

Polish and Ukrainian governments use World War II war crimes to promote nationalism

By Jason Melanovski
5 September 2016

Relations between NATO member Poland and the US-backed Poroshenko regime in Kiev have soured in recent months, as the two right-wing governments attempt to whip up nationalist support for their own corrupt governments by commemorating war crimes perpetrated during World War II against ethnic Poles and Ukrainians by right-wing paramilitary groups.

In late July, the Polish Sejm adopted a resolution to make July 11 a “National Day of Remembrance for Victims of Genocide.” The day is intended to mark atrocities committed by right-wing Ukrainian forces, such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), throughout the Volhynia and Eastern Galicia regions during the Second World War. On this day in 1943, the UPA carried out its bloodiest operations, attacking hundreds of predominately Polish villages and massacring tens of thousands of men, women and children.

Right-wing nationalists in Ukraine and abroad have for decades attempted to obscure the facts regarding the massacre of Poles in Ukraine, often blaming either the Nazis or Soviets for the killings, or inflating the number of killings of Ukrainians by Poles. It is generally accepted that UPA-OUN forces murdered approximately 100,000 Poles. Modern day Ukrainian nationalists insist that the true number is only 8,000.

The glorification of the UPA and OUN as courageous “freedom fighters” is being pushed by right-wing forces in Ukraine. The Polish bill is seen as a threat to these efforts. It has been met with widespread condemnation from all levels of the Ukrainian government and bourgeoisie, across the political spectrum.

Yuriy Shukhevych, son of OUN-UPA leader and war criminal Roman Shukhevych, told the Polish

newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* that the Polish bill was a regular stab in the back.” Ukraine’s president responded to the Polish resolution on his Facebook account stating, “I regret the Polish Sejm’s decision. I know many would like to use it for political speculation,” wrote Petro Poroshenko.

The Polish resolution itself was a response to the ongoing glorification of right-wing World War II figures by the Kiev regime, such as Stepan Bandera. In July, Moscow Avenue, a major street in Kiev, was renamed Bandera Avenue in honor of the war criminal.

Earlier in May, the Ukrainian Parliament held a moment of silence for Symon Petliura, a nationalist politician who led Ukraine’s military forces during the short-lived existence of the Ukrainian People’s Republic from 1917-1921. Under Petliura’s leadership, an estimated 50,000 Jews were killed in anti-Semitic pogroms.

On August 4, Ukrainian Minister of Parliament Oleh Musiy introduced a draft resolution to declare March 24 a “Memorial Day of the Victims of Polish State Genocide against Ukrainians from 1919-1951.” Polish Foreign Ministry spokesman Rafał Sobczak responded to the resolution’s introduction by stating that the title “astonishes us.”

Kiev city leaders have also announced plans to honor UPA General Roman Shukhevych with a street of his own. In a 1944 military order Shukhevych stated, “In view of the success of the Soviet forces it is necessary to speed up the liquidation of the Poles, they must be totally wiped out, their villages burned ... only the Polish population must be destroyed.”

The street’s renaming drew opposition from the conservative-nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party-led Polish government. The PiS response to

nationalism in Ukraine is not based on any principled opposition to nationalism, but rather is part of its own attempts to promote Polish nationalism, anti-communism and right-wing forces within Poland. Similar to recent developments in Ukraine, in April the Polish Sejm passed a de-communization bill that seeks to wipe the country clean of any symbols of communism in the public sphere. The bill will change the name of approximately 1,300 streets throughout the country that have anything to do with “communism.”

During the same month, the City Council in the Polish city of Szczecin voted to remove a World War II memorial that honored the Soviet Red Army for liberating the city from Nazi forces. The measure was pushed by PiS members on the city council who insisted that the Red Army had in fact not liberated the city from the Nazis, but rather “enslaved” the town’s citizens.

Across the border to the east, the Kiev regime has rapidly accelerated the “de-communization” that first began in 1991 after the liquidation of the Soviet Union. In May, Ukrainian Minister of Culture Yevhen Nyshchuk announced that the government would move forward with tearing down the The Friendship of Nations Arch, which was constructed in Kiev in 1982 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Ukraine joining the Soviet Union, as well as the 1,500th anniversary of the founding of Kiev, a city to which modern-day Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus all trace their origins.

The arch also includes a statue of Russian and Ukrainian workers holding up a Soviet Order of Friendship of Peoples. In its place, the government plans to build a memorial to the Ukrainian soldiers who have been senselessly killed in the ongoing NATO-backed conflict in eastern Ukraine against pro-Russian separatist forces.

The destruction of Soviet monuments in Ukraine often takes on post-modern cultural sensibilities, such as when a Lenin statue in Odessa was replaced with a statue of Darth Vader from the film *Star Wars*. The statue is located in the same city where in 2014 right-wing thugs killed dozens of protesters opposed to the recent US-backed coup in the country’s capital.

The promotion of ethnic nationalism, anti-Semitism and far-right ideology is creating an increasingly volatile political state across eastern Europe. The tit-for-tat resolutions implemented by the two

US-backed governments exposes the contradictions emerging for American imperialism as it seeks to turn two nations controlled by opposing bourgeois nationalist classes into militarized satellite states directed against Moscow.

To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>