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Canadian parliament and prime minister give standing ovation to Ukrainian Nazi war criminal



Canada's parliament applauds Yaroslav Hunka, a former member of the Waffen SS.

On Friday, Canada's entire Parliament and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau gave a standing ovation to Yaroslav Hunka, a Ukrainian former member of Adolf Hitler's Waffen SS, which played a leading role in the extermination of European Jewry between 1941 and 1945. Also joining in the thunderous applause was Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who was in the Parliament as an honored guest.

This shocking public embrace of a Nazi war criminal and participant in the greatest crimes in human history has shed light on the Canadian government's longstanding ties to the Nazis' Ukrainian fascist collaborators and their political descendants, and, as well, the broader rehabilitation of fascism as part of the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

On Friday, House of Commons Speaker Anthony Rota introduced Hunka, who was seated in the parliamentary gallery. He was described as a "veteran from the Second World War

who fought for Ukrainian independence against the Russians and continues to support the troops today even at his age of 98.”

Yaroslav Hunka, Rota continued, “is a Ukrainian hero, a Canadian hero, and we thank him for all his service.” In unison, Zelensky, Trudeau, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, the leaders of the opposition parties, all the assembled MPs and senators and the top brass of Canada’s military rose to their feet to give Hunka a standing ovation. He in turn stood up and pumped his fists.

It soon emerged that this Ukrainian and Canadian “hero” was a war criminal. Hunka had “fought for Ukrainian independence” as a member of a special unit of the Nazi SS, the Waffen SS 14th Galizien Division. Apart from its most senior officers, the Galizien Division was comprised of Ukrainians, most of them members of one of the rival wings of the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN).

Created by Himmler in 1943, the 14th Waffen SS Galizien Division, trained at Nazi concentration camps and carried out mass killings of Poles, Jews and Slovaks. The Nuremberg Tribunal later found that mere membership in the SS was a criminal act.

The exposure of Hunka’s role in the SS has generated a social media firestorm. Ivan Katchanovski, a University of Ottawa lecturer and critic of Canada’s role in instigating and prosecuting the US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine, drew attention to postings by Hunka that depict and speak proudly of his involvement in the Waffen SS.

Jewish organizations have demanded Canada’s parliament apologize for celebrating an SS veteran. “An apology is owed to every Holocaust survivor and veteran of the Second World War who fought the Nazis,” declared a Friends of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre statement. “And an explanation must be provided as to how this individual entered the hallowed halls of Canadian Parliament and received recognition from the Speaker of the House and a standing ovation.”

Trudeau, Conservative leader Pierre Polievre, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh and others are now scrambling to disassociate themselves from Friday’s events. All are claiming to have had no role in the Speaker’s honorary calling out of Hunka and to have been unaware of his Waffen SS membership. “The PM did not meet him,” said Government House Leader Karina Gould. “I am deeply troubled this happened. I urge MPs to avoid politicizing this incident.”

On Sunday, House Speaker Rota issued a prefatory apology in which he personally accepted all responsibility for parliament’s recognition of Hunka. “I have subsequently become aware,” Rota claimed, “of more information which causes me to regret my

decision to [honour Hunka]. I wish to make clear that no one, including fellow parliamentarians and the Ukraine delegation, was aware of my intention or of my remarks before I delivered them.” This despite the fact that Hunka’s past is public information, and Hunka himself has boasted of it!

It is impossible to take seriously claims that the Speaker was left to his own devices in scripting his introduction for Zelensky’s address to parliament. As Trudeau made clear in his own remarks during Zelensky’s visit, his government—and in this it has the support of the entire Canadian ruling class—is determined to support the Ukraine war for as “long as it takes” to secure victory. This it has defined as restoring the Kiev regime’s pre-2014 borders, including retaking Crimea, and in franker moments as “regime change” in Moscow.

There is every reason to believe that high level individuals in the government and their allies in the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) wanted to use Zelensky’s visit to further their longstanding efforts to promote and publicly honor the far-right Ukrainian nationalists who collaborated with the Nazis. No doubt they calculated that they would have allies in Zelensky and his entourage. After all, the Ukrainian regime openly celebrates Stepan Bandera, his OUN (B) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which in their drive for an ethnically “pure” Ukraine participated both in the Holocaust and Hitler’s “war of extermination” against the USSR. And it has incorporated the Azov Battalion and other fascist groups that venerate Bandera and his UPA into the Ukrainian military and security services.

According to credible reports, there were plans for Trudeau and Zelesnky to meet with Hunka. The SS veteran did meet with the government House leader, Gould.

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There were many people in attendance, beginning with Zelensky and Deputy Prime Minister Freeland, who would have immediately known from Rota’s description of him that Hunka was a fascist, and that he was either a member of the Waffen SS or of Bandera’s OUN (B) and its UPA.

The Canadian state, as the *World Socialist Web Site* has extensively documented, has a three-quarters of a century association with the Ukrainian far right. Following World War II, it provided safe haven to tens of thousands of Nazi collaborators from both factions of the OUN, helped them whitewash their crimes, and used them as tools of its Cold War policy, including against leftist influence within Canada's large Ukrainian community. Ottawa also allowed some 2,000 former members of the Galizien Division, Hunka included, to come to Canada.

The UCC has for years served as the nexus of a network of Ukrainian cultural organizations and academic study programs aimed at promoting a far-right, virulently anti-communist and anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalism. Following the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the USSR, it played a major role, with Canadian government support, in reinjecting far-right nationalism into Ukraine, and has come to play an ever more important and provocative role in Canada's foreign policy.

The UCC has long defended and advocated for the Waffen SS veterans. Hunka is himself active in the UCC, and an endowment fund has been set up in his name and that of his late wife at the University of Alberta's Canadian Institute for Ukrainian Studies.

The alliance between Canadian imperialism and the Ukrainian far-right is embodied in the current government's deputy prime minister and finance minister, Chrystia Freeland, who from an early age was enrolled in UCC youth groups. Her maternal grandfather, Mikhalio Chomiak, was the editor of *Krakivski Visti*, the only Ukrainian newspaper allowed to appear under Nazi occupation. It published a constant stream of anti-Semitic incitement and campaigned for the creation of the Ukrainian-manned SS division.

The most fervent war-hawk in the government, Freeland has spoken frequently and lovingly of how her grandfather schooled her in Ukrainian culture and nationalism. When reports of her grandfather's role as a Nazi collaborator first surfaced, the political establishment and corporate media joined her in denouncing them as Russian "disinformation."

The Canadian elite, like that of its NATO allies, tries to hide the predatory strategic interests animating its ever-escalating war on Russia with claims it is defending Ukrainian "democracy" and "sovereignty." But the ultra-reactionary forces upon which it relies to ideologically and militarily wage this war—as underscored by Friday's standing ovation for a Nazi SS murderer and honored member of the pro-Banderite UCC—illustrate its true character.

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