I stopped. A funeral was going by. A pauper’s burial. Only a woman and a child followed. I asked an old man looking on who it was.

“A neighbor who sold fruit and vegetables and couldn’t pay the rent”.

He looked up puzzled. “How could they afford a coffin, a burial site and a stone if he couldn’t put food on the table when he was alive?”

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My grandfathers, stone cutters would find plenty of work: people of all ages are dying every day. The authorities call them “unnatural deaths”. But how many grave sites have tombstones?

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I gaze up at the Acropolis and the marble columns of the Parthenon shimmer under a brilliant blue sky . . . and I trip over a ragged body stretched across the sidewalk, a blackened hand grasping a crust of bread.

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I walk past the dead. I walk over the dying. And I hurry away from a wild-eyed, white bearded raving madman screaming in a high-pitched hoarse voice. “The crises is over! The banks are rich! We are saved!”
I enter the Byzantine museum, a refuge from the turmoil, an inexpensive escape into the past . . . or is it? The ticket sellers, guards and guides are nowhere to be seen … Are they on strike? Or have they been fired? Or both? I walk alone, unmolested, through a thousand years: the rise and fall of Constantinople.


A museum depicting the collapse of illusions of wealth and streets paved with euros. A European city converted into the home for one hundred thousand beggars and two million unemployed.

The bagmen are coming – it's election time. The scrawny hands of impoverished pensioners reach out . . . A grizzly bald Socratic look-alike lines up at a soup kitchen. He questions the Athenians: “Do you believe the democratic authorities will add meat to the watery soup?”.
Kimon, a recent graduate of Athens University, a classical scholar, sells counterfeit ancient coins on a street corner. He tells me an authentic fifth century Arethusa dekadrachm signed by Kimon or Euainetos or Eumenos would feed a thousand unemployed Greeks for a year, maybe two, if they are vegetarians.

I stood behind a small crowd in front of a kiosk reading the headlines of the newspapers (who buys them these days?). An excited woman pushed her way out of the semi-circle and screeched to the silent on-lookers. “The Nazis called the Jews, Communists… the gas chambers, showers. The Americans call the fascists who burned alive three dozen workers in Odessa, Ukrainian Nationalists”. She turned abruptly and walked quickly down the street. The others mumbled incoherently and drifted away. A nattily dressed businessman smiled at me and nodded his head as if to say “Only a crazy woman screams in the street like her”.

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Reflections on Odessa

James Petras

Some things do not change, despite world-historic catastrophes. Back in the late 19th century, Isaac Babel witnessed and described mobs, self-described as “Black Hundreds”, rampaging the streets of Odessa, dragging red-bearded Jews through the streets, sacking and burning their stores. Dozens of Jews were murdered and hundreds fled to sanctuaries. Terrible times, indeed!

But how much worse today when the progeny of the Black Hundreds and the proud descendants of Nazi collaborators, who now call themselves the ‘Right Forum’, roam the streets of Odessa with impunity and license, beating whomever they encounter.

Women, adolescents and pensioners fled, seeking refuge in a Trade Union Center. The contemporary Nazi’s firebombed the Center, incinerating forty and forcing others to jump from windows to their death. And those injured from their fall… beaten to a bloody pulp.

The Right Forum flaunts the worst of the Black Hundreds and Nazi legacy of mayhem and massacres.

The pogroms of the Black Hundreds of the pre-revolution were nothing compared to the genocide of the Ukrainian Waffen Galician Nichtengall and Roland Division. Eighty thousand Ukrainian fascists led by Stepan Bandera served as Hitler’s willing executioners. They murdered millions of Poles and Jews and Ukrainians. Even their Nazi overseers were appalled by the buzz-saw assassinations.

The children of the Bandera genocidists, in recognition of their Nazi roots, first called themselves the “Social-National Party of the Ukraine”. They changed to “Right Sector” and
“Svoboda”, so as not to offend the sensibilities of their new Western paymasters. Still, in remembrance of times past, the Right Sector, in the tradition of Bandera, knows best how to burn alive those “fake Ukrainians” who speak Russian or support socialists or protest the American designated junta that they, the Right Sector, brought to power.

Ukrainian fascists have been given license to kill: in the past at the service of the Tsar, later with Hitler, today for the United States. The Ukraine is the center of the resurgence of European fascism taking state power: armed and willing to exterminate any enemy of the puppet junta.

Yes, Odessa has ‘changed’ since the time of Babel. It was liberated by Revolution, ravaged by civil war, starved by Stalin, genocided by Germans and Ukrainian Nazis . . . who juxtaposed the swastika to a background of national colors.

Yes, the Nazis were defeated . . . but not forever!

Yes, the pogroms of the Jews ended . . . because there were so few.

Yes, half the population speaks Russian . . . but for how long?

Yes, there are new industries . . . but they are closing.

Yes, the “black earth” was the granary of Russia . . . but now it is owned by foreign billionaires.

Yes, the Ukraine was independent . . . but elections, uprisings and coups were bought and sold in, by and for . . . the free market.

The Ukraine is ruled by a US appointed junta that seized power through a US financed coup. A junta which rules through pogroms and military massacres. They terrorize the towns and countryside; they roam the city streets and occupy the squares. They hate to death the
workers self-governing councils and popular militias which have sprang up spontaneously, free of Russian tutelage and junta appointed oppressors.

In Babel’s time, Jewish workers, under fascist siege, joined the Red Army and wealthy merchants offered their daughters in marriage to Bolshevik commanders.

Today the architect of the pogroms, the ethnic cleansing of Russian speakers, is a leading American policymaker, a Jew, who calls herself Victoria Nuland (nee Nudelman).

In Odessa and throughout the Ukraine, under the heel of the Kiev junta, the legacy of the Black Hundreds and the Nazi collaborators lives on, despite a century of world shattering events. Only the sponsors, organizers and paymasters have changed.

But let’s not forget the other legacy of the Ukraine: the four million heroic Ukrainians who fought in the victorious Red Army that defeated Nazi Germany and decimated its Ukrainian collaborators. That legacy lives on, in today’s self-governing workers councils and popular militias.
Conversations: Scholars and Farm Workers

James Petras

Conversations with farm workers, migrants and other subjects of academic publications.

The basic question, never asked by established and up and coming academics is: What do the subjects who answers my questions get out of it? The academic will write an article in a professional journal or a book for a scholarly press. Publication leads to an appointment, a promotion, and life time employment, a substantial salary with health insurance, a pension, travel funds and time paid to conduct studies.

A Mexican farm worker who was asked for an interview, walked away. The scholar followed him explaining the importance of the study and its relevance “to improving the life of the community through greater understanding”.

The worker stopped and looked his pursuer in the eyes “How much will you pay me for my time?”

The scholar was taken aback hesitated and asked; “Why do you expect to be paid?”

And the peasant answered; “Why not? You are paid to write books . . . my interview will help you write your books. You pay me for my time and answers.”

The scholar argued in vain: “My publications take the side of the farm workers, peasants, the immigrants, my writing exposes the exploitation by landlords and supports peasant resistance.”

The peasant answered; “But those exploiters, at least pay me. I am resisting your attempt to secure my labor without remuneration”.
The scholar moved on to interview another peasant and explained that “the study would improve the life of the community by making the world aware of the plight of the immigrant Indians”.

The Indian asked “What ‘world’ reads about Indians in the fields. Only others like you. They read your writings in order to interview other Indians in order to publish books. And, all of you live in a different world. Will your books or articles raise my wages, secure me credit, build a road to market”?

Some demanded equality of wages: one hour interviews at the pay rates of the scholars.

Others, the wisest, demanded pre-payment of village improvements. Because they quickly learned that the wily, scholars did not fulfill their promises; the interviews were completed, with handshakes and promises. But the streets were never paved.

According to peasants, it turned out that the worst exploiters were not the landowners who paid a miserable wage, but the scholars who insisted on work without pay. And worst, deprived the peasants of family time, of free time among friends and companions.

The peasants have yet to write their book about scholars who profit from unpaid labor and academics who refuse to answer the peasants’ basic question “What do we get out of it?”