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STEPAN A. BANDERA AND THE 1941 "UKRAINIAN STATE"

Petro Yarovyv

On 30 June 1941, the Ukrainian fascist and Hitler's professional spy, Stepan A. Bandera (according to his German appellation, "Consul II"), proclaimed in L'vov, then occupied by the Germans, the resurrection of the Ukrainian State in Western Ukraine. The same day a government was formed under the designation of the "State Government" with Yaroslav Stets'ko, Bandera's deputy, as premier.

S. A. Bandera appeared on the Ukrainian political horizon in June 1934, when, as leader of the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) in Western Ukraine, he gave the order to kill the Polish Minister of the Interior, Peracki. It is worth noting that, although the perpetrator of the act, Grigoriy Matsyenko, had not been arrested, the Polish police had immediately in its possession sufficient data to start a case against the leaders of the OUN, with Bandera at the head of the list. This indicates that the evidence and data bearing on the revolutionary and terroristic activities of the OUN had not been received from the murderer but from some other source.

The courageous deportment of the 23-year-old Bandera during the trial in Warsaw in 1935 gave him a halo of heroism and made him the hero of the Ukrainian nationalists in the Western Ukraine and among the emigres. Bandera behaved at the time like a fanatical revolutionary nationalist.

However, many changes took place during the intervening 16 years.

In 1940, when the Germans occupied Warsaw, Bandera was released and assumed a role of greater scope, no longer on an oblast scale, but as one of the principal leaders of the OUN, which already existed on German territory.

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- 1 -

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As is well known, Col Andrey Mel'nik [in Ukrainian, Andriy Mel'nyk] had replaced Col E. Konovalets, chief leader of the OUN, who was killed by a Bolshevik agent, Valyukh, in Rotterdam in 1938. Thus, in his struggle for domination within the OUN, Bandera came face to face with Mel'nik from the start.

It was then that a new facet of Bandera's personality was revealed -- not that of a revolutionary, even of a fascist type, but a provocateur and Hitler agent.

The German occupation forces at the time needed agents and informers who were conversant with conditions in Poland and could help the Hitlerite invaders. They could find no better men for the job than Bandera and his followers.

Bandera proceeded with great zeal to carry out Hitler's assignments, under the guidance of a man who was at once one of the chief directors of Hitler's spy system, a prominent leader of the OUN, and -- as became known only in 1945 -- an important Soviet agent. His name was Riko Yary. He was an extremely odd individual, completely unknown to non-Ukrainian readers, but he played a prominent role in the Ukrainian national movement. I shall have to write about him separately at some other time.

While working under the direction of Riko Yary and trying to strengthen his position among the German invaders, Bandera launched the campaign which was to make him master of the OUN. To achieve this, he found it necessary, first, to compromise the old leadership headed by Mel'nik. His first act was to prefer charges against the "Polish and Soviet spies" allegedly ensconced in the Main Administration of the OUN. Yaroslav-Baranovskiy, accused of "Polish espionage" on the basis of documents allegedly found in Polish archives by Riko Yary, was the first victim of the campaign. Next came Col M. Stsiborskiy and squadron leader O. Senik-Gribovskiy, who were accused of having "connections with Soviet agents."

Bandera produced no proof of any kind. What had been published on the subject appeared obviously unsatisfactory, even to the layman. However, no one demanded proof. Bandera's master, the Gestapo, on one hand, and the Soviet agency in the person of Riko Yary, on the other, gave him a free hand. A simple denunciation to the Gestapo was sufficient to cause persons objectionable to Bandera to be arrested and liquidated at his order. This was the case, for instance, with Turash, oblast leader of the OUN in Western Ukraine, who had come to occupied Poland to establish connections with the Main Administration of the OUN.

At the same time, Bandera worked feverishly to get hold of the leadership of the Ukrainian nationalist underground organizations, created in 1939 for the struggle against the Bolsheviks during the Soviet occupation.

Bandera succeeded in all his enterprises. He seized the reins of the OUN and became the acknowledged favorite of the Hitlerite authorities, who, preparing for a war in the Ukraine, were sufficiently far-sighted to take into account the help that Bandera could render them there.

It was not Bandera's espionage that was important to Hitler's gauleiters. They needed him as an agent, who would undermine the Ukrainian national liberation movement, or as an obedient police dictator who could suppress the nationalist movements among minorities of Western Ukraine. (He was of no use in the central and eastern oblasts because he was completely unknown there.)

The Hitlerites made no mistake in their calculations. Bandera played his part to perfection. And when he had done his duty, he and some of his assistants were dispatched to a concentration camp. The Gestapo had its own candidates for the posts of gauleiters and governors of the Ukraine.

- 2 -

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Bandera stayed at the camp from summer 1941 to fall 1944, when he was freed by the Germans and sent to spy for them during their retreat from the Ukraine. (One could tell a good deal about this period of Bandera's activities.)

Let us return, however, to the "Ukrainian State," founded by Bandera on 30 June 1941. The proclamation of the "state" took place in an atmosphere of great solemnity, with Hitler's representatives participating. However, no solemn speeches could hide the shameful fact, which will remain a black spot on the history of the Ukrainian movement, that the first act of the "State Government" headed by Stets'ko was an expression of deepest gratitude to Hitler. Even the Norwegian, Quisling, whose name has become a synonym for traitor, did not go so far.

Since the support of the OUN alone, or, rather, of those groups in the OUN which followed Bandera was not sufficient to invest the government of the "Ukrainian State" with the necessary authority, the Bandera falsifiers resorted to the fabrication of two false documents. One of these was produced through the convocation in Krakow, on the eve of the war, of a special conference of prominent Ukrainian leaders, and was given the grandiloquent title of "The Consolidation of All Ukrainian Political Tendencies and Common Action for the Resurrection of the Ukrainian State." With such a platform, it is no wonder that the Banderists were able to obtain the necessary signatures, and the adopted declaration was presented to the nation as an acknowledgment by all political parties of the right of the Bandera group to direct the government of the future state.

The second falsified document was obtained from the generally respected Metropolitan A. Sheptytsky. He was shown the declaration and persuaded to issue an appeal to the people calling for support of the "generally recognized authorities." (Later, the Metropolitan became convinced that he had been deceived and retracted his appeal.)

What was the Banderist "resurrected Ukraine" like at the time? It is hard to find an adequate definition for the "mongrel state" created by Bandera and Stets'ko under the scurrilous name of the Ukrainian State. If one were to judge this brain child of Bandera even by totalitarian standards, one would find that the elements of law and legality, which are present even in totalitarian states, were absent there. However bad and cruel these laws are, they still contain some elements of right and order. There was nothing of the kind in the "kingdom" of Stets'ko and Bandera. Bloody chaos, utter lawlessness, and the wildest and most vicious excesses in the treatment of the Ukrainian population and the national minorities prevailed. Unbridled terrorism was used to force dissenters to submit to the "leaders." Tensands of people were killed without trial, without investigation, and often, without any apparent cause.

During the first days of Bandera's rule, terror was directed primarily against the organization headed by A. Mel'nik. The greater part of the leaders of this organization were killed, openly or secretly. The brothers Prishlyak and many others were brutally murdered in Podgaytsy; the above-named Senik and Stsiborskiy, in Zhitomir. The assassin was Stepan Kozly of Lyubachev, a Ukrainian Communist, and at the same time one of the leaders of Bandera's combat detachments. Then came the turn of all Bandera's opponents among the Ukrainian people in general. Finally, the national minorities in the Western Ukraine, the Poles and the Jews, were subjected to bloody persecution. It is difficult to estimate how many Poles were killed, but some data has been preserved concerning the number of Jews who perished. Over 10,000 Jews were destroyed in a single "operation" at the border of the Carpathian Ukraine. The Hungarian gendarmes drove these Jews out from the area which had been occupied by Hungary with Hitler's consent. At the border, they were received by "special" elements of the Bandera militia, which drove them to unknown parts, destroying all of them en route. Altogether, during the 5 weeks of its existence, the Bandera "state" destroyed over 5,000 Ukrainians, 15,000 Jews, and several thousand Poles.

- 3 -

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The "Ukrainian State" of Stepan Bandera ended its short but ignominious existence in August 1941, when it was announced in L'vov that Western Ukraine had been incorporated as the "District of Galicia" in the "General Governorship" (occupied Poland). And then a "new order," Hitler style, began to be introduced in the Ukraine.

This is, in short, the story of Bandera's "one-day holiday," which his followers, relying on people's forgetfulness, now try to present as a glorious and heroic page in the history of the Ukrainian liberation movement. In reality, it would be best, especially for the supporters of a free Ukraine, to erase from the history of their movement this infamous Hitlerite, fascist episode, which brought nothing but shame and sorrow to the Ukraine.

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- 4 -

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5