

Simon Wiesenthal: A real Nazi-hunter draws the lessons of history

by Laurent Murawiec

Justice n'est pas vengeance: une autobiographie

by Simon Wiesenthal with collaboration from Peter Michael Lingens, translated by Odile Demange
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The autobiography of Simon Wiesenthal has just been published in French, in translation from the original German written in collaboration with Austrian journalist Peter-Michael Lingens. What impressed me reading it is the passion for the Law displayed by the famous "Nazi-hunter." Wiesenthal considers himself a survivor, one that only chance and accident saved from the Holocaust, and one indebted to those who did not survive; it is in their name, and to repay that debt, that he has since the war worked against the barbarism that caused the slaughter. His book of memoirs shows it.

Let us see him in the Eichmann affair and the Waldheim affair: Great crises reveal personalities. In the first case, his meticulous intelligence work gave Israeli intelligence the data required to locate and identify, and then snatch the bureaucratic organizer of the "Final Solution." Wiesenthal specifies that Israel must be thanked for having given Eichmann due process. That trial established concretely that there is a Law higher than the victors' law (contrary to the Nuremberg trials), a law higher than "might makes right." The Eichmann trial showed that crimes against mankind can be tried, and the criminals brought to justice—justice is not based on territorial or jurisdictional considerations. Concluding this chapter, Wiesenthal reports Eichmann's final statement at the trial, "I must admit that, today, I consider the extermination of the Jews as one of the worst crimes ever committed in mankind's history. We must do all in our power to prevent such a thing from happening again." Wiesenthal's comment: "I do not know whether this sentence was sincere or if his lawyer had suggested that he squeeze

it in in the hope of saving him from a death sentence. Ultimately, this does not matter; I am glad he said it."

This makes the point, as does the book's title, that Wiesenthal seeks justice, but not revenge. Is "revenge" not incommensurable with the crime, anyway? The author expresses the same when he reports on a debate with young Germans: "Try to disassociate this question from the Jewish question—it is genocide per se that interests me. . . . Genocide is the crime that most fatally threatens mankind."

The Waldheim affair

Some courage was required for Wiesenthal to tackle the true causes of the ruckus raised against Austrian President Kurt Waldheim: He shows how the Austrian Socialist Party, even before Bruno Kreisky was its leader—and especially under Kreisky, and ever since—had bought a good chunk of its political success on an armistice with Austria's Nazis, and, worse, with Nazism. He proves that the Austrian Socialists could not have cared less about justice on that account, but launched the Waldheim affair for despicable reasons of gutter-level politics. He details the abhorrent complicity [Mittäterschaft] and role of the so-called World Jewish Congress and its head Edgar Bronfman—those who issue charges first and investigate last, to quote Wiesenthal's scathing characterization. He shows how Bronfman and his clique merely used that one piece of dirty Austrian political laundry to serve their own ends and goals, which have nothing to do with Jewry, justice, or hunting Nazis, but everything to do with Bronfman's stinking businesses.

This being said, Wiesenthal has no love lost for Waldheim—the lily-livered, flabby opportunist, always crawling to curry the mighty's favor—but demands that the defendant be given due process: presumption of innocence, fair and equitable trial, the right to defend himself and prove himself innocent, if he be so. He concludes that the Austrian President had never been a Nazi, but showed by his very attitude how unworthy he was of his high position.

The gallery of portraits drawn in the book is not very inviting. The reader encounters the banal monsters, the bureaucrats of crime, the professionals who commit slaughter without batting an eyelid—they kill, for such is their job,

what their superiors ordered them to do. Wiesenthal describes them as socially well-integrated, acting within the guidelines set by institutional power, allowing them later to argue, "I was only obeying orders"—not to speak of the cowards who knew nothing, saw nothing, and guessed nothing—quite a lesson for today's events!

Some portraits are overwhelming testimonies to the moral beauty of mankind: concentration camp inmate Dr. Adelaide Hautval, who put her life at stake when she flatly refused to take part in the atrocious "medical experiments" inflicted upon prisoners, and did not hesitate to drive home her point in the following exchange with SS doctors: "What do you mean, you do not want to operate on healthy human beings? Don't you know that there is a difference between human beings? You're being told to operate on Jewesses." She answered: "Of course there are differences between human beings. Between you and me, for example."

Wiesenthal also introduces us to two members of the Nazi Party, Chief Inspector Kohlrautz and Heinrich Guenther, both of whom saved his own life. The lesson as he draws it: "They are the evidence that it was possible to go through the Third Reich without dirtying one's hands. They prove the absurdity of the idea of collective responsibility." Let us also note the remarkable 1983 manifesto Wiesenthal co-authored with two other Polish Jews and three Poles: The document lays the basis for a renewal of relations between Poles and Jews, grounded in the understanding of history.

The author is not always soft on his own people: His damning narration and diagnosis of the crass indifference encountered amongst Jews on the subject of the other genocide perpetrated by the Third Reich, against the gypsies. In whose name should *that* genocide be neglected, omitted, forgotten, he asks? There is no "small" genocide.

Against euthanasia

May the great consciences with a small radius, those who wiggle with petitions and humanitarian appeals, meditate on the precious distinction drawn by Wiesenthal. As he discusses the concept of law and the theory of law applicable to his subject, he forcefully rejects "any theory that considers that law is always but what the state defines as such through its legislation," that is, the so-called historical theory which subjects moral law, and law itself, to the vagaries of history (*Zeitgeist*, Will of the People) and its fetishistic cult-notions (class, race, etc.).

Far from that, he underlines the eminent truth contained in "the Christian idea of a 'natural law' imposed by God," in short, the legacy of the entire Judeo-Christian culture. Based on this idea, Wiesenthal may then vehemently assail the recent wave of "new-style" euthanasia, the "death with dignity" movement.

First and foremost, Wiesenthal lashes at the murderous practitioner of euthanasia Dr. Julius Hackethal, whom he charges with destroying the fundamental inhibition of human

society, that expressed in the Commandment "Thou shalt not kill." "Professor Hackethal demands of himself and his colleagues to overcome this inhibition. This frightens me. I do not like hasty comparisons, but this self-same argument had already been raised by some doctors under the Third Reich: It was medical ethics that demanded murder, in order to avoid something worse—in the event the Judaization of Germany, or the spread of hereditary diseases." He correctly points out that there was no difference between the Nazis' "T4" program that prescribed euthanasia against the so-called "incurables," and then against the "mental defectives," the elderly, and finally, Jews and gypsies.

Nazism equals Bolshevism

From Wiesenthal's narration, the Soviet Union and its satellites emerge branded with the Mark of the Beast. The book shows unambiguously that Soviet Russia is in no way second to the Third Reich, that Moscow after the war systematically recruited Nazi dignitaries, big and small—whenever those were of use—and that these newcomers did not find it difficult to adapt. He shows how Warsaw Pact countries hindered the search for Nazi criminals, and only used "anti-fascism" as a convenient and hollow slogan. Note incidentally the sickening ploy used years ago by Polish intelligence and the KGB, who spread the hoax that Wiesenthal had only saved his skin in concentration camps by collaborating with the SS. As it happens, it was incumbent upon Socialist International dignitary Bruno Kreisky to be the principal propagandist for this particular lie.

Much more information will be found in this book concerning the love affair between the FBI and the Nazis who ran Interpol, concerning the role played by some religious orders, and so on. But the reader will also find a call to Resistance, an appeal to act before it is too late, to combat and beat barbarism before it can crush the rest of us.

Why "hunt down the Nazis," when most of them today are doddering and ancient? Not for purposes of individual revenge, but to assert and strengthen the principle that justice has a concrete reality and efficacy. Short of respecting this commitment, there is no moral basis to hunt down the culprits of the Cambodian genocide, of the massacre of the Lebanese Christians by Syria, or the genocidal uses of the AIDS pandemic.

Unfortunately, the "Nazis" who are being hunted down today are not those who sit on the supervisory boards of major international banks as honorary chairmen. The small fry around which so much absurd noise is being made, guilty or not guilty, are but pawns in the psychological warfare exercises of powers and intelligence services, including the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations (OSI).

I do not always agree with every particular judgment or estimate of Wiesenthal's. Respect and tolerance make me listen, though.