

EHRI Online Course in Holocaust Studies

The Holocaust in Ukraine - German Mass Shootings

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Translation: *B05 The Italian Correspondent Felice Bellotti Wonders Where the Jews of Kiev Have Gone, 31 October 1941.*

When war is no longer a question of honor

The "murderous" mines of Kiev

The brutal destruction carried out by the Bolsheviks. Where have the city's 350 thousand Jews gone? 25 percent of the city's activity is back to function.

(By our correspondent)

Kiev, October 30th.

The living generations of people inhabiting Kiev are no strangers to the disasters of war. Kiev, between 1917 and 1921, has been conquered 16 times by the "reds" and by the "whites", by the Germans and by the Polish, by the Ukrainians and by the Russians.

Therefore, the 19 of September, when Hitler's troops took over the city, the population was not particularly agitated. They watched the Germans arrive with the same feeling with which they assisted a few hours earlier at the departure of the Russians. It is true that the anti-Semites did take advantage of the interregnum for a quick settling of scores - Ukrainians and Jews have indeed old and new scores to settle; and the mobs, on their part, carried out a thorough pillage, running off with the poor goods existing in a Soviet city.

The "News"

A small amount of blood was spilled but it was nothing much since the G.R.U. had evacuated the Jews, and then again, Kiev is used to seeing worse, in pogroms as well as in sackings. The "developments" occurred five days later, when the population was least expecting them. On the 21 of September, around noon, the windows of all the houses trembled after two violent explosions. Due to the fact that the Soviet air force had been conspicuously absent for quite a long time, there were no doubts as to the cause of such a loud noise. Two apartment blocks had been blown up in the air. The military engineers and the military police started working as millions of mines were discovered in every corner of the city. The alarms were sounded at the very last moment. At 3:00 PM, the red army's headquarters, the radio station

building and the Duma all exploded simultaneously. Few minutes later, two building blocks on Krestcik exploded with an enormous crash and a rainfall of flaming rubble came down on the people who were peacefully strolling. Krestcik is the most beautiful and the most important street in Kiev and at 4:00 PM all its length was in flames. Nothing could be done to control the flames. There was no water, there were no firemen. The oldest buildings in Kiev, the beautiful structures dating from times much better than these, the big hotels, the big department stores, all went up in smoke. The fire climbed up the hillside where the Czar's palace rises, spread rapidly towards the Dnieper and westward, nipped off the streets adjacent to the paved and grandiose main avenue devouring entire blocks everywhere. When it got tired of running, it stopped and consumed itself. And then - It dawned on everyone that the heart of Kiev no longer existed. Now the blown up buildings have become piles of rubble gathered together by the Russian prisoners. The burnt buildings hide the horrors of destruction behind their still standing facades. Silent and gloomy facades, their windows empty sockets, behind them the sun shining or the clouds passing by. We walked inspecting all this destruction for nearly three hours. The thoughts in our minds were confused and we couldn't talk. With aching hearts and dry throats we kept repeating to ourselves: "this is no longer war". War is an honorable feat. Nothing is more painfully noble than taking up arms. But Stalin's army does not know the meaning of honor. There is no use blaming them since they never knew what it was. An endless amount of mines have been found in Kiev. Captain Koch distinguishes between "tactical mines" and "murderous mines". As tactical he regards those legitimate from a military point of view, namely those placed under bridges, under roads, under artillery emplacements, warehouses with military equipment and factories. As murderous he regards those deceptively hidden in private houses, in furniture, behind doors, in beds, in water containers, in outhouses. The engineers have found in Kiev 3 tactical mines for every 7 murderous. We have slept for two nights over these mysterious mines and a house blew up 200 meters from our quarters. An Italian colleague had the "good fortune" of photographing the explosion while bricks and beams came pouring down around him. Indeed there is a God looking over journalists.

Ecce homo! (Behold the man)

Kiev is situated slightly south of the confluence of the Desna with the Dnieper - or on the left bank of the latter. It sits on seven hills from which it dominates a wide, gloomy and fertile valley. From the peak of the biggest of these hills, where the harmonious palace of the Czars, built to the design of the Italian architect Bartolomeo Rastrelli, and the white and despicable building of the Ukraine Soviet are situated, one can enjoy a splendid view. But the golden domes of Kiev do not shine since they have been coated with a thick dull paint due to the air raids alarms: They

are the domes of Saint Sophia, of Saint Vladimir, of Saint Andrew's and of many other churches, all left without God for many, many years. When we arrived at Saint Andrews, erected on the summit of a hill by the art of Bartolomeo Rastrelli, a great multitude of people were praying in the re-consecrated church. They greeted us in a friendly fashion while the organs were playing. The women kissed Captain Koch's hand. There was an odor of incense and of poverty. All of them were old people or children. The young generation prefers free love rather than the worship of God. If Bolshevism has managed to last nearly 25 years, it is certainly due to the fact that the new theories concerning moral were such that they allowed satisfying the most beastly instincts of mankind. In that church was the odor of incense, of poverty and of old age, a pungent and slightly sickening odor, more of death than of life. A choir was singing praise to the Lord. Ecce Homo! Under the black ringed eyes of many, the glands were slowly secreting the bitter secretion of tears. An old legend has it that Kiev was founded many, many centuries ago by a group of Cossacks tired of their long run. After crossing the Dnieper they encountered a beautiful forest looking over the peaceful hills emerging from the marshy lands. The Ataman said, "let us stop here!", and everyone stopped. History tells a different story; it tells of peoples coming down from the Baltic, it tells of merchants, of trade and of profit. I prefer the Cossacks. The Ukrainians must prefer them as well since one of their artists sculpted on the bell tower of St. Sophia's cathedral two angels dressed in Cossack tunics. When the war began, Kiev had a population of nearly 900 thousand inhabitants. Current evaluations are that approximately 450 thousand people walk now the city's streets. We asked where did all the others go and the vice burgomaster of the city told us, "We expect that 20 to 30 thousand Ukrainians will return, that is almost the entire totality of the intellectuals and of the 'opportunist Bolsheviks', or rather of those who made a show of being Bolshevik though everyone knew they were not at all". And so we asked, "How many Jews were in Kiev? – Over 350 thousand. And where have they all gone? – They are no longer here.

Today, not a single Jew is left in Kiev. We arrived in Kiev coming from the west. It was cold but the sky was clear and the setting sun girdled, with gold and blood, the leaves that already bore the colors of autumn. The forests were splendid. Then, the signs of battle started to get more and more frequent, the mine laden roads, the collapsed bridges, the ruined houses, the antitank barrages, some tree and stone barricades. The refugees were heading towards the city on every sort of vehicle. One family was riding peacefully on a hearse, another one made its home in a wagon from an equestrian circus.

Contrasts

The first impression of Kiev was upsetting, painful. We passed the area where the battle raged, the area in which the wounds were fresh. Now we approached the outskirts of Kiev, the outskirts of Ukraine's capital, the third largest city in Russia. I have never seen anything more miserable: the streets with potholes, the worn out and protruding streetcar rails, the reinforced bottom of houses chipped off and humid, the walls cracked, dirt, an air of destitution. War did not come by here, here we see only the dreadful traces of Bolshevism. I was thinking about the streets of Turin, about our pavements, about our houses, about our stores, about our shop windows. In Kiev shop windows do not exist, they haven't existed for many years. A blue trolley with broken windows sat there sulking in the middle of the street. People were walking up and down the streets, people poorly dressed, indifferent, lacking any curiosity. Smoke was rising from the smokestacks of a factory. There is work in Kiev. Later we were told that 25 percent of the city's workplaces have started functioning again. The workers refused to allow the blowing up of many factories. Night came. In the pitch dark, many voices resounded. Rarely, flashlights sparkled. The heavy army boots of the guards marked the passing of time. We were accommodated at the "Red Kiev" hotel. In the room we were given there were two beds made of metal mesh, the kind of mesh that we use to enclose chickens. No mattresses, no sheets, no covers, no water, no light. Then a house blew up and our windows as well were a thing of the past. It was freezing cold. The walls were plastered with stucco, the doors wide, beautiful. I would be curious to know the story of this house. I did not sleep a wink. I thought about the ruined houses. More than 50,000 people in Kiev have no roof over their heads and the cold is already here, biting, harsh and relentless. How many people will die of cold this winter in Kiev and in all of Russia? At times I felt like laughing, perhaps because of the cold. Wearing the black shirt in the "Red Kiev" hotel!

Felice Bellotti