

6 ethnics leave Bush campaign; allegations called political attacks

RESIGNATIONS, from 1-A
August to drum up support for Bush among diverse ethnic groups, were: Florian Galdau, honorary national chairman of Romanians for Bush; Rudi Slavoff, national co-chairman of Bulgarians for Bush; Phillip A. Guarino, national vice chairman of Italians for Bush; Laszlo Passtor, national co-chairman of Hungarians for Bush; Bohdan Fodorak, national vice chairman of Ukrainians for Bush, and Ignatius Billinsky, honorary co-chairman of Ukrainians for Bush.

All but Slavoff were first accused of having links to Nazi or fascist groups, or of having sympathies to them, in an article Sept. 8 in the Washington Jewish Week.

The Bush campaign last week dismissed Jerome A. Brentar, a Cleveland travel agent who also was named in that article, from a post in the coalition as national co-chairman of Croats for Bush. He was dropped because his support of convicted Ukrainian war criminal John Demjanjuk "put him at odds" with Bush, a campaign official said.

The Inquirer reported Saturday that Slavoff, national co-chairman of Bulgarians for Bush, heads the Bulgarian National Front, formed by members of the Nazi-aligned Bulgarian Legion after World War II.

Billinsky, of Fort Washington, Montgomery County, had been identified by the Washington Jewish Week as president of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA), which the newspaper said has vigorously opposed the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations — the government's Nazi-hunting agency.

According to a 1984 list of UCCA component groups, the organization also includes the Ukrainian Survivors of the Holocaust, whose president, Petro Mirchuk of Philadelphia, wrote in connection with the Demjanjuk deportation case that the Office of Special Investigations "has been transformed into a holy inquisition by world Jewry. Jews need a show trial concerning the Holocaust and pick up a Ukrainian as a scapegoat regardless of whether he is guilty or innocent."

The group has consistently has opposed Nazi-hunting efforts by the special-investigations office. Bush pledged strong support for the special-investigations office in a speech to a Jewish group last week in Baltimore.

The UCCA also includes veterans of the First Ukrainian Division, which fought under Nazi direction.

Billinsky last year told another Jewish newspaper, the New York Jewish Week, that Demjanjuk was prosecuted because "there's no more Germans left to accuse after Eichmann," that the trial was "the price the Israelis are paying to get the Russian government on their side" and "a showcase for the Holocaust... Jews need that."

Slavoff, 66, of Bethesda, Md., said in interviews yesterday and Saturday that he is the Washington representative of the Bulgarian National Front and served as the organization's U.S. president for several years in the early 1970s. He said the organization has no relationship with Nazis, and that Bulgarian Legionnaires were not its sole formative members.

The Inquirer reported Saturday that Slavoff arranged a 1983 event in Washington, D.C., at which an award was presented to Austin J. App, author of several texts denying the existence of the Holocaust.

On a program printed for the event — the 1983 national convention of the National Confederation of American Ethnic Groups Inc. — Slavoff's name appears as secretary/director of activities. Although the program lists Slavoff as a speaker at the Sept. 29, 1983, event at the Rayburn House Office Building, he said yesterday that he neither arranged nor attended it.

"Even if I was on the board at that time, I did not participate in the arrangement of that event," Slavoff said. He said he recalls attending the following day's convention activities in order to convey his desire to remove himself from the confederation.

"It offends me to be portrayed as anti-Semite," Slavoff said. "I have nothing to do with anti-Semitism. I never had anything to do with it.

And I'm not going to use the routine statement that I have many Jewish friends, because I do."

Brentar's name first surfaced in the Washington Jewish Week article, which reported his connection with Demjanjuk, who was found guilty by an Israeli court last April of atrocities at the Treblinka death camp in Poland.

The Inquirer reported Saturday that Brentar claims to have helped hundreds of Nazis emigrate to the United States during 1949 and 1950 when he was an eligibility officer in Germany for the International Refugee Organization.

In yesterday's statement announcing that they were quitting the volunteer ethnic panel — a group aimed at generating support for the GOP presidential candidate among ethnic Americans — the six said they were the victims of "Sesso-like attacks."

The reference was to John Sasso, the Dukakis top aide and confidant who left the campaign when it was revealed that he had circulated a videotape pointing out similarities between speeches of Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D., Del.) and British politician Neal Kinnock, a revelation that contributed to Biden's quitting the presidential race. Sasso recently returned to the Dukakis campaign.

Dukakis spokesman Mark Gearan in Boston said links of the revelations to Sasso are "ludicrous."

"Their backgrounds, their leanings, have been well-reported by the independent press," said Gearan. "The real issue here is George Bush's lack of judgment... The people were hand-picked by the vice president."

Yesterday, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, which documents Nazi war crimes and tracks alleged war-crime suspects, said, "We were contacted last Wednesday by a Dukakis official in Boston [who] asked us to look into the allegations in the Washington Jewish Week."

He said the center was investigating, although it has no partisan interest and does not endorse candidates, according to Reuters news service.

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