DRO AND WORLD WAR II

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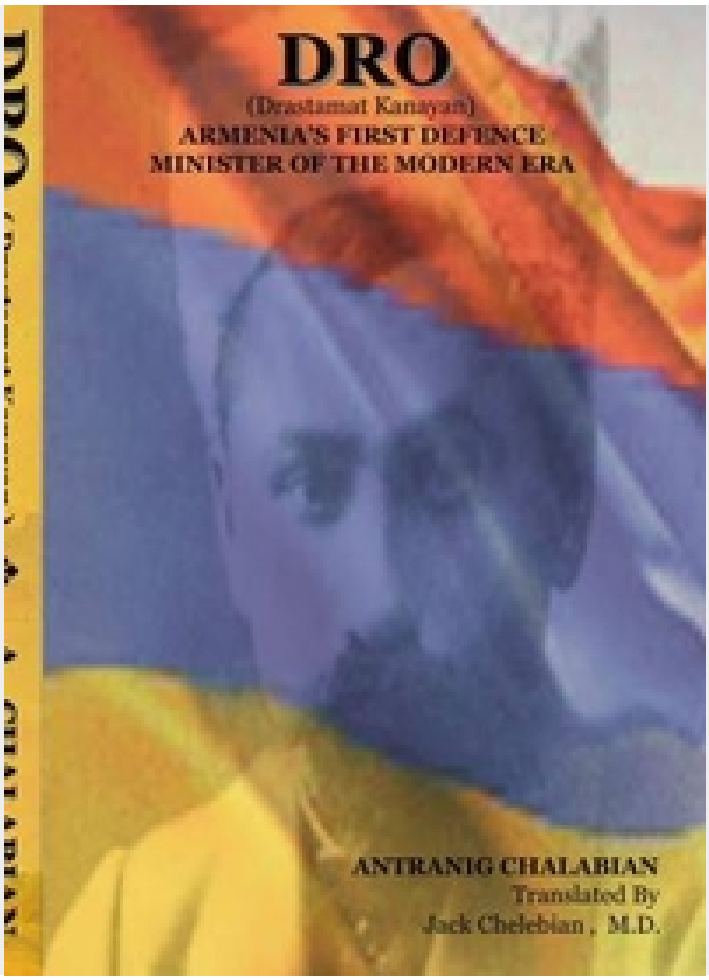

Category: Opinions

> ***Dr. Antranig Chalabian*** *(1922 - 2011)*
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With the same rationale, it is not possible to accuse Dro of sympathizing with the Nazi ideology. In collaborating with Nazism, he was guided solely by the supreme interests of Armenia and the Armenian nation. There is no other way to consider this matter; because, like Andranik, Dro was not an ideologue who understood Bolshevism, Nazism, or the many varieties of socialism. Dro and all the revolutionaries, for the most part peasants, knew how to struggle for Armenia and die for the sake of the Armenian people's salvation. Even when those fedayeen were ARF (Armenian Revolutionary Federation) members, they did not understand much about the socialist ideology of

that party. For them the ARF was that organization which had trained and molded them to fight against the Turks and other enemies, and if need be, to die for the deliverance of the Armenian people and homeland.

In the years of WWII, the issue that preoccupied Dro's and his comrades minds, before all and above all, was the physical survival of the Armenian nation, knowing the conditions to which Jewry in all of Europe was subjected.

"Collaboration" with Nazism

Many people threw furious insults at Dro without understanding why, after living under Bolshevik regime for several years, he would suddenly change color and turn to Nazism, supposedly to battle against his much-beloved Russia and the Russian people.

The most elemental logic and common sense would make us surmise that the guerrilla leader and military commander, still carrying a piece of lead in his lungs from having been wounded on the path of the homeland's salvation, could not have taken such a step if not for the rekindling of patriotism in his heart and soul.

Starting in his adolescence, the elements of Dro's life had been struggle, revolution, war, and adventure.

Thus, simple common sense would reassure us that Dro could not have betrayed his name, his conscience, and his beloved Armenia. For the sake of what purpose would he have taken such a step? For riches or for glory? He was neither materialistic nor ambitious. Surely, he must have had a concealed and supreme goal when he proceeded to collaborate with Nazism.

It's relevant to mention that the government of Armenia, during independence, had offered to grant him the rank of colonel when he was military commander of the entire province of Yerevan. Dro had declined that offer.

Years later, when Dro was visiting Beirut, people everywhere would address him as "General Dro", but he would always demur, saying "Just Dro" or "Comrade Dro".

Dro's perspective was that politics is amoral, unprincipled, and relativistic. Therefore, for the sake of the salvation of the homeland and the nation, it is necessary, for a period of time and until the storm passes, to forget moral and democratic principles, especially when the anti-democratic regime is mighty.

In the beginning of WWII when Dro's links and contacts with Nazism were publicized, Ruben Ter-Minasian and Hamo Ohandjanian proposed distancing Dro from the ranks of the ARF, but with Vahan Navasardian's active intervention the proposal was rejected. Navasardian was Dro's intimate friend and worshiper and leaned toward collaboration with the Russians.

Not only did a small group of one faction of the Armenian people collaborate with the Nazis for a

specific purpose, but also prisoners of war from all the republics of the Soviet Union did as well, in larger dimensions, were they Russians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Caucasians, Tajiks, or any of the rest. Why? Because they all hated Stalin and his bloody regime equally; therefore they did not want to fight and die for Stalin. And if Hitler had behaved a little differently toward the millions of Red Army prisoners of war who willingly surrendered, they could have shaken the anti-populist regime of the Kremlin's dictator and his sycophants from its foundations.

During WWII, the Armenians in the whole world could be divided into three main parts:
1. The Armenians in Armenia and the Soviet Union, who were obliged to follow the position of the Soviet government;
2. The Armenians in the great countries of the West and the countries more or less subject to them, who similarly were obliged to follow their governments delineated policies;
3. The Armenians, some 400,000 in all, living in the territory conquered by the Wehrmacht in the Balkans and the Ukraine, who naturally were subjected to Nazi dictatorial rule.

Bearing in mind the Nazi Party's chauvinistic and xenophobic ideology and brutal methodology, what would have been the fate of this third group of Armenians? Who would have worried about them?

That individual was to be the brave living in the Balkans, Drastamat Kanayan, aka Dro, who would assume the responsibility for the care and safety of the Armenians living in Hitler's imperial domain.

Only a person of extraordinary courage and selflessness would have had the temerity to plunge into such a dangerous political game, in large measure because the supreme leader of Nazism with whom Dro was to deal was not a normal, straightforward man of sound judgment. Excessively eccentric, a skilful trickster with strange ideas, Hitler could have harboured suspicions that Dro served the intelligence services of the Bolsheviks or of the Western imperialists and therefore Dro could have lost his life. I think that Dro's strong personality, sound judgment, and daring enabled him to survive the claws of both Stalin and Hitler, both of whom he dealt with for years.

The work of Dro and his comrades became more difficult when it became evident that Nazism intended to physically annihilate in its entirety the Jewry of Europe. There was fear that Armenians also could be subjected to the same fate, because according to Nazi ideology Armenians were considered enemies and subject to the same rules. Moreover, in the event of Hitler's divisions invading the Transcaucasia, the existence of the Armenians in Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan would have been greatly imperilled.

According to Simon Vratsian, an influential wing of the Nazi Party wanted to classify Armenians as not Indo-European, but to be listed among Asiatic people, which meant a race unworthy of living.

Dro and his comrades ware able to recognize the danger threatening the existence of the Armenian people in the occupied countries as well as in Armenia. They put forth proof that Armenians are of Indo-European origin and belong to the Aryan race.