

Getting them young:

Instilling Ukrainian nationalism in children and youth

At age 11, Chrystia Freeland was interviewed by her mother's brother, Uncle Bohdan (son of Nazi propagandist Michael Chomiak), for *Student*, a magazine circulated to Ukrainian-Canadian university students. Five years earlier, her mother, Halyna Chomiak Freeland, wrote in *Student* about her own childhood pressures:

"While growing up we were under pressure from our parents [Alexandra and Michael Chomiak] to be aware of our Ukrainianism and to be proud of it. This pressure also came from the Ukrainian community. It was exerted in many ways As a distant goal, we looked forward to the liberation of Ukraine and I can remember childhood dreams of leading armies down the mountain sides. This pressure to remain proudly nationalistic was very necessary."

As children, Chrystia Freeland and her friend Paul Grod, former president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC), like thousands of other Ukrainian ethnonationalists around the world, were raised through the ranks of two scouting groups. Both are historically linked to the fascist Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). While Grod is a product of the Ukrainian Youth Association (UYA or SUM) of Stepan Bandera's OUN(B), Freeland's roots are in Plast with its ties to Andriy Melnyk's OUN(M). Both OUN factions, says historian Per Anders Rudling continue to raise their children "in ritualistic celebration" of Ukrainian national heroes including those political and military leaders who collaborated with the Nazis:

Children and adolescents, dressed in the brownshirts and black ties of the SUM, the OUN(B) youth section, or the blue uniforms of the Plast were made to march in formation, decorate graves of the fallen heroes, perform militaristic and folkloristic hymns, and recite pledges of allegiance in front of nationalist memorials.¹

At age nine, Freeland was signed up with the Plast scouting troop in Edmonton. In 2013, when asked if Plast had been influential during her childhood, Freeland said:

Absolutely. Plast was a very important part of my life growing up and it is a very important part of my daughters' lives. I grew up in a Ukrainian community and was active in Plast. Now my two daughters are active plastunky in New York (my son is only 3 years old). My elder daughter went to Lviv this summer for [Plast's] 100th anniversary.²

Freeland joined Edmonton's Plast troop in 1977. That year, her mother, Halyna Chomiak Freeland, another intensely pas-



sionate Ukrainian nationalist, separated from her nonUkrainian husband and left Peace River, Alberta. Upon moving to Edmonton, Chrystia Freeland could become much closer to her mother's father, Michael Chomiak (aka Mykhailo Khomiak), his other children and to their extended families. Chomiak had been the Nazi's top Ukrainian-language news propagandist in Europe throughout WWII, and became deeply involved in Edmonton's Ukrainian community, which makes up 14% of the city's total population.³

The move to Edmonton was a turning point in Freeland's life because she became immersed in that community's ubiquitous, Ukrainian enculturation programs. Besides joining Plast, she began classes in two Ukrainian education programs: Alberta's government-funded, bilingual Ukrainian-English public school system, and the Ukrainian community's ultra-patriotic, nationalist "Saturday schools."

At age 11, in 1979, Chrystia was interviewed by her mother's brother, Bohdan Chomiak, son of Michael, for a nationalist Ukrainian newspaper, *Student*, which has been distributed to Ukrainian youth in universities across Canada since the late 1960s. Her uncle Bohdan asked Chrystia to compare the two Ukrainian education programs in which she was enrolled. She replied that historically, geographically and grammatically [sic] speaking ... you learned more in the Saturday school.... One of the biggest differences though is that the Saturday schools are much more patri-

otic and religious, so that history will have a lot of facts about how brave and gallant the Ukrainian kings were. And it will usually be stressed. Sometimes they'll talk about the negative points, but their perspective will be that of the Ukrainian nation.⁴ (Emphasis added.)

While this may be Freeland's first appearance in print media, four members of her family (the children of Michael Chomiak) were already involved in *Student* for about a decade. Her uncle Bohdan Chomiak had been on its staff (1972, 1978-80) and was a frequent contributor during the 1970s.⁵ Her aunts (Halyna, Natalia and Chrystia, Chomiak) were also active in the magazine. Chrystia Chomiak edited issues of *Student* (1969-70) and was involved in organising, producing and publishing it (1973-74).⁶ Natalia Chomiak wrote for *Student* and worked for its publishers (1972-74), the Ukrainian Canadian Students Union (SUSK).⁷ Chrystia Freeland's mother, Halyna Chomiak Freeland, also wrote for *Student*. In her late 20s in 1974, Halyna penned an article giving insights into childhood "pressures" from her parents (Alexandra and Mykhailo) and the Ukrainian community:



"[F]or me to grow up Ukrainian was to grow up with the idea that I was different and therefore special.... [We] were allowed only to speak Ukrainian at home.

While growing up we were under pressure from our parents to be aware of our Ukrainianism and to be proud of it. This pressure also came from the Ukrainian community. It was exerted in many ways. I and the other Ukrainian children that I knew were taught about the Ukraine — its history, beauty, culture and vast richness. Both our parents and the Ukrainian community pressured us to marry Ukrainians and to keep working in Ukrainian organizations. *As a distant goal, we looked forward to the liberation of Ukraine and I can remember childhood dreams of leading armies down the mountain sides. This pressure to remain proudly nationalistic was very*

photo: Ukrainian Weekly, January 19, 2014.

necessary. It counteracted the dominant social pressure from the general society to assimilate.”⁸ (Emphasis added.)

Like her father, Michael Chomiak, Halyna went into law. Funded by George Soros she moved to Ukraine to help draft its post-Soviet constitution (1992-2002).⁹

Chomiak's children and grandchildren could not help but be deeply affected by the belief system in which they were immersed. From an early age, they were inculcated into nationalistic Ukrainian culture not only by family and friends, Ukrainian schools and Plast, but by a myriad of other extremely nationalistic groups, events and activities. The Ukrainian Catholic church was also very influential. As Freeland said of her mother, “when we were growing up, she insisted my sister and I go to church every Sunday with our grandfather.”¹⁰

From childhood on, Freeland's enculturation into the cause of Ukrainian ethnonationalism was practically inescapable. It is little wonder then that as an adult, her commitment and dedication to this cause has been relentless. Aided by her intelligence, her command of language, her extreme confidence and personal chutzpah, Freeland became an outspoken voice promoting the mythic narratives of Ukrainian nationalism. Her grandfather would surely have been proud of her skills as a mass media news propagandist, and as a politician dedicated to the virilently Russophobic and antisocialist policies that dominate their community.

Freeland has also passed on the tradition to her own family. She has for example involved her children in a Toronto festival which is likely the world's largest Ukrainian ethnonationalist event outside Ukraine. (The local branch of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) has received

\$667,000 since 2009 to organize this event.¹¹) In 2013, when Freeland was the Liberal Party's “star candidate” running for parliament, she was honoured to be the festival's Parade Marshal. Heading the parade were a boy and girl in traditional Ukrainian dress carrying the event's official banner. Then came uniformed veterans bearing the flags of Ukraine, Canada, the US and NATO. Right behind them was a military-style band with 40 uniformed youth marching in formation. Next in line was Freeland, with her young children, waving from a vintage white Cadillac. (See photo, opposite page.) Another military-style band soon marched past with 60 uniformed members¹² of the UYA. As the youth affiliate of the League of Ukrainian Canadians, which represents followers of the OUN(B), the UYA's Bandera youth are taught to hail their fascist WWII military heroes with a cult-like reverence.

Toronto's Ukrainian Festival has everything to be expected from such annual family events: music, dancing, food, and politicians from all levels of government and Canada's three largest political parties. The event's organizers also permit fundraising for a far-right paramilitary group whose street fighters are known for brutal violence in Ukraine. Toronto's 2014 Ukrainian Festival allowed Right Sector Canada to raise money to buy military equipment for their fighters in Ukraine. CBC's TV news showed Right Sector's table with images of Bandera.¹³ That year's festival received a \$99,700 Canadian government handout.¹⁴

In 2016, when Freeland marched with her children in this Ukrainian parade, Right Sector Canada marched close behind them. Among them, Ukrainian youth carried a banner bearing a large portrait of Bandera.

The red and black battle flag of his Ukrainian Insurgent Army was held high.¹⁵ To hold that year's parade, UCC-Toronto received \$58,200 in federal government funds.¹⁶

As usual, Toronto's 2016 parade enjoyed the avid participation of Ukrainian ethnonationalist groups which glorify fascist army formations that collaborated with the Nazis. In this annual display of Ukrainian patriotism, hundreds of children and youth were joined by politicians (representing the Conservatives, Liberals and NDP), veterans, Ukraine's Ambassador to Canada (Andriy Shevchenko), and uniformed members of the Bandera youth movement who filed in-step behind the UYA marching band (*Baturyn*). The parade also featured such role models as Miss Teenage Canada and Miss Ukraine Toronto. Children from Ukrainian schools and uniformed members of Toronto's Plast troop also took part.¹⁷

This Toronto festival and similar events continue to demonstrate that Canada's far-right Ukrainian diaspora is alive and well. This ethnonationalist community continues to thrive thanks in no small part to ongoing government funding that has funneled millions of dollars in grants to their right-wing member groups and events.

Thanks to state generosity, Canada's Ukrainian nationalists have been able to foster their cultural traditions, beliefs and narratives through the ritualistic inculcation of children and youth. Dominated by anticommunist groups with fascist roots, this community's young have not been made aware that some of their most highly-revered wartime heroes, organizations and movements were deeply engaged in collaborating with the Nazis. Those raised in this amnesic cultural milieu are proud to carry this flame of

Plast recruited for the Waffen SS and is now “at the forefront” of Ukraine's holy war

In 1943, “Plast actively supported the creation of the Waffen-SS division,” wrote historian Per Rudling.¹ Plast not only recruited Ukrainian youth for this Nazi division, it also “provided many of the ... officers.”² In post-Soviet Ukraine, says Rudling, “Plast has taken an active role in raising children to glorify the OUN, the UPA [the OUN-B's fascist army], and the Waffen-SS Galizien.”

Plast issued a “Call for Support of Plast Scouts in the Ukrainian Armed Forces and Volunteer Units.” It was written by the Plast Conference with member groups in Australia, Argentina, Canada, Germany, Poland, the UK, US and Ukraine.³ This “Call” to join the armed struggle has been on Plast Canada's website since Feb. 2015.⁴ This was not long after Ukraine's pro-Russian/anti-NATO

government was ousted in a violent, US/NATO-backed coup. Here is an excerpt from Plast's religious call to military action:

As they were a century ago [when they fought for the Austro-Hungarian Empire in WWI], *Plast members are again at the forefront of the war effort....* Some of our Plast members organize aid and support for the armed forces; others volunteer ... in information services and procurement and delivery of medical supplies. *Most importantly, many have now taken up arms and are defending their country and our ancestral land.*

We are profoundly proud of and indebted to our Plast members serving in the armed forces or in the various volunteer organizations supporting the war effort. They are defending a new Ukraine and its democratic European values. They have taken

their *oath of loyalty to God and Ukraine*, to help others and to live by the tenets of Plast to a level that few of us ever will. *May the Lord protect our Ukrainian servicemen and women.*⁵ (Emphasis added.)

References

1. Per Anders Rudling, “‘The honor they so clearly deserve.’ Legitimizing the Waffen-SS Galizien,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 26:1, 2013, p.116.
2. Per Anders Rudling, “‘They Defended Ukraine’: The 14 Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS Revisited,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Sep. 2012, p.340. bit.ly/2DQrFRc
3. “Call for Support of Plast Scouts in the Ukrainian Armed Forces....” bit.ly/PlastArmy
4. Internet Archive of Plast Canada website web.archive.org/web/*http://www.plast.ca/
5. “Call for Support...” *Op. cit.*

Ukrainian nationalism and to pass it on to future generations, just as it was passed—with generous state assistance—to them.

References and notes

1. Per Anders Rudling, “‘They Defended Ukraine’: The 14. Waffen-Grenadier-Div. der SS (Galizische Nr.1) Revisited,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Sep. 2012, pp.334-35. bit.ly/RudlingSS-Galicia
2. “A conversation with Chrystia Freeland,” *Ukrainian Weekly*, May 19, 2013, pp.9,17. bit.ly/UW-Freeland
3. The 2006 census said Edmonton had 145,000 Ukrainian Canadians (i.e. 45% of Alberta’s Ukrainian population).
Population by ethnic origins, 2006 (Edmonton) bit.ly/2006-census
4. Bohdan Chomiak, “Life inside the Ukrainian Schools,” *Student*, Dec.1979, p.6. bit.ly/Free79
5. This search of *Student*’s back issues shows his active involvement (1972-80). bit.ly/B-Chom
6. Chrystia Chomiak (aka “Dolly Kumar”) bit.ly/C-Chom and bit.ly/C-Chom2
7. Natalka Chomiak was SUSK’s Secretary (1972-1973) and one of three on its “Controlling Committee” (1973-1974). Some articles ran under her pseudonym “T.T.” (1977-80). bit.ly/N-Chom
The July-1973 issue of *Student* (p.4) noted that she ran a SUSK summer program with \$11,000 from the Canadian government (the equivalent of \$66,500 in 2020) to produce TV shows and a national conference. It featured Trudeau’s External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp, who presented the government’s official position on the USSR. bit.ly/N-Chom2
8. Halya Chomiak, “In Response,” *Student*, Jan. 1974, p.3. bit.ly/H-Chom
9. Marko Levytsky, “Ukrainian Legal Foundation’s Halyna Freeland ‘Independent thinking is hard to acquire,’” Apr. 29, 1999. bit.ly/HalSor
10. Chrystia Freeland, “The richness of her life,” *Financial Times*, Jul. 13, 2007. bit.ly/CF-Mom
11. Grants and Contributions to Ukrainian Festivals from the Govt of Canada bit.ly/UkrFest
12. Parade / 2013 Toronto Ukrainian Festival www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPxtJLJCvG
13. “Muted Ukrainian-Canadian celebrations,” The National, *CBC TV*, August 23, 2014. www.cbc.ca/player/play/2495967253
 - 1:20: A Ukrainian-Canadian youth says he may enlist in the Ukrainian military.
 - 2:10: A Right Sector Canada spokesman, wearing camouflage, is interviewed at their fundraising table. On display are OUN-B battle flags and portraits of its fascist political and military leader, Stepan Bandera.
 - 2:45: Then-Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Chris Alexander, calls the Right Sector’s booth a mere ‘rumour,’ refuses to comment and says he is ‘proud’ to be there.
14. Grants & Contributions, *op. cit.*
15. Ukrainian Festival Parade, 2016, Toronto. www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKH78pJtf64
 - 15:58: Freeland appears in the parade.
 - 16:30: The Right Sector group appears.
16. Grants & Contributions, *op. cit.*
17. Ukrainian Festival Parade, 2016... *Op. cit.*

From Chomiak to Freeland: “keep that flame alive” *Close parallels and conflicts of interest in advocacy journalism*

As a teen, in the late Cold War era of Reagan’s 1980s, Chrystia Freeland began her journalism career with jobs for two far-right Ukrainian-Canadian publications in which her maternal grandfather, Michael Chomiak, had also been deeply involved. Both publications used Cold War memes about “captive nations” that were popularized by wartime fascists. While these were likely the last publications with which Chomiak worked, they were Freeland’s first known jobs. The highly-charged, rightwing milieu of these workplaces must have helped shape her worldview, and to hone her skills as a propagandist eager to aid the cause of antiSoviet, Ukrainian ethnonationalism.

She was guided along this path not only by her mother’s family, whose patriarch (Chomiak) was the Nazi’s top Ukrainian news propagandist, but by her teachers, the Ukrainian Catholic church and such militantly patriotic youth groups as Plast.

Chomiak had also been steeped in the biased, advocacy journalism of ultra-patriotic Ukrainian culture. Both began their youthful media careers when thrown headlong into extraordinary historical events that riveted ethnonationalist aspirations. Being in the right place at the right time, they both received widespread public acclaim by serving their community’s interests. Their public fame, aided by outside political forces that ruthlessly exploited Ukrainian nationalism, allowed them to become media gatekeepers editing large news enterprises.

In Freeland’s case, in her early 20s, she was simultaneously a student, political activist and journalist in Lviv, and was fully engaged in Ukraine’s final NATO-backed battle to separate from the USSR. Chomiak too had been a student and journalist in Ukraine on the nationalist beat. While studying law at Lviv University (1930-31), Chomiak wrote for *Dilo (Deed)*, the top daily paper in Galicia, southwest Ukraine. Later, he worked on its editorial staff (1934-39).¹ His work included covering at least one terrorism trial of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). To gain Ukraine’s independence, the fascist OUN assassinated Polish politicians. While on *Dilo*’s staff, said scholar John Paul Himka, Chomiak worked for a Lviv law “firm that handled one of the famous OUN assassination cases.” While Chomiak’s articles “made him a famous cub reporter,”² said Himka (who as Chomiak’s son in law, is Freeland’s uncle), he had a conflict of interest. How could he write unbiased news about such trials when, as an

intern trying to pass the bar, he was beholden to a law firm defending terrorists? His objectivity was also tainted by the Ukrainian nationalist struggle with which he identified.

Freeland too was in a major conflict of interest. The widely-accepted narrative is that she was an “accidental journalist”³ who, in 1990, suddenly began her meteoric rise through some of the world’s largest media firms. This media legend, created by Freeland herself, neglects any mention of her deep involvement in the divisive, partisan fight to sever Ukraine from the USSR. In



Stepan Bandera
posing in his
Plast uniform,
at age 14
in 1923.

early 1989, when her political meddling hit the news, she signalled her intent to enter mainstream journalism and hinted at her conflict of interest. “Freeland says her political activism,” reported Don Retson, “may not make her an ideal journalist.”⁴

Freeland’s legend also neglects mention of her work for far-right propaganda organs in Canada, the US and Europe. These Ukrainian ethnonationalist and CIA-linked enterprises were the first steps in her journalism career. Freeland’s skill in feigning objectivity allowed her to become a beloved darling of corporate media, which remains as entrenched in Russophobic/pro-NATO rhetoric as it was throughout the Cold War.

The right place, the right time and the ultraright ideology

Freeland’s media career benefited from her anticommunist and Russophobic views. These ideologies are valuable qualifications for all candidates seeking careers in Western media. And, being in Soviet Ukraine during the final battle of the Cold War, put Freeland in the right place at just the right time. Beginning in about 1990, she assisted billionaire George Soros in his efforts to manipulate Ukrainian politics. At that time, Soros began funding the CIA-created propaganda network—Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty—which assisted Freeland’s entrée