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The Holocaust in Ukraine – The Pogroms of 1941

Translation: A02 Stanisław Różycki describes attacks on Jews in Lviv in June and July 1941

Part II Ukraine “liberated” again

Diary of a refugee in Lwów [Lviv], from June 1 to September 15, 1941

written by

Stanisław Różycki

June 22. A bolt from the blue – that is, dive bombs over Lwów at 3 a.m. At 1.45 a.m. I am roused from sleep by the rattle of a lorry and shouts of *kommandirs* [Russian: commanders – translator’s note], knocking on the gate. – Ah, it’s transportation – I wake up with this thought and look fearfully through the window. Indeed, there’s a characteristic car, boorish *kommandirs* – have they come for me, the only remaining refugee? I was quite mistaken. They came (a few dozen minutes before the bombing) for *kommandirs*: for a colonel-intendant and for a major-aviator (sound asleep with his wife), who was the commander of a flight – the flight that no longer existed when they were leaving, as it had been destroyed on the ground by German bombs. Were they prepared? Yes and no. Yes, because they had been preparing for war for a few months, expecting it to break out any day. No, because they completely did not predict June 22 – the shower of bombs fell on them unexpectedly – like a bolt of lightning.

At five in the morning I’m already queuing for bread. There are enormous queues everywhere, but the shops have plenty of merchandise – they won’t run out of food. However, one has to queue for everything to do the shopping right away for a few days at least. Anyway, one must get rid of roubles as soon as possible, because they’re losing value by the day, and after “what is to come” they will be nothing but waste paper. The Russians don’t even believe that this is already war; they delude themselves, clinging to the official

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story about military exercises. But they run in panic to bomb shelters, pale and scared, both servicemen and civilians, young and old – much to the amusement of the Lvovians, old stagers, who don't care about the bombs, because they are accustomed and experienced.

It was only after Molotov's speech on Sunday, June 22 [1941], at noon, in which he spoke about Germany's unprovoked aggression and promised immediate help from the allied America and England, that they finally believed.

Already in the afternoon, optimists, enthusiasts of the Red Army, and the official circles spread rumours about the Russian capture of Przemyśl, Rzeszów, Tarnów, and even Kraków and Warsaw. In fact, within 10 hours the Soviet air force took very heavy losses in the west. Defeatists, yellow-bellies, pessimists and all Ukrainians are talking about the destruction of 30% of the whole air force and about the German advance on Lwów.

Indeed, absolutely everyone expected that the Germans might come any hour. What is it for the German offensive to advance 80 km in a day. Refugee traffic starts already on the first day of war and intensifies towards the evening. There is already a continuous stream of wagons and cars with refugees, mostly not the locals, but rather Soviet new arrivals, who are fleeing from Przemyśl, Rawa Ruska [Rava-Ruska], Kamionka Strumiłowa [Kamianka-Buzka], Sokal, Turka, Sambor [Sambir], Bełżec.

June 28. Where are the Germans? That's the only question that troubles everyone, but for different reasons. Complete confusion. We haven't gone out since yesterday. During the night we had two visits from *kommandirs*, who suspected that our flat (occupied exclusively by the Jews) was giving light signals. It was an absent-minded old lady, who went to the kitchen twice with an oil lamp and then back to the room. This time we got away with it. In the street you can see only single individuals, slinking terrified against tenement walls, because the Bolsheviks already shoot at passers-by. The rising in the city has been suppressed, the revolution has died down, but terror continues unabated. We no longer know the meaning of shots. ~~Is it the Ukrainians or the Bolsheviks.~~ Is it the Germans or the Bolsheviks? Is it the Ukrainians or at the Ukrainians? We know nothing. Troops march hither

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and dither. Perhaps they do it on purpose; perhaps the same troops leave by one gate and return by another? We don't know. The English radio informs us of the situation. Kowel [Kovel], Brześć [Brest], Grodno [Hrodna], Białystok, Czerniowce [Chernivtsi], Stanisławów [Ivano-Frankivsk], Przemyśl, Rawa Ruska, Kamionka Strumiłowa, Jaworów [Yavoriv] — taken. The main thrust of the offensive is directed at Białystok and Równe [Rivne]. There's no point arguing. The only question is when — today, tomorrow or in two days? There are no other possibilities. Today, they've fiercely bombed the city and the environs, Winniki [Vinniki] and the road east, the evacuation route of the army. The city centre has been badly hit. They bomb the areas around hospitals particularly often. Łyczaków [a district of Lwów — translator's note], the exit route to the east, is under constant fire. Throughout the night, tanks leave for the east. We stay in bomb shelters from the night till the evening. We don't care about the bombs, but we are sad and helpless, downcast and resigned. I told myself long ago that one has to experience everything in life, that one can't avoid the Germans. Yes, we'll experience the Jewish fate under Hitler. One must be prepared for the worst and accept with stoicism everything that befalls us. There has been another conscription for the last three days, which has been our immediate concern because the conscripts were taken away at once, which meant an almost certain death, as the Germans shot recruits in civilian clothes on the spot. Today it is already clear to everyone that the Bolsheviks have been quietly, systematically and energetically evacuating their people from the city. But they've left the waterworks, electricity and gas intact and all storehouses full — except for the trams and destroyed buildings, the city will be turned over to the Germans in "good condition." There are rumours, perhaps true, that the Germans have issued an ultimatum that the Bolsheviks pull out of the city, and the latter have accepted these terms and now they're slowly withdrawing. But the facts contradict the rumours: there are continuous bombings again, and troops are returning from the east, filling all exits from the city. The tactics of the Russian army is completely incomprehensible — puzzling, as everything with the Bolsheviks, who never inform anyone of anything. They tell no one about new regulations, and it is only from gossip, indirectly, from a caretaker or administrator, that you find out what is permitted and what is forbidden.

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In fact, the Ukrainians are masters in every house; the Jews and Poles are voluntarily turning over the command of the anti-aircraft defence of every house and residential block. Characteristically, people trusted by the Bolsheviks, on whom the latter bestowed favours and high positions, are now unceremoniously, knavishly paving the way for the new “order.” The question of the official language is already becoming an issue. Under the Bolsheviks, Ukrainian was favoured, but no one was put at a disadvantage for using whatever language he wanted. Chauvinistically, the Ukrainians spoke exclusively Ukrainian, but we always spoke Polish or Jewish whenever we knew we would be understood. From now on, the Ukrainian language is one of the main political assets. So which language should one speak? Any language but Russian: Ukrainian, Polish, German. Pale and frightened, the Jews make last attempts to escape. They flee on foot at night; in a few hours they’re back because no one is allowed to leave the city without a permit. Those who’ve made it are either dead or missing.

June 30. A quiet night before the storm. The bombing has stopped. There are very few Bolshevik troops. One can see a dozen or so cars, a few destroyed tanks. Complete silence in the city. The meaning is clear. There are still several hundred, perhaps several thousand Bolsheviks, but they are the rearguard left to die. It seems that the Bolsheviks have given up Lwów without fighting, and the Germans are in no hurry to occupy it, because they know the situation. In the evening, in the silence of the night, vultures are in their element. Storehouses, shops and warehouses are plundered. After all, it’s free, ownerless property. We already have a foretaste, for they do not allow the Jews to participate in the looting. Anyway, the Jews don’t rush to join in, because they already know their future fate. There has been a characteristic shift in sympathies among particular nationalities. The Polish attitude towards the Jews is too opportunistic. They [the Jews – translator’s note] are allies politically, as well as companions in misery, considering the hatred from the Ukrainians, but a Jew is a Jew, and, moreover, it’s better to have nothing to do with them under the Germans. That’s why our neighbours, friends, colleagues and acquaintances turn away, suddenly stop visiting us, although from 1939 until now they courted our company, believing that friendship with a Jew was a good recommendation for a Pole under the Bolsheviks.

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Fortunately, this opportunism is not universal, for there are a very large number of workers and intelligentsia who did not change their attitude in the least after the Bolsheviks had left. As regards the Ukrainians, the case is hopeless. Ignorant and ineffectual, unqualified and conceited, they throw their weight around, ignoring the law. In reality, they hate only the Poles. They would love to stage a pogrom and slaughter them this very night, but instructions that had arrived earlier from the Nazi Ukrainians explicitly forbade any active hostile behaviour towards the Poles. So they redirect their base, primitive instincts at a safe target: at the Jews, Bolshevik lackeys. The latter are already eagerly awaiting the Germans, deluding themselves that the Germans are not like the Ukrainians after all. So let them come, or else the Ukrainians will surely stage a pogrom tonight. The Poles silently fear the same – those who were actively involved against the Ukrainians before the war aren't sleeping in their homes tonight. So, as it happens, we are all looking forward for the Germans to come.

July 1. Germans are already in Lwów: We've been hearing this news for a dozen hours or so. The ominous, sinister, deadly silence is broken by shots here and there, sometimes very close, machine guns, light firearms, cannons, sometimes an exploding grenade or a bomb. For the moment, the worst fears have not materialized. So far, we have avoided a spontaneous pogrom by the Ukrainians. The Germans aren't here yet, but they have issued their orders long ago: no pogroms, no unorganised impulsive actions, no harm to the Poles. Today at 6 a.m. the first German motorcyclists arrive. An hour later, a swastika is already hanging on the town hall. Two hours later, there are already several hundred Germans and a battalion of Cossacks, Ukrainian legionnaires conscripted into the German army. The tension in the city has eased in every respect. First of all, the German entry was a pleasant surprise. It is only the vanguard, just cars and motorcycles, but everyone was impressed by the striking contrast between German and Bolshevik behaviour. The Bolsheviks (I mean the military, which, by the way, included many locals) acted very insecure in the city. They walked the streets scared, kept looking back fearfully over their shoulders, always with a bayoneted rifle in hand, at the ready against any enemy. A single shot would trigger a random, thoughtless,

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panicky fire in all directions, and innocent victims fell. The Germans came, as they would to friends. Smiling, confident, with rifles on their backs, usually just armed with pistols (holstered too), they did not inspire fear or panic at all. Apparently such is the suggestive power and authority of the German army, for I saw a German soldier with a pistol at his belt, which he didn't even take out, disarm and escort to a guardroom 12 frightened Red Army men, who resigned themselves to their fate without any resistance. I should add that the Ukrainians greeted them [the Germans – translator's note] with flowers, green branches, smiles and joy – full of high hopes and delusions, in their Sunday best, they welcomed their saviours and liberators.

In the afternoon, Lwów looks completely different: instead of the sickle and hammer, there are the swastika and Ukrainian trident everywhere, as well as blue and yellow flags – *sino-zhovti* [Ukrainian: blue and yellow; written in the Cyrillic alphabet in the original – translator's note]. A proclamation by Stepan Bandera, the leader of the OUN, about the creation of a Ukrainian superpower empire was posted in the city. Within an hour, the Germans took down and confiscated the posters, and sent Bandera packing. The Ukrainians haven't figured out the situation yet and they're still parading belligerently and victoriously. They beat up whoever speaks Polish, and all Poles and Jews must speak Ukrainian everywhere – no one understands or wants to understand anything. Liberated from the Judeo-Muscovite yoke, Ukraine becomes an independent state allied with and under the patronage of the "Invincible German Army." Certain terms from 21 months ago reappear: "liberation from under the knout," "oppressed Ukrainian people," "national oppression," "brilliant leader," "invincible army." One could draw more such analogies.

July 4. "Ukrainian hecatombs" – here is a topical issue, which is on everyone's lips and fills the pages of a newly established Ukrainian rag. This is about the victims of the Bolsheviks, who murdered them before the Germans had come. In the last weeks [before the war – translator's note] and in the first days of the war, the NKVD conducted mass arrests. Those whom they hadn't managed to transfer before leaving Lwów were slaughtered in prisons. Indeed, the prisons were a horrible sight because the mass

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executions, carried out at the last moment, took place under abysmal conditions: the prisoners were finished off with rifle butts, the wounded were left under heaps of corpses, bodies were not buried, etc. However, one correction is necessary: the victims were Jews, Poles, Ukrainians and Soviets. Many of them had been incarcerated for months, waiting for a sentence. They still hadn't been tried – many were suspected of minor offences – and in the last days of June they were not segregated according to the gravity of offence; whether they were jailed for petty theft, profiteering or hooliganism, all prisoners were killed. German and Ukrainian propaganda presented those victims as exclusively Ukrainian. They were photographed, and the photos were sent to the national and foreign press – hence the Ukrainian hecatombs. They also forgot that within 4 days, the number of hecatombs by the Ukrainians, that is, people murdered by the Ukrainians, was twice or thrice as large. The funerals themselves were a political demonstration directed obviously against the Jews, which culminated in a pogrom and plunder of the Jewish quarter. For the time being, the Germans don't pay attention to the Jews, as though they were not interested in them at all.

translated by Grzegorz Dąbkowski