The global Black Ribbon Day (BRD) crusade was spawned in 1985 by East European émigré groups in Toronto whose founders and leaders included Nazi collaborators and Holocaust perpetrators. BRD propaganda continues to smear the USSR with a Nazi brush by spreading disinformation about the Soviet-German nonaggression treaty of August 23, 1939. (See p.17.) By exploiting the West’s ongoing Cold War phobias, BRD portrays Nazism and communism as diabolical twins. As BRD founder Markus Hess said in 1986, this treaty was “the high point in the evil of these two tyrannical regimes.” This narrative even goes so far as to claim that Nazism and communism must take equal blame for causing WWII.

The émigré groups that spread BRD across Canada and the globe were linked to pro-fascist networks like the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations, the World Anti-Communist League and the CIA-funded “Captive Nations” movement. Their efforts were soon joined by far-right lobby groups, mainstream politicians at all levels of government, and their likeminded mass media allies who eagerly joined the fray.

BRD has now spread globally and August 23 is has been officially memorialized in the US, Australia and Europe. In 2009, Canadian MPs unanimously affirmed BRD. Introduced by then-Liberal leader Bob Rae, the motion was co-authored by Estonian-Canadian Markus Kolga of the Central and Eastern European Council. (See p.26.) Since then, BRD laws—falsely equating the world’s most avidly-lobbiedathem by attending the Jan.-Feb. 1986 meeting of Canada’s Captive Nations—has been raised by those who had welcomed the Nazis as liberators in WWII, these émigré groups embraced Hess’ plan and were its driving force.

“With their collaboration,” says Soltys, “Hess idea moved forward with lightning speed.” Besides “collaboration” from the groups entered Canada (1945-52), he said, they “invigorated” the CPC, “transformed the Polish-Canadian community” and “lobbied the Canadian government to oppose Communism in Poland.” As Zophia de Witt, longtime CPC-Manitoba president said: “Being communist is the worst sin that you could commit.” Not surprisingly, the CPC has received $988,000 in government grants, and three of its member groups received $510,000 in 2018.5

BRD was the creation of Markus Hess, a Canadian of German-Estonian heritage. His preface to Soltys’s book details how he began BRD in 1985 by pitching his idea to Canada’s Toronto-based Estonian Central Council (ECC). Neither Hess nor Soltys mention that the ECC’s early leadership was rife with Nazi collaborators including former officers of Estonia’s Waffen SS (pp.28-31) Neither did they reveal any of the other fascist links to émigré groups behind BRD’s success.

The Hess plan was to unite all “Captive Nations” groups by using an annual protest to focus public attention on anti-Soviet fears and the Cold War loathing of communism. As a symbol, he picked the black ribbon of mourning. Once elected to the ECC’s board, Hess presented his plan to the group’s annual meeting which gave BRD its full blessing and support.6

As chair of ECC’s BRD committee, Hess “extend[ed]... the protest to all other enslaved [Soviet] peoples”7 by attending the Jan.-Feb. 1986 meeting of Canada’s Captive Nations. There he met leaders of three groups linked to Nazi collaborators: the ECC, the Lithuanian Canadian Community and the Latvian National Federation Canada. (See pp.38-39) Wanting to fuel protest and animosity against their Soviet enemy, Canada’s Captive Nations embraced Hess’ plan. Their alliance, aka the Group of Seven (G7), united far-right East Europeans from Czechoslovakia (Czechs and Slovaks), Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine.

The BRD crusade got its next big break after Hess met Yaroslav Sokolyk at an ECC-Toronto event in Feb. 1986. Sokolyk was then president of Ukrainian Canadian Congress-Toronto. (See p.47.) It was hosting a meeting the next day of the World Congress of Free Ukrainians (WCFU). Hess addressed that event and got a “vote of support” for BRD.8 The WCFU, now called the Ukrainian World Congress, leads the global diaspora which reveres WWII fascist leader Stepan Bandera with cult-like adoration. (See pp.48-51.) By joining the BRD committee Sokolyk threw the weight of this worldwide movement behind the cause.

Bandera’s faction of Ukrainian nationalists is still the strongest of Canada’s government-supported East European émigré groups. By the 1980s, Banderites had long been a leading force in the fight against socialists in their communities, and in support of Canada’s US/NATO-led, anti-Soviet foreign policies. Dominated by those who had welcomed the Nazis as liberators in WWII, these émigré groups embraced Hess plan and were its driving force.

“With their collaboration,” says Soltys, “Hess idea moved forward with lightning speed.” Besides “collaboration” from the groups

ABN Correspondence, May-Jun. 1987. ABN = Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations

ABN President Slava Steisko with M. Hess and D. Somerville of the Black Ribbon Day Committee at the ABN offices in Munich

cited above, Soltys notes many others that were key to pushed the BRD cause. These included:

* Canadian Slovak League and Slovak World Congress (pp.40-43)
* Czechoslovak National Assoc. of Canada and Council of Free Czechoslovakia (pp.44-45)
* Estonian Central Council Canada (pp.28-31)
* Estonian World Council (pp.32-33)
* Latvian National Federation Canada (pp.38-39)
* World Fed. of Free Latvians (WFFL) (p.39)
* Lithuanian Canadian Community and the Lithuanian World Community (pp.34-37)

Each of Canada’s so-called Captive-Nations groups supplied volunteers to the BRD cause. Soltys details how these groups used their member lists, publications, radio and TV shows, meetings, public events and contacts with government, media and financiers to push the BRD agenda. They also sent delegations to BRD meetings. As a result, the G7 soon disbanded and was replaced by the BRD committee which took lead of Canada’s Captive Nations movement. LNAK’s president, Linard Lukks, who had led the G7, became secretary—

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Black Ribbon Day (BRD) arose in the heyday of Pres. Ronald Reagan, a former B-movie actor who had been the smiling PR frontman for nuclear-weapons maker GE (1954-62) and for the CIA’s antiRed “Crusade for Freedom” propaganda campaign administered by Radio Free Europe (1950-60).

In his role as America’s “Great Communicator,” Reagan followed his script in 1982 to brand the USSR as “The Evil Empire.” Using his hokey homespun style to spread vile hate speech against socialism, he was a vibrant symbol of the West’s most aggressive anti-Soviet policies. Reagan was, for example, infamous for arming rightwing paramilitaries. But in Cold War parlance, these terrorists were “freedom fighters” struggling to stop the the Third World spread of communism. Subsidized by smuggling cocaine and heroin, these CIA proxies killed thousands of innocents in covert wars that crushed fledgling leftwing governments from Nicaragua to Afghanistan.

Reagan’s anticommunist thugs were glorified by East European émigré groups that had long revered their own “freedom fighting” predecessors who allied with the Nazis in WWII. In 1986, just as the Iran-contra affair hit the news, speakers from the Afghan mujahideen and Nicaraguan contras attended a global conference of the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations (ABN) in Toronto. These and other CIA-backed “freedom fighters” were on the frontline of the West’s Cold War crusade.

which had lost 27 million citizens to defeat Nazi Germany, issued an all-but-ignored media release titled “Hate Propaganda Day Sullies Canada.” It correctly denounced BRD as “a blatantly dishonest anti-Soviet propaganda exercise.” As mainstream journalist John Best reported: “From all indications, not least the outraged response from the Soviets, Black Ribbon Day was a huge success in its first year.”

The swift realization of Hess’ BRD dream proves that myth building can be a “huge success” if, as a tool for pushing official narratives, it is supported by politicians, the mass media and state-supported groups—even if they include those with close organizational and ideological connections to Nazi collaborators.

The Late Cold War Context of the BRD Crusade

Soviet policies. Reagan was, for example, interested in using the public’s preexisting revulsion for the Nazis to get them to feel similarly toward the Soviet Communists.... [I]n condemning both regimes simultaneously, it would be impossible for critics to attack us as right-wing extremists or possibly Nazi sympathizers. (Emphasis added)

To spread public “revulsion” against the Soviets, Hess and Somerville began an “organizational campaign” tour to the UK, Germany, Austria, France, Sweden and the Netherlands. Funding for this BRD tour, says Hess, came from Stefan Roman. As Canada’s “Uranium King” billionaire, Roman was a lead force in the Canadian Slovak League and the Slovak World Congress, which glorified Slovakia’s Nazi puppet regime. During their tour, Hess and Somerville were welcomed by such leading profascists as Slava Stetsko, who met them at the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations’ (ABN) global HQ in Munich. See photo, opposite.) Stetsko led the ABN, was an executive of the World AntiCommunist League and headed the Bande der Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. While in Munich, Hess and Somerville also broadcast “interviews at Radio Free Europe [RFE] into the Soviet Union regarding Black Ribbon Day.” (RFE was the CIA’s largest Cold War propaganda mill. See pp.10-11.)

In 1986, the once-tiny BRD project spread wildly with “anti-Soviet rallies in the US, Australia, Sweden, France and Britain,” and in “at least nine Canadian cities.” At Toronto’s rally, thousands were addressed by Conservative MP and former Mayor David Crombie. Canada’s BRD protests also had government support through PM Brian Mulroney whose warm greetings were read out to the anti-Soviet protesters across Canada. That year, the BRD group also produced $40,000 worth of TV ads (i.e., $83,000 in 2020) to equate the Soviets with Nazism. In response, the USSR, the smiling PR frontman for nuclear-weapons maker GE (1954-62) and for the CIA’s antiRed “Crusade for Freedom” propaganda campaign administered by Radio Free Europe (1950-60).