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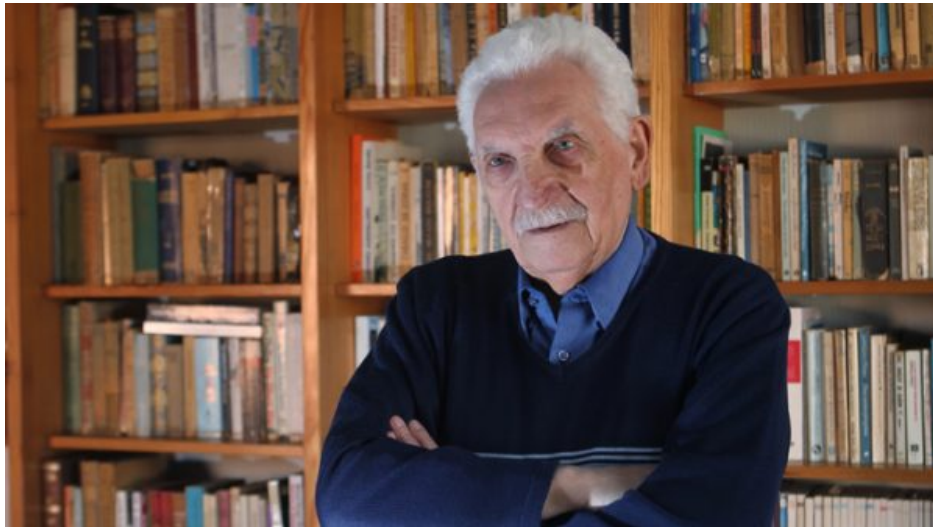
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Ukraine: The fascists of yesterday and today

It cannot be that the Makarenko and the Fyodorovs have disappeared. I will err on the side of over-optimism, but it will not be Putin who will stop fascism in Ukraine or the Russian Federation. It will be the very people of those heroic territories to whom we owe the end of barbarism almost 70 years ago.



A few days ago French TV interviewed Dominique de Villepin, who was Jacques Chirac's foreign minister. The theme: the invasion of Iraq by the US in 2003. Dominique de Villepin recalled that at that time the only Western country that opposed such a scoundrel was France. And he recalled that Colin Powell, George Bush Jr.'s foreign minister, blatantly lied at the UN Security Council meeting. "I told him later in his UN office, and Colin's reaction was such that I feared he would physically assault me," Dominique de Villepin said. In his conversations with Colin Powell he argued: "Dominique, this will be a short war, a punch like the one I gave in Panama" (General Powell invaded Panama in 1989, overthrew Noriega and liquidated the Armed Forces of that country). Dominique de

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Villepin replied: "Iraq is not Panama, you know nothing of the history of the Middle East..." History, so important when it comes to knowing and respecting the rights of each one. In the case of Ukraine, neither the United States, nor the rest of the Western world, knows nothing of anything. Here, in Miguel Lawner's shocking account, is the truth of what happened in that country... and that it could happen again in Europe.



The Azov Battalion: the controversial Nazi paramilitary group integrated into the Armed Forces of Ukraine

My parents were born in Ukraine. They lived in villages populated mostly by Jewish farming families in the southwest of the country, near the border with Poland. It was enough to cross the Dniester River to enter Polish territory. After the triumph of the October Revolution in 1917, the tsar's power collapsed throughout his empire, but at first, the Bolsheviks were only in a position to dominate the territory between St. Petersburg and Moscow.

In Ukraine there was a power vacuum, a situation that led to the emergence of what became known as White Bands, gangs made up of adventurers of all kinds, including former members of the Okhrana (the tsar's secret police), who roamed the country carrying out assaults on villages like the one where my parents lived. The most famous was the one headed by Simeon Petliura, of whose outrages my mother spoke to me with real horror. These attacks are those identified with the Russian word pogrom, which means devastation.

It is a term associated with the attack directed against Jewish communities and originates in Ukraine, where the persecution of Jews began at the end of the ninth century, after

accusing Jews, without any evidence, as guilty of the assassination of Tsar Alexander II occurred in 1881.

My parents recounted how they had to establish lookouts in the tops of the tallest trees, scanning the horizon. As soon as a dust appeared in the distance, it was a sign that Petliura's cavalry was approaching and they hurried down to the underground, built expressly to put them safe along with their animals, which were anesthetized in order to ensure the most absolute silence. Anguished they heard the bandits banging on the pavement with their weapons, seeking to locate access to the subways.



In the center, Pilsudski with Simon Petliura.

According to Solzenitzyn, of the 887 pogroms counted in Ukraine between 1918 and 1920, approximately 40% are attributed to gangs led by Petliura. My father's family composed of 8 brothers and their parents, decided to emigrate to America. They abandoned everything and crossed into Poland in 1921, embarking in the port of Gdansk towards Buenos Aires, to finally settle in Chile a year later.

My mother's family, consisting of two other sisters and two brothers, remained in Ukraine. When Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union ensued in June 1941, the Soviet government ordered the total evacuation of the cities near the border. My mother's two sisters obeyed this order, and began a journey that lasted for about two thousand kilometers, walking much of the time, at times in a truck, some sections by rail, until they reached the other

side of the Ural Mountains, where the Soviets moved much of their war industry. They remained there until the end of the war.

Of the two brothers, one enlisted in the Red Army and died in combat very soon. The other, married with two young children, refused to evacuate. She told her sisters, "Germans are not so bad. Now we can make good gishef" (In Yiddish language: business). In Ukraine, the Nazis did not need to make one of the Einsatzgruppen, a police unit specialized in the arrest of Jewish families and their transfer to the death camps. This task was carried out to the full satisfaction of Ukrainian fascist groups, where anti-Semitism and anti-communism was and still is as entrenched as their anti-Russian sentiment.



The

Einsatzgruppen, specialized assassins

It was they who denounced our relatives as soon as the Nazi occupation troops arrived. My uncle, his wife and two children were taken to the death camps, suffering the same fate as the 6 million Jews gassed and incinerated by Nazism during the course of World War II.

The Ukrainian fascists did not limit themselves to hunting Jews in their own homeland, but organized an army corps that joined the Nazi troops in the war against the Soviet Union, where they stood out for their ferocity in combat. One of the main organizers of this detachment of mercenaries and traitors to their homeland was Pyotr Krassnoff, leader of the Cossacks who had gone into exile once the Bolsheviks assumed power in Ukraine and returned to serve the German army. This Piotr is the grandfather of retired Colonel Miguel Krassnoff, convicted by the Chilean courts because of his participation in the torture and disappearance of numerous compatriots.



Michael Krassnoff

The lawyer Gabriel Zaliasnik, president until recently of the Jewish community in Chile, revealed that "with the advent of Hitler to power, and particularly on the occasion of the Nazi invasion of the former Soviet Union, Pyotr Krasnow, agreed to the incorporation of Cossack units to the German side. Among these soldiers was precisely the father of retired Colonel Miguel Krassnoff, Semeon Krassnoff. Both the grandfather and the father of Colonel (R) Krassnoff were tried for war crimes, treason and collaboration with the enemy, being sentenced by the Supreme Court of the USSR to the death penalty and finally executed by firing squad in the courtyard of the Lefortovo Prison in January 1947" and not in Red Square for fighting communism, as the "former minister of the military regime Alfonso Márquez de la Plata" said in "an evening newspaper".

At the end of the war, my mother's two sisters set out on their return, walking much of the route again. During the journey, the eldest sister died leaving a young daughter named Bella, born of his marriage to Motia, a person also of Jewish origin, who had enlisted in the Red Army concluding the war with the rank of colonel. My mother's only surviving sister: my aunt Brane, along with her brother-in-law Motia and her niece, arrived in 1946 at the same home in the city of Kamenetz-Podolsk, which they had abandoned at the beginning of the invasion of the German army.

At the end of the war, my mother wrote numerous letters one after another until she managed to re-establish contact with her sister Brane in 1962. Only then were we able to re-establish the exchange of letters and learn of the dramatic fate of our relatives. In 1971

we invited Aunt Brane to travel to Chile, staying 3 months with us, so we could learn more details of the untold sufferings experienced during the war.

It took 70 years from Ukraine's incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1922 until its collapse in 1991. Except for the years of the Nazi occupation, throughout that period Ukraine developed without ethnic or racial conflicts, but the end of Soviet power was enough to unleash chauvinism and persecution against families of Jewish origin again, to such an extent that Germany itself resolved to come to their aid.

As a form of reparation for so many crimes and damages committed against Jews, the German government organized an important shelter program, rescuing thousands of families victims of anti-Semitism unleashed again in Ukraine and establishing them in their own territory providing them with all kinds of financial and social support. My aunt Brane, her brother-in-law Motia, her niece Bella and her 15-year-old son Roman arrived in 1994 in the city of Mulheim, near Dortmund, where they were able to settle, study and work without problems. My aunt Brane died there in 1997. Taking advantage of a trip to Europe a year earlier, we went to see them finding the sick aunt confined in a hospital where she died shortly after.

Since the collapse of the socialist world, Ukraine, like the rest of the republics that followed that path, has experienced a brutal restoration of capitalism. All the achievements in education, health, social security and urban development were dismantled, all this accompanied by a gigantic anti-communist campaign in the media, aimed at blocking the historical memory of their peoples.

Globalization has exacerbated the culture of consumerism, competitiveness and violence, bringing with it the mirage of a presumed well-being for a small nucleus of society and hitting the social conquests and the pockets of the great majority.

A handful of former regime officials took over all the nationalized companies, generating multimillion-dollar fortunes that embarrass, among them, the former Prime Minister of Ukraine, Yulia Tymoshenko now released from the prison where she remained 3 years ago. She, as well as the recently ousted Prime Minister Yanukovich represent two groups of the current corrupt oligarchy, in dispute for power. Their fortunes come from the privatization of public companies, a matter in which some Chilean businessmen have been notable disciples.

The crisis that began in the United States in 2008 has brought with it a sharp economic deterioration in most European nations. Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain, and now also Italy experience unemployment rates close to or above 20%. Millions of indignant citizens

walk the streets or settle in the squares of many European cities, complaining about the abrupt deterioration of their lives, especially the youth, who foresee a black future.

Ukraine is no exception. However, legitimate popular discontent was quickly monopolized by today's fascists, who took over the protests in Kiev's Independence Square, brandishing weapons and erecting barricades. The chancellors of Germany and Canada, as well as Republican Senator Mac Cain, rushed to his support for his support, haranguing his boys "to fight for democracy to the end." Along with the flags of Ukraine, those of the Chechen secessionists have been raised, and that of the most radical of the Islamic groups fighting today in Syria.

The desperation of the Ukrainian people has been cleverly exploited by the militant Ukrainian fascists of the Svoboda (Freedom) party, a grouping of a fanatical nationalism whose motto is Ukraine above all, which differs nothing from the slogan of the Nazis: Deutschland uber alles (Germany above all). Illustrative of the fanatical nationalist zeal that inspires them, is the fact that one of their first measures has been to force an agreement in parliament declaring Ukrainian as the only official language, in circumstances that almost 40% of the population is of Russian origin and practically does not speak another language.

The Communist Party of Ukraine has just issued a statement in which it states the following: "The actions of the ultra-right groups, led by openly neo-Nazi forces, which emerged in the heat of the Yanukovych regime, and ideological heirs of the Hitlerite occupiers, are accompanied by a new and extremely dangerous resurgence of anti-communist hysteria, which manifests itself in the widespread destruction of monuments to Lenin, to the heroes of the Great Patriotic War, for criminal assaults on the headquarters of our party, in Kiev and in other cities of the country, for the moral and physical terror against the Communists and for the demands to ban the activity of the Communist Party."

The picture that Europe presents these days, begins to look too much like the one that was lived in the 30s, before the rise of Hitler to power. In France, recent polls confirm that the far-right National Front party, led by Marine Le Pen, appears as the most voted option with a view to the European Parliament elections next May.

In Greece, the fascist Golden Dawn grouping, which even uses the Nazi salute, entered parliament for the first time. In Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Norway and Serbia, far-right political organisations have achieved significant popular support in recent years (Italy has an openly Nazi president of the Consiglio... And nobody says anything. Editor's note).

There is no case,..... the impoverishment of the popular and media sectors in Europe, makes them easy prey to the racist and nationalist message, especially if we add to this the weakness of left-wing social and political organizations. Ukraine is an especially acute case in this regard, given the roots of fascist roots, which remained submerged during the existence of the USSR, but which today are reborn strengthened by the exclusionary nature of the neoliberal economic model. However, it is difficult for me to admit that the humanist and solidarity values that we learned yesterday have disappeared in that fertile land.

Two books that take place in Ukraine moved us in our youth. One is Anton Makarenko's Pedagogical Poem, which deals with the creation in Ukraine of a colony to recover young men and women, who roam the territory as lazy or criminals. It was a situation generated as a result of the family imbalances caused by the revolution of 1917, also by the subsequent intervention of the three powers and the aforementioned pogroms.



The author of the book is a schoolteacher to whom the Soviet authorities entrusted him at the end of the 20s, the direction of said colony that will bear the name of Maxim Gorky. Makarenko resorts to methods that are often debatable, in order to create habits of coexistence, studies and collective work among highly undisciplined boys, with whom he even weaves into clean fist combat. It is shocking to learn of the social reintegration of these real lost cases.

The other book is titled The Regional Underground Committee Acts, by Aleksei Fyodorov, who is the protagonist and author of the work. Fyodorov was the Regional Secretary of the Communist Party in the Chernigov region when the German invasion occurred and it was decided that he went underground in order to organize resistance in the rear against the German occupation, taking advantage of the existence of an extensive area of forests, conducive to this operation.



It is a guerrilla struggle against a fierce, heavily armed enemy, who receives daily blows in the transport of his troops and equipment. The heroism of these underground fighters was a great contribution to the victory of the Red Army that will end up expelling the invader. Fyodorov and his Ukrainian comrades were honored at the end of the war as heroes of the Soviet Union. I remember with great emotion the reading of this book that marked an important stage of my youth.

It cannot be that the Makarenko and the Fyodorovs have disappeared. I will err on the side of over-optimism, but it will not be Putin who will stop fascism in Ukraine or the Russian Federation. It will be the very people of those heroic territories to whom we owe the end of barbarism almost 70 years ago.

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