



# Press Release

25 April 2007

## **Dr. Peter Potichnyj Addresses Controversies Related to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in Forty-First Annual Shevchenko Lecture**

This year marks two anniversary dates of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). October 2007 marks 65 years since its founding while September 2007 marks 60 years since UPA soldiers began to break through to areas controlled by the Western Allies, completing their raids from Ukraine through Soviet-occupied areas of post-World-War-II Eastern and Central Europe. 2007 also marks the 100-th anniversary of the birth of the Commander in Chief of UPA, Roman Shukhevych-Taras Chuprynka.

Although much time has passed from its founding and since it ceased activities, and even though there is a considerable amount of literature on UPA, much controversy continues to exist about the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and its activities. To this day, UPA has not been recognized as a combatant force during the Second World War by Ukraine's post-Soviet government, while some Western academics and Ukrainian émigré circles hold negative views of its character and activities. In view of the anniversaries and the controversies that exist related to UPA, the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS) and the Ukrainian Professional and Business Club of Edmonton (UPBCE) invited Dr. Peter J. Potichnyj, a leading authority on UPA, to deliver the prestigious Shevchenko Lecture on 30 March on the topic "The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA): What Have We Learned 65 Years After Its Founding?"

Following introductory remarks, Dr. Potichnyj turned to addressing some of the key controversies surrounding UPA. The first issue addressed by Dr. Potichnyj concerned the conflating of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), especially of the organization led by Stepan Bandera (OUN-b) with UPA, by commonly referring to the two entities in academic and popular literature as OUN-UPA.

Professor Potichnyj pointed out that the first to use the hyphenated designation for the two bodies were the Soviet security organs and other Soviet entities and individuals from the Soviet Union. As the OUN, whose ideology was integral nationalist, had dealings with the Germans, getting people to believe that the two entities were virtually identical would serve to discredit UPA. The hyphenated term has also been used by some émigré circles affiliated with the OUN-b, and it has become fashionable again since Ukraine's independence, which Dr. Potichnyj attributed in part to the political ambitions of some politicians in contemporary Ukraine. While acknowledging the important role played by OUN members in UPA, Dr. Potichnyj stressed that the UPA was subordinated to the Ukrainian Supreme Liberation Council (Ukrains'ka Holovna Vyzvol'na Rada - UHVR)—an underground governing body more broadly-based than the OUN-b—and that UHVR was itself created upon the insistence of UPA. Dr. Potichnyj pointed out that some academics constitute the third group which uses the conflated term, thereby ignoring the subordination of UPA to the UHVR.

The second controversy addressed by professor Potichnyj concerned the number of people involved in UPA and in underground activities overall. He first spoke about the problem of the reliability of estimates. Based on Soviet statistics, about 538,727 people in the western oblasts of Ukraine were killed, jailed or exiled from 1944-

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1956, which is about 10% of the population of the period. Dr. Potichnyj concluded that some Soviet statistics were exaggerated, as some of those killed or repressed had nothing to do with the underground resistance. He contended that Soviet losses were also made smaller.

The third controversy dealt with the organization of the UPA. Soviet propaganda aimed to portray UPA as undisciplined bands of gangsters. Professor Potichnyj first outlined the organizational structure of UPA to show its similarities to that of a regular army. He then noted the Soviet efforts made to create armed groups that looked like and imitated UPA units, who were engaged in atrocities with the intent of discrediting UPA. He noted that already in 1945 there were 156 such mirror-image groups in existence.

Professor Potichnyj next discussed controversies related to ideology. He began by mentioning that various works portrayed UPA members as steeped in integral nationalist ideology based on Dmytro Dontsov's writings and Nazi and fascist ideologies. While OUN members of the 1930s were exposed to Dontsov's political views, the same cannot be said for UPA members in wartime Ukraine. The ideological underpinnings of UPA and the Ukrainian World War II and post-World War II underground were based largely on the writings of O. Hornovyi (Diakiv), P. Poltava (Fedun), and others, who stressed democratic values in their writings. These ideas were buttressed by those contained in earlier writings of Ukraine's literary giants--Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko and Lesia Ukrainka. Dr. Potichnyj continued that the UPA slogans "Freedom for Nations" and "Freedom for Individuals" were not empty words. During his talk Professor Potichnyj pointed out the multinational aspects of UPA, which contained national units of Uzbeks, Georgians, Tatars and others, while Jews primarily provided medical services.

Professor Potichnyj also treated the Polish-Ukrainian conflict, which he called a great tragedy for both nations. He dismissed the assumption held by some academics that integral nationalist ideology was a primary factor motivating Ukrainians. Pointing to the recently published book *Zahybel' Arkadii*, by Bohdan Hud', Dr. Potichnyj noted that the Polish-Ukrainian conflict had a long history and that land hunger explains in part the ferocity of the struggle and of the involvement of the peasants in the Volynian tragedy of 1943. There were other factors as well, including Polish plans to incorporate Volyn' into Poland, German and Soviet meddling, and the inability of the Polish and Ukrainian underground leadership to reach an understanding.

In respect to the Jews, Dr. Potichnyj noted that the populace was aware of the mass killings of Jews in Ukraine. However, he knew of no documentary evidence that would support the assumption or accusation that the UPA welcomed or supported the Holocaust. Implications that the UPA was thirsty for blood of Poles after most Jews had been killed in the Holocaust were also without foundation. The biggest failure of the Ukrainian underground leadership with respect to the Jews was that they were basically silent about the mass killings. No condemnations or proclamations of concern were issued. Dr. Potichnyj also said that he knew of no instance of the Jewish leadership attempting to contact the Ukrainian underground leadership. Dr. Potichnyj ended his overview of some of the controversies surrounding UPA by stating that resorting to sensational statements was no substitute for genuine scholarship, and that much serious work remained to be done on the question of Jews and UPA and on other controversial issues.

A lively question and answer session followed the Shevchenko lecture. During this period, perhaps the most poignant, effective and revealing statements concerned the guest speaker's personal experiences, which he also touched upon in his lecture. Dr. Potichnyj, who comes from the village of Pawlokoma (Pavlokoma), now in Poland near Przemyśl (Peremyshl'), became a soldier in UPA when he was just fourteen years old. This occurred following a brutal mass killing by Polish Home Army (Armija Krajowa) soldiers in March 1945. Dr. Potichnyj mentioned the empowerment he felt being armed with a rifle, following which he "felt equal to our enemies. I no longer had to wait to be threatened, beaten or even killed. This feeling of liberation and some control over one's destiny however illusive had a profound impact on uneducated village boys, who made up the majority of UPA." It was very sobering to hear Dr. Potichnyj state that his becoming a UPA soldier helped him to mature quickly and to lose a childlike hatred that had been welling up inside him for the Poles and Germans, and for the Russians who killed his father.

Dr. Potichnyj's description of his personal experiences brought into sharp relief images of the brutalities of war, where unspeakable horrors were visited on a village far removed from global political centres, but which

was dragged into this inferno as a consequence of decisions by world leaders. It also brought into focus what may be described as a failure of some academics and students who write on UPA and WWII to understand the context and terrible realities of the war, especially in Ukraine.

Dr. Potichnyj served in UPA until 10 September 1947, when the remnant of his company (36 soldiers) under the leadership of Hromenko (Mykhailo Duda), crossed from Soviet-occupied Austria to the US-controlled zone in Germany. Peter Potichnyj later served with the US Army in Korea before beginning his higher education, earning his Ph.D. in political science from Columbia University in 1966. That year he began his academic career as professor of political science at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Since 1995 he has been Professor Emeritus there.

Throughout the course of his career, Dr. Peter Potichnyj has written many articles and books on Soviet and East European politics and history, and Ukrainian politics and history, especially military history. He had a particular interest in Ukrainians' relations with their neighbours and organized conferences on these topics. These resulted in the publication of the following books by CIUS Press, which he edited or co-edited: *Poland and Ukraine: Past and Present* (Edmonton and Toronto, 1980); *Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Historical Perspective* (Edmonton, 1988); and *Ukraine and Russia in their Historical Encounter* (Edmonton, 1992).

Since 1975 Dr. Potichnyj has served as editor-in-chief of the documentary series *Litopys UPA*. To date, 61 volumes have appeared in this three-part series. He is co-editor of *Political Thought of the Ukrainian Underground: 1943-1951* (Edmonton, 1986), published by CIUS Press. Peter Potichnyj is also the author of a documentary history of his native village—*Pavlokoma, 1441-1945: istoriia sela* (L'viv and Toronto, 2001)—which was ethnically cleansed at the end of World War II.

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