

GAREGIN NZHDEH - SELECTED WORKS IN ENGLISH

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*The following is the Introduction to the Book **Selected Works of Garegin Nzhdeh***

Antranig Bedrossian

President of 'Nakhijevan' Institute of Canada, Montrea, 10 September 2011

☒ These *Selected Works* of Garegin Nzhdeh have been chosen for an English translation for the first time. The texts represent his thoughts as well as his political and philosophical approaches. They cover the period from the early 1920s till his prison writings, in a Soviet prison camp, in the mid-'50s. They also include an interview (1943) with Nzhdeh by "Razmik" newspaper of Sofia and a testimony by Nzhdeh. A chronological survey of his life and work, bibliographical sources and a glossary of place names complete this volume.

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The selected writings reflect the evolution of his thoughts shaped by the turbulent political events and the intense ideological battles that characterized most of the 20th century in the Armenian and international political scene. The Armenian national liberation struggle of late 19th and early 20th centuries, the worldview of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (*Dashnaktsutjun*), the struggle for survival of the First Republic of Armenia, and subsequently, its forced partition and sovietization had their impact upon the development of his political thinking and philosophy. Nzhdeh witnessed the collapse of the Ottoman Turkish and Tsarist Russian Empires, faced the destruction and the dispossession of Western Armenians during the First World War. He participated in the struggle for the independence and territorial unity of the first Republic of Armenia, and saw its forced partition, sovietization and its incorporation into the Soviet Union. Finally, as part of the Diaspora, he joined the struggle for national survival, experienced the Second World War and always focused on Armenia's preservation and territorial unity. His fame was kept alive in the popular memory of Armenia, despite the prohibition of his name during the Soviet era (1921-1990).

Nzhdeh possessed a strong personality and embodied three prominent talents: that of an orator, military strategist and philosopher. These attributes made him one of the outstanding Armenian political and military leaders of the first half of the 20th century. His political and intellectual achievements acquired significance, his legacy spreading during his lifetime and after.

As a political and military leader, Nzhdeh played an important role in shaping the outcome of some of these events of modern Armenian history. He played a major role in organizing and leading the Armenian forces into reversing the trend in the battle of Gharakilisa in 1918, which became  pivotal along with the decisive battles of Sardarabad and Bash-Abaran fought against the Ottoman Turkish army (Hambardzumian, 2005). The victorious struggle for Zangezur (1920 to 1921) under his leadership against the combined forces of the Red Army and Turco-Tatar reinforcements, secured for Armenia her southern territories in Siunik (Zangezur), bordering Iran thus creating a wedge between Turco-Tatars of eastern South Caucasus (subsequently identified as Azerbaijanis) and Turks of Turkey (*Lernahayastani goyamarte*, "Mountainous Armenia: the Battle for Survival", 1923). His organization of the National Covenant ("*Tseghakron*") movement, which constituted later the basis of the founding of the Armenian Youth Federation of the United States and Canada, affiliated with the A.R.F., prevented the assimilation of thousands of Armenian youth.

According to R. Hampardzumian (2007), the texts point to his ideology: Christian Armenianism whose self-defence system focuses on David Bek's, St.Vartan's and the Mamikonian Covenant, revived by him in the '20s and the '30s.

In this volume Nzhdeh raises many political, strategic, historical and social issues pertaining to the Armenian people in particular and to international developments in general. His *Prison Writings* and *Self-Testimony* reflect the culmination of his thoughts, reinforced by his experience. The selected texts also indicate Nzhdeh's acquaintance with his contemporary European political, military and philosophical currents of thought. Certainly, Nzhdeh approaches many of these issues with clear perspective of his own and formulation.

The debate between spiritualism and materialism; the role of the state in politics; the relationship between the individual, the nation and the state; the role of history, culture and ancestral territory in nation-building; the value of social justice in human societies; the interrelationship between national and universal values; the role of intellectual, spiritual and military elites in shaping the national life of peoples are issues discussed by Nzhdeh. They are all relevant today. Indeed, today the debate around these issues is conducted within the interwoven and multifaceted relations of the world and within the parameters of new theoretical approaches and empirical results.

The strengths and weaknesses of the Armenian people; education, self-knowledge and the spiritual renewal of Armenian generations; unity among various Armenian currents of thought; the

emancipation of the Armenian homeland forcefully incorporated into the Republic of Turkey (Western Armenia) are also issues addressed by Nzhdeh. These also are presently part of the discussion agenda among Armenians, albeit, under more complex objective and subjective conditions. Moreover, his thoughtful and realistic analysis of Armenia's strategic priorities and security threats has a contemporary significance in light of recent geopolitical transformations in the South Caucasus.

His philosophical inclination is best reflected in his aphorisms, characterized by its fragmented, but deeply reasoned style.

Nzhdeh's style is fragmentary, but his reasoning is powerful and complete. Few, very few people speak, write or act with "blood and vein". His writings are the psychological features of a distinctively temperamental and powerful individuality, which are remarkable for their unique style and pious qualities of expressed ideas and truths (Hayk Asatrian, philosopher and one of his closest companions-in-arm).

The texts reveal a talented writer, who with newly-coined words and with new styles of representing them, enriched the Armenian language. *"His colourful thinking reminds us of Yeghisheh, the 5th century Armenian historian; the mystic Grigor Naregatsi among ancient writers; Hakob Oshakan and Avetis Aharonian, among modern writers"*(Hambardzumian, 2007).

Aphorisms of Nzhdeh preserve a value of reflection for the new generations of Armenians and inspire them with patriotism, self-knowledge, self-confidence and self-reliance. By singling out a few of them, their contemporary relevance can be seen outright:

"History, it is not an unfinished novel but an unfinished battle." What an eloquent way to prepare the Armenian long-term struggle for the recovery of the lost homeland!

"The more socially just, the more powerful is the fatherland." Here is a guiding idea upon which to anchor the state-building processes of post-soviet Republic of Armenia and Artsakh!

"Sword or pen? As one as well as the other – both I liked and used. But I appeared before an alternative and I had to choose the first because there are times when to advance, pen, word, truth need a sword. I like the pen, which at the same time is a sword that knows how to raise thousand arms with swords to defend justice." This resumes Nzhdeh's life, but it also describes the hard and complementary choices facing the Armenian people in their historical journey to their homeland.

Finally, this publication of *Selective Works of Garegin Nzhdeh* make available to scholars, researchers,

students and general readers the political, military and philosophical reflections of a great 20th century Armenian patriot, while paving the way for further studies into his worldview and his relevance to posterity. Comparative links between European political, military and philosophical currents of thought and his approaches can be explored further.

To obtain a copy of ***Selected Works of Garegin Nzhdeh*** contact Antranig Bedrossian at antranig1@videotron.ca

The Cost is Can. \$ 22.00 plus shipping and handling

