

Reflections on Richard Lukas'

The Forgotten Holocaust

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No book is an island. Books are read and interpreted in the midst of other books, and their position in the stream of scholarship often determines what we say about them. In other words, history is written by winners. Losers have a hard time getting their story told.

The Forgotten Holocaust tells the story of a nation that fought on the Allied side in World War II but emerged from the war a loser, even though the Allies won. In 1945, Poland was reoccupied by its sworn enemy, Soviet Russia. Authentic Polish voices were silenced, and Polish scholarship on World War II was virtually gagged. While the Jewish Holocaust lasted four years, terror in Poland lasted for fifty years, from 1939 to 1989.

It is in this context that one should read Lukas' book. It tells the story of a country and a people that were the prime target of Nazi hate *and* of Soviet hate. No other nation in Europe was thus exposed to the hate of two totalitarian regimes, and no country in Europe resisted longer, or more nobly. This is what *The Forgotten Holocaust* faintly outlines, but it will take many more books like this one to make a dent in the consciousness of the American public.

To understand *The Forgotten Holocaust*, one has to realize that the context of World War II for Poland was different than for the United States. To understand the Polish story, it is crucial to remember that in September 1939, Poland was attacked by Nazi Germany *and* Soviet Russia. It is crucial to remember that the Soviets were sworn friends of the Nazis in 1939, in 1940, and in 1941. The year 1945 began a new reign of terror in Poland. Until 1954 in particular, the Soviet-controlled secret police murdered and terrorized people by the tens of thousands, starting with the hero of Polish resistance, General Emil Fieldorf, murdered in 1950 under Stalin's deputy in Poland, Jakub Berman, and falsely accused in a show trial by prosecutor Benjamin Wajsbloch (Antoni Zambrowski, "Morderczyni sadowa na lawie oskarzonych," *Tygodnik Solidarnosc*, 1 January 1998).

In Poland, three names strike terror into people's hearts: Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Jakub Berman, Stalin's right hand in Poland from 1944 to 1953. Adolf Hitler's crimes are well known, Stalin's crimes are beginning to be known, but Jakub Berman's crimes are totally unknown in the West.

Lukas points out that in World War II, Poland had the largest, on a per-capita basis, and the most effective Resistance movement in Europe, and virtually no collaborators of any social stature. Poles are proud of not having produced a Quisling government or a Vichy government.

Poland lost one-quarter of its population in the war. Portions of Poland were polluted by Nazi invaders who built their largest extermination camp on Polish soil. Virtually every Polish family tasted the bitter taste of displacement, death, pauperization and, after the war, total powerlessness. This part of the Polish story deserves Jewish sympathy and recognition, and Poles are eagerly awaiting for tokens of these attitudes.

In 1939, Hitler said: "The destruction of Poland is our primary task. The aim is not the arrival at a certain line but the annihilation of living forces. . ." (Lukas 4) Before Jews became the primary target, Poles were shipped to Auschwitz by the tens of thousands. 150,000 Polish Catholics went to Auschwitz. In Sachsenhausen, 20,000 Poles perished, in Mauthausen, 30,000, in Neuengamme, 17,000 (Lukas 38); 35,000 went to Dachau, 33,000 Polish women went to Ravensbrück many of them to be experimented upon, with glass and other objects implanted in their uteruses. In view of that, to hear from uninformed members of the Jewish community that Poles participated in the annihilation of Jews makes you ask, "has the world really gone mad?"

Unlike those Jews who survived the Holocaust and moved to the West, Poles remained captives of the Soviets for 45 years. Unlike the Jews, Poles were never individually compensated by Germans for forced labor and camp atrocities. Tens of thousands of Poles were executed for helping Jews. In the Belzec concentration camp alone, 1,000 Poles died solely and exclusively for having been caught helping the Jews (Lukas 150). In 1944, after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising, the Germans ordered the entire population of Warsaw man, woman, child to leave the city, somewhat like the Khmer Rouge leaders who did the same to the capital of Cambodia Phnom Penh in the 1970s. Two hundred thousand Catholic civilians died in that uprising, of those who survived, 50,000 were shipped to concentration camps.

The Germans closed all scientific, artistic and literary institutions in Poland. Some 2250 periodicals ceased publication. Polish university professors were shot or sent to concentration camps. Calorie allotment for those Poles who were not shipped to concentration camps was 669 calories per day.

While this was going on, on the other side, in the Soviet-occupied part of Poland, Polish intelligentsia perished in Katyn and in the Gulag. Twenty-one thousand were murdered at Katyn, Bologoe, Dergachi. A million and a half went to the Siberian gulag. Show me another nation in Europe that suffered the fury of *two* of the most murderous regimes in modern history.

