melnyk, in collaboration with elements in the Nazi Wehrmacht, who established the Waffen-SS Galicia Division to which Yaroslav Hunka belonged, and which participated in the mass murder of Poles, Jews and communists.

Melnyk’s predecessor in the OUN leadership, Yehven Konovalets, was reinterred in August.

If Hunka’s long-dead commanding officers are “national heroes,” does the Ukrainian fascist state not also view Hunka, one of the last living members of the 14th Waffen SS Galicia Division, as one of them too?

Might not Zelensky have travelled to North Bay to personally commend him? Or if the centenarian was too feeble to meet him, perhaps Zelensky visited with his son, Martin, a prominent corporate leader in North Bay who accompanied his father when he was celebrated by Canada’s parliament, so that they could decry the “injustice” done Hunka in 2023 when the Canadian establishment felt it necessary to disown him.

Canada’s pliant corporate media raised none of these obvious questions. None dared even point to the “coincidence” of Zelensky travelling to the small north Ontario city that is home to the Ukrainian SS veteran who was at the centre of a political firestorm when the Ukrainian president

addressed Canada’s parliament almost exactly three years before.

Such questions cannot be asked because they undermine the imperialist narrative of the Russia war being a war for “democracy” and Ukrainian “sovereignty,” and would thus help fuel popular opposition to the war and Canadian imperialism’s rearmament drive.

Instead, the capitalist media worked to provide Zelensky’s visit to North Bay political cover. The CBC, local media such as *Bay Today*, and other outlets breathlessly gave column inches to Ukrainian nationalist supporters of the Zelensky regime who barked on command such mindless lines as “Our president is the best president.” Likewise, the press touted entirely uncritically Prime Minister Carney’s claim “Ukraine’s cause is freedom, democracy and sovereignty.”

In fact, Ukraine’s “cause”—in the face of mass domestic opposition—is to serve as a garrison state for world imperialism’s quest to redivide Eurasia and the world in order to seize hold of its natural resources, cheap labour and markets. Zelensky’s government takes its instructions not from the Ukrainian people, who are subject to vicious persecution and forced military mobilization, but from world imperialism. This political arrangement requires not “democracy” in Ukraine, but rather a police state regime in which twelve political opposition parties, including the largest, have been banned. Ukraine’s role as a garrison state requires the complete destruction of a free press, and the suppression of all dissent. Fascist forces are being cultivated in Ukraine, and by Canadian imperialism, to wage a war on the world working class and to prevent the emergence of mass working-class resistance.

The urgent task for workers in Canada, Ukraine, Russia and internationally is to take up the fight against imperialist war and the capitalist system that breeds it. This means fighting for the freedom of Bogdan Syrotiuk, and linking the struggle to stop the war with the class battles over deteriorating working conditions, real wage cuts and dangerous workplaces that are breaking out in all of the major countries around the world. This movement must expose the criminal rehabilitation of Nazi war criminals and their modern-day defenders in the imperialist capitals.



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