Ernest Gyidel

Ukrainian Public Nationalism in the General Government

The Case of *Krakivski Visti*, 1940–44


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КРАКІВСЬКІ ВІСТІ

УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ ЩОДЕННИК

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Ціна прим. 30 сот.

За майбутнє европейських народів

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„В Расії нєт закона"

With a foreword by David R. Marples

Ukrainian Voices, vol. 62

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"Хорошая газета, говорит тов.
Троцкий, лучше, чем плохая дивизия."

"A good newspaper, says Comrade Trotsky,
is better than a bad division."*

* The quotation is from the report on Leon Trotsky's meeting with the Kuomintang delegation headed by Chiang Kai-shek in Moscow on November 27, 1923: G.M. Adibekov et al., *Politbiuro TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Komintern: 1919-1943 gg. Dokumenty* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2004), 223.

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Foreword

Wartime Europe often seems unusually close, particularly from my vantage point of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. It was to this northern city that Mykhailo Khomiak, the chief editor of *Krakivski Visti*, migrated after the Second World War, and his remarkable family soon began to have an impact on the local community and eventually the city and nation too. His daughter Halyna, a lawyer by training, ran unsuccessfully for the New Democratic Party (NDP) in the constituency of Edmonton Strathcona. Another daughter, Chrystia, married the historian and my colleague at the University of Alberta, John-Paul Himka; a younger sister also married a scholar, Myroslav Shkandrij, a professor at the University of Manitoba. Halyna's own daughters attended Harvard University, and the older of the two, another Chrystia, is currently Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Canada.

More than the above, they were also, for roughly a decade, my close neighbors in a community known by its Ukrainian name *Hromada*, which was initiated to promote "Ukrainianism, socialism, and feminism." Many lively debates ensued, and the metamorphosis from the sort of Ukrainian nationalism embraced by contributors of the wartime newspaper edited by the elderly Mykhailo appeared complete.

I had moved from the UK to Canada to study with the legendary Professor Ivan L. Rudnytsky. Incidentally, he and Khomiak passed away in the same month (April) of 1984, though Mykhailo was the senior by some fourteen years. The 1980s and 1990s, however, were a time of relative innocence, before accusations of collaborationism came to the fore. The 1985 Deschênes Commission, for example, sealed most of the cases and reported tamely that no known Ukrainian war criminals were living in Canada. Thereafter, the question was considered resolved.

Many, including Himka, and my former PhD student Per Anders Rudling (his PhD was actually on Belarus) now disagree and have been at pains to emphasize that Ukrainians in Canada must accept their responsibility for war crimes and a role in the

persecution of, inter alia, European Jewry. Matters came to a head last year when the visit of Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky to Canada became the occasion for a member of the Waffen-SS Division *Galizien* to be brought as a guest to the Canadian parliament. There, he received a standing ovation from all the MPs and Zelensky for his role in fighting the Russians in the war and was regarded as a celebratory hero until someone pointed out that the "Russians were on our side" in the conflict. The Speaker of the parliament, who had hosted Yaroslav Hunka, was forced to resign.

Subsequently—as well as earlier—Chrystia Freeland has been the target of activists on the far left who claim, without much hard evidence, that she espouses the same sort of nationalism as the wartime collaborators. In an article for The Wilson Center (May 19, 2022), Zoe Reid and Emily Hardy note that in 2000 she conducted an interview with Vladimir Putin characterizing him as a "cuddly, cooing president" and in 2015 she described herself as a "Russophile."* Her views of Putin obviously changed after the invasion of Ukraine, and Russia banned her from entry in 2014. In the same article, the authors cite her attitude to her grandparents as "political exiles with a responsibility to keep alive the idea of an independent Ukraine." Their legacy has passed to Canada precisely because of the fact that *Krakivski Visti* is available in the Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre (*Oseredok*) in Winnipeg, as well as a private copy in Edmonton.

The task of dissecting the issues of a newspaper published under Nazi occupation is a sensitive one. The late Rudnytsky, who was no nationalist and despised the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists), once told me that in the 1930s, when western Ukrainians were living under Polish rule, that it was logical that some would support a German invasion since such a development was the only hope of positive change. He noted also that the Germans had been in Ukraine in 1918 and though the early occupation was quite harsh, it bore no relation to what was to follow in the Second World War.

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* https://www.wilsoncenter.org/microsite/3/node/110533

Some other points are also relevant. The Ukrainians who wrote for *Krakivski Visti* had no state, having been ignored by the victorious powers who assembled in Paris after the First World War. Poland had ignored their rights despite earlier promises of autonomy. Frustrations were evident in the reluctance of many Ukrainians to engage in the legal politics of the Polish Sejm. Thus, they sought an outlet for their intellectual discussions during a war that in 1941 had no obvious end in sight.

In the early years of the war, the Wehrmacht appeared to be unstoppable, and only suffered its first major defeat in Stalingrad in early February 1943. The early indicator was that the occupation might be protracted. One can certainly describe those who found employment under German rule to merit the term 'collaborators.' But the choices were grim. In contrast to those such as the head of the Ukrainian Central Committee, Volodymyr Kubijovyč, who was both a collaborator and anti-Semite, were others who wrote articles on aspects of Ukrainian history and culture that had no other viable outlet.

Thus finding a clear line between intellectuals and ideologues is often very difficult. As Ernest shows, lip service had to be paid to the German war effort, but that aside, it was possible to explore issues linked to the cultural heritage of an emergent nation.

Further east, in Soviet Ukraine, which had joined the USSR in December 1922, early cultural aspirations of the 1920s, ended abruptly with Stalin's rise to power. In 1929-33, mass collectivization was a disaster for Ukraine, and turned into a tragedy with the forced famine that reached its peak in the latter year, and was responsible for the deaths of about four million peasants in the Ukrainian SSR, and perhaps another million in the North Caucasus where a large portion of the population was ethnically Ukrainian.

Following the famine, which Ukrainians called the Holodomor, came the Great Purge of 1937-38, which eradicated Ukraine's cultural and political elite without regard for political ideology. From the vantage point of the Polish part of Ukrainian lands, it was thus logical to look west rather than east for solace. Little could be gained from Soviet rule. Following the Pact between Hitler and Stalin, Ukrainians could witness for themselves the nature of Soviet

rule in September 1939, albeit for a brief time. I recall an interview I carried out in Sheffield, England, with a former resident of western Ukraine who had been a child when the Soviet army crossed the border. He told me the main concern of he and other residents was for the state of the horses ridden by Soviet troops. The soldiers themselves looked like beggars and immediately started to root around for products that were scarce further east.

Many Ukrainians living in Poland in the 1920s dabbled with Communism, some even went to Soviet Ukraine to experience firsthand the workers' "utopia." Others joined a branch of the Communist Party of Poland (CPP), known as the Communist Party of Western Ukraine. The party played a role in strikes and protests against the harsher rules and integrationist policies of the Polish state, but by the late 1920s it suffered already from Moscow's suspicion. In the summer of 1938, the Comintern dissolved the CPP and its subordinates.

By that time, many Ukrainians looked to the political right as an alternative and to violent methods to achieve change. The OUN sought an ethnically Ukrainian state for which Ukrainians should be prepared to die. In 1940, when the OUN split into two wings, the Polish state had ceased to exist in its original form, and Ukrainians found themselves under Soviet occupation in the east and German military rule to the west. Kubijovyč, aligned with the older wing of the OUN led by Andrii Melnyk, convinced Hans Frank, head of the General Government, to be allowed to form a Ukrainian Central Committee in Cracow.

In Lviv, the wing of the OUN led by Stepan Bandera, declared an independent Ukrainian state on June 30, 1941, a move that startled the German occupants and toward which they were negative. Over the following weeks, members of the OUN-B present in the occupied area of Ukraine were arrested, including leader Bandera. Thus, while Bandera spent the war under arrest at Sachsenhausen concentration camp, the Melnyk wing continued to collaborate with the Nazis for much of the war. *Krakivski Visti* was one of the more benign consequences. As Ernest notes, it paid lip service to Nazi propaganda, without which it would have been shut down.

But it also provided an outlet for some talented Ukrainian writers whose voices would otherwise never have been heard.

In 2024, the wartime politics have once again come to the fore. Large parts of eastern and southern Ukraine have been occupied by Russian troops. Ukrainian leaders, in Russian propaganda, are equated with wartime Nazis, and therefore Russia has mounted a Special Military Operation to eliminate them. Ukraine in turn has no option but to fight for its own territory, granted to it in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is in Russia's interest to focus on Bandera, the OUN and UPA, and examples of wartime collaboration such as the Ukrainian Central Committee and the Waffen-SS Division *Galizien*. Stalin is once again a figure to be revered, his atrocities forgotten or ignored, and the Russian narrative also plays down the Holocaust and highlights a "genocide of the Russian people" as the main goal of the Nazis.

The most obvious deduction from recent events is that any prospects of objective truth about this era are long since lost. For both sides, the Second World War has become a symbol either of victory or the beginning of further repressions. The irony that Russia can focus on Ukrainian "Nazis" while replacing the priority of the Jewish Holocaust in its own historical narratives with an alleged Russian one is often overlooked. One can only do, as Ernest has done in this book, and return to the sources available to provide a portrait of different aspects of this tumultuous period.

The wartime period helped to define modern Ukraine, while those who wrote for *Krakivski Visti* either found their way to the West or were taken prisoner or killed. While Bandera himself never moderated his extreme views, others adopted quickly to life in democratic states. Many were employed by the US government during the Cold War for their knowledge of the region and commitment to ending Soviet rule.

In truth, the publication and output of *Krakivski Visti* represented at most a microcosm of the wider conflict, as both an outlet for Ukrainian culture and a means of survival under occupation. How harshly we judge the editors and contributors depends on how we perceive the choices available to those involved. The contributors were not engaged in military activities, committing crimes

against minorities or the civil population. No doubt some supported Nazi policies of anti-Semitism and certainly more could be described as anti-Communist. Others were innocent victims of their circumstances: stateless, caught between two vast armies controlled by totalitarian regimes of left and right, and with uncertain futures and hope for raising their families. Nevertheless, the newspaper is a unique reflection of the period, of the lives of those living under occupation and their perceptions of the world around them.

David R. Marples
November 2024

Disclaimer

A significant part of this book discusses in detail, for research purposes only, xenophobic content that appeared in the Ukrainian newspaper *Krakivski Visti* (Cracow News) during World War II. Readers are warned that exposure to such hateful material may be uncomfortable and disturbing. In no way, either directly or indirectly, is this book aimed at supporting ideas of ethnic prejudice or racial hatred.

List of Abbreviations and Terms

Banderites	followers of Stepan Bandera
Melnykites	followers of Andrii Melnyk
OUN	Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists
Ounites	members of the OUN
PAA	Provincial Archives of Alberta
TsDIAL	Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine in Lviv
UAA	University of Alberta Archives
UCC	Ukrainian Central Committee, also referred as the Committee
UNDO	Ukrainian National Democratic Alliance
UPA	Ukrainian Insurgent Army
UPH	Ukrainian Publishing House
WUPR	Western Ukrainian People's Republic

List of Illustrations

Note on Transliteration and Proper Names

The book uses a simplified version of the Library of Congress' romanization of Cyrillic characters. The apostrophe representing soft sign has been omitted everywhere except in quotations and bibliographic records that originally contained it. In my experience, apostrophicide reduces visual clutter and makes the text more readable (compare L'viv to Lviv). As a rule, I have used the spelling of geographic names that reflect their current status; for example, Podlasie instead of Pidliashshia or Lviv instead of Lemberg/Lwów. Exceptions have been made for several toponyms with long-established spelling in English, such as Cracow and Warsaw (rather than Kraków and Warszawa) or Galicia and Volhynia (rather than Halychyna and Volyn).

Acknowledgments

This book is based on my dissertation defended at the University of Alberta in 2019. By its nature, a doctoral thesis is supposed to be a solitary task, but I was fortunate to have two great historians aiding me on the path toward its completion. David R. Marples was an exemplary doctoral supervisor, a true *Doktorvater*. I would have never finished my doctorate without his support, which went far beyond dissertation matters and ranged from friendly advice to employing me as his research assistant for three years. John-Paul Himka, my master's supervisor at the same university, was the reason I ended up in faraway Edmonton in 2012. The dissertation's topic was born in conversations with him. But most importantly, for three years he let me peruse his set of *Krakivski Visti* (inherited from his father-in-law and the newspaper's chief editor, Mykhailo Khomiak), which made my research of the newspaper much easier. After defending the dissertation, I had no plans to publish it. My mind was slowly changed in spring 2023 when I stayed in a quiet and sleepy Swedish town, Dalby. My hosts, both professional historians, convinced me to reconsider, and financial support from the KAW Foundation and Vetenskapsrådet enabled me to finish this book. Last but not least, I am grateful to Andreas Umland for including my book in the *Ukrainian Voices* series. All responsibility for opinions and the accuracy of facts lies with me entirely.

Introduction

In 1977 an important Polish-Jewish historian, Lucjan Dobroszycki (1925-1995), writing about the Polish legal press in the General Government, noted that "there is a surprising paucity of work concerned with the assumptions, methods, and special practices used by the Nazis to influence public opinion. The lack is especially striking on the topic of so important a means of modern communication as the press … there is no work on the press published in Polish territories by the occupation force itself, on its orders, or with its approval—that is, on the 'legal' press for the subjugated population. It is difficult to attain a complete picture of occupation policies without considering this area."[1] At the time when he made this observation only the Polish underground press had been studied, while the legal press published directly by or under the control of the German authorities in the General Government had received almost no attention.

The primary reason for this historiographical situation at the time was the assumption that the phenomenon of the legal press was insignificant and marginal in the occupied Polish society, which allegedly followed the Resistance in boycotting the public sphere of the General Government. It took Dobroszycki nearly a decade to write a book disproving this assumption and showing "that the [Polish] reptile press was well-nigh universally bought and read, despite being published by the detested occupying power."[2] Subsequent studies of the General Government's legal press support Dobroszycki's conclusion.[3] There is, however, a gap

1 Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Reptile Journalism: The Official Polish-Language Press under the Nazis, 1939-1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 1.

2 Dobroszycki, *Reptile Journalism*, ix.

3 See: Klaus-Peter Friedrich, "Publizistische Kollaboration im sog. Generalgouvernement: personengeschichtliche Aspekte der deutschen Okkupationsherrschaft in Polen (1939 - 1945)," *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 48 no. 1 (1999): 51-89; Klaus-Peter Friedrich, "Die deutsche polnischsprachige Presse im Generalgouvernement (1939-1945): NS-Propaganda für die polnische Bevölkerung," *Publizistik: Vierteljahreshefte für Kommunikationsforschung* 46 no. 2 (2001): 161-188; Grzegorz Hryciuk, "*Gazeta Lwowska*" *1941-1944* (Wrocław: Wydaw. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1996); Lars Jockheck, *Propaganda im*

in the historiography: the Polish and German language legal press of the General Government have been studied relatively well, while the Ukrainian language legal press has not been so fortunate. This study aims to correct this imbalance at least partially, dealing with the most important Ukrainian legal newspaper of the General Government, *Krakivski Visti* (Cracow News), which was published by the Ukrainian Central Committee (UCC), a legal Ukrainian umbrella organization in the General Government. That said, this book is not a comprehensive history of the newspaper (my scope and limitations are discussed further).

Primary Sources

The most important source for a history of *Krakivski Visti* is, of course, its editorial archive, which is located at the Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA) among the papers of Ukrainian journalist, editor and community activist Mykhailo Khomiak (1905-1984). A lawyer by education, Khomiak was one of the editors of the most important Western Ukrainian newspaper on the eve of World War II—*Dilo* (Action),[4] and shortly after its closure in September 1939, became the deputy editor and then the chief editor of *Krakivski Visti* in 1940-1945. In October 1948 he (as Michael Chomiak) and his family immigrated to Canada.[5] After he died in Edmonton, the family

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Generalgouvernement: die NS-Besatzungspresse für Deutsche und Polen 1939-1945 (Osnabrück: Fibre, 2006); Józef Lewandowski, "*Goniec Krakowski" (27.X.1939 - 18.I.1945): próba monografii* (Warszawa: [s.n.], 1978); Jolanta Rawska, "*Sprawa polska" w prasie "gadzinowej" (lipiec 1944-styczeń 1945)* (Warszawa: [s.n.], 1980); Maria Świstak, *Nowy Kurier Warszawski: próba monografii* (Warszawa: [s.n.], 1978); Tomasz Andrzej Uchman, *Gazeta Lwowska 1941-1944: próba monografii* (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 1977); Krzysztof Woźniakowski, *Polskojęzyczna prasa gadzinowa w tzw. Starej Rzeszy* (1939-1945) (Kraków: Wydaw. Naukowe AP, 2001); Władysława Wójcik, *Prasa gadzinowa Generalnego Gubernatorstwa: (1939-1945)* (Kraków: Wydaw. Naukowe WSP, 1988).

4 In my dissertation I translated *Dilo* as *Deed* but since then I have seen the newspaper's letterhead in which its name is given as *Action* and *L'Action* in English and French respectively. See: "Posvidka" August 18, 1934. University of Alberta Archives (UAA), Ivan L. Rudnytsky fonds, Accession no. 2020-005, File 35.

5 See Khomiak's autobiography: "Miĭ zhyttiepys." Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA), Michael Chomiak fonds, File PR1985.0191/96.

donated his papers to the Provincial Archives in 1985.[6] The editorial archive of *Krakivski Visti* is a unique collection. According to one estimate, at least 365 Ukrainian periodical titles appeared under German occupation during World War II.[7] Yet out of all of them the editorial archive of *Krakivski Visti* is the only one known to survive almost entirely. Only the last months (the Vienna period) of the newspaper's history are represented poorly in the papers. The Polish legal press of the General Government survived only slightly better in terms of the archival trail. It seems that the destruction of the last war years was only partially responsible for this lack of survived editorial archives: most likely, they were deliberately destroyed by the newspapers' staff in 1944-45, who might have believed that they would be used against them after the war (they were not wrong).[8]

The editorial archive of *Krakivski Visti* takes up almost five (out of thirty-seven) boxes containing Khomiak's papers. It consists of notebooks in which he recorded his frequent meetings with German officials and the UCC leadership; the editorial chronicle "Chleny Redaktsii 'Krakivskykh Vistei' i spivrobitnyky" (most likely written by Khomiak); German daily information bulletins; business files (salaries, remunerations, etc.); correspondence with journalists and contributors; a collection (selected issues) of other legal press in German, Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian languages; materials about religious affairs in the General Government, primarily on the Ukrainian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Churches; the Katyn massacre; the Waffen-SS division *Galizien* (primarily official announcements and newspaper articles); *Ostarbeiter* matters; and last but not least the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (pamphlets, newsletters, communiqués etc.). Besides the editorial archive, important information about the newspaper is scattered throughout Khomiak's post-war correspondence.

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6 PAA, Michael Chomiak fonds https://searchprovincialarchives.alberta.ca/mykhailo-chomiak-fonds (accessed May 23, 2024).

7 Kostiantyn Kurylyshyn, *Ukrainske zhyttia v umovakh nimetskoi okupatsii (1939-1944 rr.): za materialamy ukrainomovnoi lehalnoi presy* (Lviv: Lvivska natsionalna naukova biblioteka im. V. Stefanyka, 2010), 5.

8 Dobroszycki, *Reptile Journalism*, 5-6.

The second most important primary source is the newspaper itself. *Krakivski Visti* appeared in two editions, daily (January 1940 – April 1945) and weekly (November 1940 – October 1944). The daily edition ranged between 4 to 10 pages, though it was not uncommon for holiday issues (Easter, Christmas, etc.) to extend to 20 pages. In terms of production quality *Krakivski Visti* was not consistent. Like most newspapers under the German occupation, it was not published on quality paper from the start, but after 1943 it was visibly degraded even further. In terms of content *Krakivski Visti* was also uneven: its worst years were the first and the last. Arguably, the newspaper peaked in 1943 in terms of intellectual quality, variety of topics, and the number of contributors.

It is worth mentioning that after the war Khomiak several times expressed an intent to write memoirs about his journalistic career at *Dilo* and *Krakivski Visti*.[9] Regrettably, he never realized it. In the 1970s one of Khomiak's daughters, Chrystia Chomiak, recorded an audio interview with her father. It deals mostly with family history and stops at the events of the Polish-Soviet War of 1920.[10] In 2010, another daughter, Maria Hopchin, and her husband, Bruce Hopchin, videotaped an interview with Khomiak's first cousin, Benedict Blawacky (1920-2014). Both Chrystia and Maria were kind enough to make the interviews available to me: without a doubt they are important sources for Khomiak's biography and family history, but unfortunately, they contain very little about *Krakivski Visti* per se.

Historiography

As a primary source *Krakivski Visti* has been used by researchers of Ukrainian wartime history since the 1950s. John A. Armstrong, a renowned American political scientist whose early work focused

9 See for example: Letter from Mykhailo Khomiak to Kost Pankivskyi March 29, 1959. PAA, Michael Chomiak fonds, File PR1985.0191/208; Letter from Mykhailo Khomiak to Volodymyr Kubijovyč September 13, 1960. PAA, Michael Chomiak fonds, File PR1985.0191/184.

10 The interview was recorded in December of either 1975 or 1977. Personal communication from John-Paul Himka.