Rubbing political shoulders with the ABN in Toronto

During the Cold War, many Canadian politicians joined forces with Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations in Toronto.

1951: After opening its first congress, Lithuanian-Canadian Josef Kaskelis, ABN-Canada’s leader for the next 30 years, appointed its presidency. It included Ostap Sokolsky,1 leader of Canada’s Waffen-SS Galicia vets’ association, a key group in the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC). ABN’s presidency also included Ontario’s first Ukrainian MPP, Ivan Yaremko, a Progressive Conservative (PC) who unseated a communist MPP, A.A. MacLeod, in 1951. Yaremko was an Ontario cabinet minister (1958-72) and Solicitor General (1972-74). In 2008, he gave the UCC $25,000 to start an Ottawa lobbying office.2 In 2010, the UCC got all Ontario MPPs to endorse a glowing tribute to Yaremko that did not mention his ABN past.3

Speakers at the 1951 congress included ABN leader Yaroslav Stetsko and George Drew, the former Ontario premier (1943-48) who led Canada’s PC party. After being an MP (1948-57), Drew was Diefenbaker’s High Commissioner to Britain (1957-64). Drew saw the USSR “as the greatest threat to world peace” said historian Kirk Niergarth. He also notes that Drew so admired Mussolini and Hitler, that he wanted Canada to help the UK “to ally with fascist Italy and Germany to resist the Soviet menace.”4

1981: At this ABN congress, organised by Oleh Romanyshyn of the League of Ukrainian Canadians (LUC), émigrés from “captive nations” celebrated the 40th anniversary of supposed “Ukrainian independence in 1941 led by Mr. Stetsko.” This fascist leader, who vowed allegiance to Nazi Germany, was this ABN event’s key speaker. Others included leaders of ABN chapters; the World Congress of Free Ukrainians; LUC; the Canadian Anti-Soviet Action Ctte; Ron Gostick of the World Anti-Communist League-Canada; John Wilkinson, a British Tory MP (1970-74, 1979-2005) who chaired the Bandertor European Freedom Council; Edward O’Connor, a presidential aide who directed Eisenhower’s Ctte. to Investigate Communist Aggression (1954); and Masood Khaliili,5 spokesman for mujahideen commander Ahmad Masood who later led NATO’s proxy in the US-led 2001 Afghan invasion, the Northern Alliance. “From 1992 to 1996,” said journalist Robert Fisk, “the Northern Alliance was a symbol of massacre, systematic rape and pillage” and left Kabul “with 50,000 dead.”6

Yuri Shymko, MPP, read greetings from Ontario’s PC premier, Bill Davis, and speakers included Etobicoke Mayor Dennis Flynn, a Liberal MP of Polish descent, Jesse Flis, and PC MPs, Michael Wilson and John Gamble.7

1986: ABN-Canada’s Campaign Freedom Conference, co-organised by Lisa Shymko, was held Nov. 20-22, the 43rd anniversary of the ABN’s Nazi-sponsored creation in 1943. ABN-Canada’s chair, Orest Steciw, paid tribute to recently-deceased ABN leader, Yaroslav Stetsko, who won their Gold Medal of Freedom. Speakers included new ABN leader, Slava Stetsko, plus spokesmen from “anti-communist resistance movements” in Angola, the Baltics, Caucasus, Ethiopia, Kampuchea, Mozambique, Laos, Ukraine, Turkestan and Vietnam.8

Nicaraguan contra leader Mario Calero was there to speak about his FDN “freedom fighters.” Loyal to ousted US-backed tyrant Anastasio Somoza, the FDN used terrorism to fight the popular socialist, Sandinista government. A declassified CIA report on contra cocaine trafficking said that “Calero has one of the most seamy reputations ... as being up to his knees in corruption, ... a hatchet man for the hardcore unconstructed right ..., a symbol ... of all ... perceived to be rotten in the FDN.”9

Besides hearing from MPP Yuri Shymko, cabinet minister David Crombie (ex-Toronto mayor, 1972-78 and PC MP, 1978-88), ABN delegates met Pat Boyer (PC MP, 1984-93), US congressman Jack Kemp (1971-89) and heard written greetings from top global contra Ronald Reagan, and PM Mulroney.2 (See p. 26)

References and Notes

1. ABN Correspondence, May/June 1953. bit.ly/ABN-51
8. Gamble, a WAC director, led its affiliate, the Canadian Freedom Foundation. In 1986, Reagan’s CIA chief Bill Casey linked Gamble to Iran-Contra funding, through Toronto’s Vertex Investments.) bit.ly/ContrasGamb
12. Mycak, op. cit.