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SHALOM

Jewish Peace Letter

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Murray Polner

1928-2019

It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of our longtime friend and fellow editor, Murray Polner, who died May 30th at the age of 91.

Murray has been a model for us over the past several decades. We have lost a kind, generous, and courageous friend, a gifted writer and editor, a pacifist and anti-war activist with a lifelong unshakable commitment to peace and interfaith fellowship. We know no one who lived his beliefs more faithfully and persistently than Murray.

We mourn his loss.

We will do our best to uphold the high standards that Murray set for Shalom.

The Editors



Murray Polner in 1980.

Dear Readers,

If you wish to make a donation to the Jewish Peace Fellowship in Murray Polner's honor and memory, you may send your gift to Jewish Peace Fellowship, Box 271, Nyack, NY 10960-0271.

The Shalom Peace Newsletter will not appear in July and August as we take our annual summer hiatus. We will return in September.

The Editors

Compromise or Corruption?

Murray Polner

A Strange Romance

Readers, this is the final article that Murray Polner submitted to Shalom before his passing on May 30, 2019. His uncompromising vision, moral clarity, wide-ranging reading, and incisive intelligence remain sharply, fully intact in this last article which we are honored to share with you.

When new employee John Loftus first arrived at the Office of Special Investigations, a component of the Criminal Division of the U.S. Department of Justice formed to track down some of the thousands of war criminals who had entered the country after World War II, his supervisor greeted him so he reports in his 2010 book *America's Nazi Secret (Trine Day, 2nd ed. 2010)* by saying, "welcome to the Department of Justice. You now represent the most corrupt client in the world the United States government."

An exaggeration, of course, but it's a judgment replicated in many ways in Richard Rashke's *Useful Enemies: John Demjanjuk and America's Open-Door Policy for Nazi War Criminals (Delphinium, 2013)*, a meticulously researched and nuanced study explaining how, in the name of furthering the holy war against communism, the U.S.A. deliberately allowed Nazi war criminals to enter the country while deliberately ignoring their complicity in mass murder and torture. Rashke is the author of *The Killing of Karen Silkwood: The Story Behind the Kerr-McGee Plutonium Case*

Was using Nazi war criminals as U.S. spies a shrewd, necessary way to defeat a treacherous Soviet enemy's moves?

Continued on next page

Compromise or Corruption?

(Cornell University Press, 1981), about the labor organizer and reputed whistleblower who died in a puzzling auto accident, and *Escape From Sobibor* (Delphinium, revised and updated 1995), which dealt with the breakout of hundreds of Jewish prisoners in 1943. In *Useful Enemies*, he relies heavily on trial transcripts, interviews, whistleblowers, documents wrested from FOI requests, and assiduous study of available texts:

Several thousand SS and SD officers; Gestapo officers, agents, and chiefs; Abwehr intelligence officers, Nazi propagandists and scientists; Einsatzcommandos [specialists in mass killings of civilians, especially East European Jews]; Waffen-SS volunteers, Vlasov's legions [captured ex-Red Army soldiers, who fought for the Germans]; Nazi quislings and ethnic cleansers, all were welcomed and protected.

General Reinhard Gehlen, for example, served as the Wehrmacht's intelligence commander in Germany's war in the east against the Soviet Union. Ever the cynical opportunist, Gehlen turned American agent, employing a very large number of once loyal Nazis and assorted criminals to spy on the USSR and its satellites. He then proceeded to fill America's intelligence community with wild tales about Stalin's imminent invasion of West Germany. Rashke quotes Victor Marchetti, a onetime CIA military analyst and later critic (see his expose *The CIA and The Cult of Intelligence*) who wrote, "The agency [CIA] loved Gehlen because

he fed us what we wanted to hear. We used his stuff constantly, and we fed to everybody else: the Pentagon, the White House, the newspapers. They loved it, too. But it was hyped up Russian Boogeyman junk, and it did a lot of damage to this country."

But was it reasonable to hire Nazi war criminals and collaborators and also welcome thousands of them into the U.S.A. when our foreign policy elites and intelligence agencies believed the nation faced the grave threat of a catastrophic Soviet-U.S. nuclear war? Was it nothing more than a shrewd, tough, and necessary option to detect and defeat a treacherous enemy's moves? Or was it the case, as Tim Weiner wrote in his classic *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (Anchor, 2007), that "by 1949 the United States was ready to work with almost any son of a bitch against Stalin"? Or as Rashke asks, was the whole enterprise unnecessary, unlawful and morally wrong?

Useful Enemies is not a Manichean telling of who was or was not a war criminal, for he raises difficult legal and philosophical questions about the meaning of collaboration.

Our government's moral complicity with monsters in the name of national security cannot be easily dismissed.

Was, for example, the SS officer working in a concentration camp office a collaborator or a war criminal? And what of the many Baltic, Byelorussian and Ukrainian volunteers who assisted the homicidal Einsatzgruppen, killers of some 1.5 million Jews, Gypsies, partisans, political enemies, Jehovah Witnesses and communists? Or those who chose to work for the Waffen-SS? Quoting a German source, Rashke describes a German colonel stationed in Lithuania gazing on as civilians publicly clubbed a group of men to death while fellow Lithuanians cheered and joined in singing their national anthem. So, Rashke

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Continued on next page

asks, ‘Is watching the murder of civilians and doing nothing about working with the Nazis?’ or ‘Is jeering and spitting on the prisoners marching through the village of Dachau to the SS concentration camp located there working with the Nazis?’

Declassified documents, Rashke writes, revealed that Hoover’s FBI, the State Department, the Pentagon, the INS and the CIA “opened a wide door” for Nazis and their collaborators and sheltered them in the name of Cold War anti-communism.

That Moscow would have done the same is irrelevant because of America’s often-proclaimed morality and values. Rashke describes in excruciating detail people who committed ghastly crimes during the war and suffered no recriminations afterward. One even taught at Yale. One of many was Valerian Trifa, a Romanian pro-Nazi Iron Guard leader, whose members “hung Jews on hooks in a meatpacking plant and skinned them alive” while they “raped, stoned and decapitated.” Trifa was welcomed

first in Italy, where he became a history teacher at a Roman Catholic college, emigrated to the U.S.A. in 1950, and was later ordained and consecrated as a priest and bishop by the Romanian Orthodox Church before finally being deported in 1982 for omitting his Iron Guard role when he first arrived. When Charles Kremer, a Romanian-born dentist in New York City, wrote Presidents Johnson and Nixon demanding an investigation of Trifa, the FBI in an effort to protect Trifa opened a ten-year long investigation of the dentist. *Useful Enemies* is filled with similar cases, some considerably worse. Most men were never tried and were allowed to live out their American lives in peace.

Read together with Christopher Simpson’s *Blowback: America’s Recruitment of Nazis and Its Effect on the Cold War* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), Richard Breitman and Norman J. W. Goda’s seminal *Hitler’s Shadow: Nazi War Criminals, U.S. Intelligence, and the Cold War* (Military Bookshop, 2010), and Breitman, Goda, Timothy Naftali, and Robert Wolfe’s *U.S. Intelligence and the Nazis* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), Rashke’s engrossing and significant book about moral complicity with monsters in the name of national security cannot be easily dismissed. ✧



Bishop Valerian Trifa (1914-1987)

MURRAY POLNER,

Shalom’s late co-editor, wrote *No Victory Parades: The Return of the Vietnam Veteran* (1971) and *When Can We Come Home* (1972) about Vietnam War resisters.