

# CHAPTER 4

## DEATH BY HUNGER: UKRAINE

The death of one man is a tragedy;  
The death of a million is a statistic.  
—Joseph Stalin

Following the 1921 famine in the midst of the post-World War I civil war, Joseph Stalin induced the New Economic Policy that liberalized agricultural policies.

Thus a man-made famine, sanctioned by Joseph Stalin, devastated the Ukraine—the ethnic Ukrainian region of northern Caucasus and the lower Volga River region in 1932 to 1933. Stalin, with the aid of Lazar Kagonovich, sought to destroy the independence of the Ukrainian farmer, *kulaks*, and force them into collectivization. Soviet officials increased the grain quota for the Ukraine by 44 percent, knowing that it would cause hardship. Communist party officials employed the military with People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) secret police units to ferret out hardened grain. They also restricted the movement of peasants in desperate search for food, thus making the Ukraine a vast military preserve. Suspected horders faced deportation or execution. The estimated death toll ranged from 6 to 10 million.

The reversal of liberalization after 1928 coincided with the Soviet's political goal of dekulakization—the liquidation of "rich" peasants and collectivization of agriculture. The Soviet strategy of withholding food targeted the Ukraine.

In 1986, James E. Mace chaired the Commission on the Ukraine Famine. He describes the *Holodomor*, or famine-genocide. Ian Hunter, emeritus in the Faculty of Law at the University of Western Ontario and the first biographer of Malcolm Muggeridge, reveals how *New York Times* reporter Walter Duranty dissembled the truth about the *Holodomor*, cancelling the critical reportage of Malcolm Muggeridge. Finally, Roman Serbyn describes the denial of the *Holodomor*, which makes the aftermath a sordid postscript to the disaster.

## The Great Famine-Genocide in Soviet Ukraine (*Holodomor*)

THE NINTH CIRCLE BY OLEXA WOROPAY: EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

James E. Mace,

*Ukrainian Studies Fund, Inc. 1983*



Readers in the English-speaking world will find much of what Olexa Woropay says hard to believe. The world he describes with such eloquent simplicity is completely alien to anything they have ever experienced: it is cut from the same cloth as Hitler's death camps, a world gone mad on the blood of human beings sacrificed on the altar of political expediency.

When Americans think of the Soviet Union, they tend to think of Russia and assume that all those who live there are Russians. In fact, about half the inhabitants of the USSR are not Russian at all: they belong to nations as diverse as Armenians in the South, Lithuanians in the North, Muslim Kazakhs and Tatars, and an array of Siberian peoples not unlike our own

American Indians. There are over one hundred languages spoken in the Soviet Union, and Russian is only one of them.

According to the 1979 census, over forty million of the Soviet Union's inhabitants were Ukrainians, a Slavic nation like the Russians and Poles as different from them as they are from each other. The Ukrainians have a historical record that extends back to the tenth century when their ruler, Prince (St.) Volodymyr accepted Christianity and brought what was then called Rus' into the ranks of the Christian nations of Europe. They have a rich culture of which they are rightly proud, and the central figure of their literary tradition is the poet Taras Shevchenko, a nineteenth-century bard

who was born a serf and rose to the highest levels of cultured society in the Russian Empire. The reader will learn from Woropay what happened in Shevchenko's native village in 1933.

In 1933 Ukraine and certain neighboring areas were victims of what those who survived remember as the Velyky Holod, the Great Famine or, more precisely, the Great Hunger. It is also often referred to as Shtuchny Holod, the Artificial or Man-Made Hunger, for it was not, like most famines, due to some natural calamity or crop failure. Figures on the Ukrainian harvest were published in the press at the time, and they show that the grain crop was only a little below the precollectivization average; there was certainly no crop failure capable of causing a famine. A few years earlier the Soviet government had collectivized agriculture, forced the farmers to give up their individual farms, pool whatever resources could be taken from them, work the land in common on estates not unlike that on which Shevchenko worked as a serf, and give a far greater share of what they produced to the state. The farmers fought against this, and they also fought for their national culture, which was under attack by the Soviet regime. It was in order to break this resistance that government agents were sent into the countryside and ordered to take away all foodstuffs. As a result, the people starved.

We have far more than Woropay's word for this. For one thing, we have census figures published by the Soviet government, and we have various other official Soviet population studies, which allow us to put the census figures in perspective. According to Soviet Ukrainian figures from the late twenties and early thirties, the number of Ukrainians in the USSR was increasing at well over one percent a year. Yet, the 1939 census—itsself somewhat suspect—shows that the number of Ukrainians declined by almost ten percent, over three million peo-

ple, from what it had been in 1926 when the last published census was taken.

A Polish Communist historian calculated from these figures that there were 9.3 million fewer Ukrainians in 1939 than would have been expected from the population trends of the 1920s. Some of this was due to a lowered birth rate during the famine and some to assimilation at a time when Soviet government was actually attempting to destroy Ukrainian culture, but this still leaves several millions who could only have perished from starvation and famine-related diseases.

There are also thousands of eyewitness accounts like those Woropay presents. The Harvard University Refugee Interview Project conducted interviews with thousands of displaced persons who left the Soviet Union during and shortly after World War II, and the project files contain hundreds of accounts virtually identical with those in this book. Many more survivors published accounts of their experiences in books of testimonies published by Ukrainian groups in the West. They have highly emotional titles like *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin* and *Moscow's Biggest Crime*. After one reads Woropay's book, one might begin to understand how these people became so emotionally and vehemently anti-Communist. For Ukrainians, Communism has come to be just another name for Russian imperialism, one even more oppressive than the tsarist imperialism under which their grandparents lived. There are also quite a number of Western accounts by non-Ukrainians.

Lastly, we have one truly unimpeachable source. Nikita Khrushchev, who ruled the Soviet Union from the mid-fifties until 1964, related the following in his unofficial memoirs, published in the West from tape recordings smuggled out of the USSR after his death:

Mikoyan told me that Comrade Demchenko, who was then First Secretary of the Kiev Regional Com-

mittee, once came to see him in Moscow. Here's what Demchenko said: "Anastas Ivanovich, does Comrade Stalin for that matter, does anyone in the Politbureau know what's happening in the Ukraine? Well, if not, I'll give you some idea. A train recently pulled into Kiev loaded with corpses of people who had starved to death. It had picked up corpses all the way from Poltava to Kiev ..."

The fact that Khrushchev was not in Ukraine at the time and can only give the story second-hand does little to undermine its credibility. Khrushchev might have lied about many things, but he had no reason to lie about this. In order to understand why the famine of 1933 occurred, one must go back at least to 1917, perhaps even to 1900 when the first Ukrainian political parties were formed in the Russian Empire. The Ukrainians were at that time almost entirely a nation of peasants, just as the Czechs had been not long before. If one visited Prague in, say, 1800, the language one would hear in the streets and shops would have been German, not Czech. Only later was Prague "Czechized." By the same token, the cities of Ukraine were predominantly Russian-speaking in 1917. Although they were largely Ukrainized in the late 1920s, they were later re-Russified to the point where today Ukrainian is seldom heard in the streets of Kiev. In order to prevent the development of a Ukrainian national movement, the tsarist Russian government made it illegal to write or publish in the Ukrainian language up to 1905. The concessions made in that year were gradually withdrawn to the point that very little could be published legally in Ukrainian by the time the First World War broke out. Ukrainian writers had two choices: either publish legally in Russian and hope to slip something past the censor through the use of Aesopian language, or publish in Ukrainian in Austrian-ruled Western Ukraine (Eastern Galicia) and try to have their work smuggled over the border illegal-

ly. Despite these obstacles, the Ukrainians produced an educated stratum, the intelligentsia, and this group organized political parties, which sought national liberation, social justice for the peasants, and some sort of home rule for Ukraine.

In 1917 the Russian Empire disintegrated. The tsar abdicated, the police were slaughtered or went into hiding, and the imperial army began to fall apart. The Russian Provisional Government had little real power, particularly in outlying areas. A Ukrainian national council, the Central Rada, was organized in Kiev. Led by the two largest Ukrainian socialist parties, the Socialist Revolutionaries and Social Democrats, it gradually evolved into an autonomous national government. After the Bolsheviks took power in Petrograd and began an invasion of Ukraine the Rada declared Ukraine independent in January 1918. For years Ukraine was fought over by Ukrainian governments, the Bolsheviks Denikin's Russian Volunteer Army (which sought to turn the clock back to before the revolution), the Poles, and a number of rural warlords known as otamans. Although by 1921 the Bolsheviks were able to defeat their various rivals in the field of battle, large-scale guerrilla warfare continued in the Ukrainian countryside. Ukrainian governments were driven from the country, but the Ukrainian peasantry remained unconquered.

The Bolsheviks decided to concede the peasants the minimum of what they demanded. In 1921 the New Economic Policy was adopted, ending forced requisitions of foodstuffs and allowing farmers to sell their products in a limited free market. In 1923, a series of policies known as indigenization were adopted in non-Russian areas. These policies provided for the recruitment of non-Russians into the Party and state, teaching Russians the local language, and actively supporting the cultural life of the non-Russian peoples. Belorussianization, Tatarization,

Yiddishization, and so forth, proceeded through the rest of the decade.

Since the Ukrainians of all the non-Russian nations were the most numerous and constituted the greatest political threat to Moscow, Ukrainization went much farther than any of its counterparts. Many prominent Ukrainian intellectual and political leaders returned from exile to take advantage of the cultural opportunities afforded by this relatively benevolent policy. A national cultural revival of unprecedented creativity took place in literature, scholarship, and the arts. Even within the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine, a strong Ukrainian wing demanded that Ukrainization lead to the end of Russian domination. This group, led by Oleksander Shumsky, Mykola Khvylovy, and Mykhailo Volobuev, was condemned as "nationalistic deviationist," and the Party repudiated their views.

By the end of 1927 Mykola Skrypnyk emerged as Ukraine's political strongman. His official post, Commissar of Education, placed him in charge of the Ukrainization policy and of supervising cultural life in general. By eschewing any hint of anti-Russian sentiment, he was briefly able to achieve much of what Shumsky, Khvylovy, and Volobuev had called for. Under Skrypnyk, Soviet Ukraine evolved more and more in the direction of a national government, defending its prerogatives from Moscow and even demanding it be allowed to defend the national interests of Ukrainians residing in Russia itself.

The regime used the respite provided by the New Economic Policy and Ukrainization to penetrate the Ukrainian countryside in a variety of ways. Committees of Non-Rich Peasants (*komnezams*, KNS), which had earlier seized peasants, crops and held absolute power in the villages, were retained. There was no counterpart to these organizations in Russia. After 1925

they were stripped of political power and turned into voluntary organizations, and during collectivization and the early stages of the famine they played an important role in expropriating those the regime wanted to get rid of, forcing the peasants into collective farms (*kolhosps*), and searching for hidden grain to seize. In this later period, however, they often performed these functions under the leadership of someone sent from the outside to supervise *dekulakization*, collectivization, and the deliveries of grain to the state. Village soviets were also organized, and the countryside was covered by a dense network of secret police collaborators known as the *seksoty*. Because of this penetration of the countryside, the regime was in a far stronger position relative to the peasants than it had been in 1921. Whereas the Bolsheviks had hitherto come to the villages as complete strangers, they now had organized supporters ready to do their bidding and provide information on potential opponents who could be singled out for elimination.

Stalin saw the nationalities question and peasant question as indissolubly linked. In his view, the peasants constituted the social basis of national movements, the reservoir from which such movements drew strength. As he once put it, "The nationality problem is by its essence a peasant problem." Thus, concessions to the peasants meant concessions to the non-Russian nations and vice versa. By the same token, repression in the countryside and repression against those nations were bound to go together. They were two sides of the same coin.

In 1929 Stalin decided to eliminate the *kulaks* (well-to-do peasants, *kurkuls* in Ukrainian) as a class, begin forcing peasants into collective farms, and use what could be taken from the peasants to finance rapid industrialization. This was possible because, although collectivization did nothing to increase crop yields

(the current problems of Soviet agriculture are largely attributable to forced collectivization), harvesting was done in common, and the state could supervise the harvest directly and take as much as it wished directly from the threshing room floor. This is precisely what happened, and the idea that the state should take all it required from "first proceeds," that is, the threshing room, became known as the First Commandment of Soviet agriculture.

At the same time as peasants were being forced into collective farms, the first steps were taken to end the indigenization policies. Since Ukraine was the largest stumbling block, these steps took the form of indirect attacks on Skrypnyk and his clients. In 1929 one of his most important subordinates, the ideological watchdog of historians, Matvyi Yavorsky, was attacked for "treating the history of Ukraine as a distinctive process." The political implication of such a charge was quite obvious: if Ukraine did not have its own history, it was not a distinctive country and ought not to be considered as such. This was the beginning of the end of Skrypnyk. At the same time, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church was banned and its priests were executed on a mass scale. In 1930 a show trial was held of an imaginary conspiracy called the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine. At this trial some of Ukraine's most distinguished intellectual and spiritual leaders were convicted of a host of crimes known in the jargon of the day as "wrecking." Among these charges was a most interesting one: linguistic sabotage, which consisted of spelling words in such a way as to make the Ukrainian language closer to Polish than to Russian. Despite the absurdity of this charge, it held particularly ominous political implications for Skrypnyk, who had participated directly in various linguistic discussions of the 1920s. When Skrypnyk was denounced and removed from his post in

1933, one of the major charges leveled against him was that he had advocated the use of the letter G in Ukrainian.

The famine of 1933 succeeded in breaking the Ukrainian peasantry as a political force, completed the destruction of the entire social structure of the Ukrainian nation, and made possible far-reaching political changes. In addition to the fall of Skrypnyk, the Ukrainization policy was ended and a policy of Russification was instituted. The Ukrainian wing of the Communist Party ceased to be an independent policy force and over the next several years what was left of its old cadres was "liquidated" (a singularly inappropriate euphemism since such people did not melt; they were executed), and the Ukrainian intelligentsia was to all intents and purposes destroyed. Ukrainian culture was thus decapitated by the loss of its intellectual and political leaders, pushed out of the cities and back on the farms by a return to Russification, and Soviet spokesmen began to glorify everything Russian, including the tsarist past. At roughly the same time, internal passports were issued to urban dwellers but not to collective farmers. Since farmers could not live in the cities and towns without such documents, this meant legally attaching the agricultural population to the land. The word customarily used to describe such a state of affairs is serfdom.

#### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What was this famine *not*, according to Mace?
2. Census figures verify what?
3. Who was the "one truly unimpeachable source" for verifying the famine?
4. According to Mace, Stalin's attack on the kulaks was the first step in a campaign to do what?
5. What did the famine accomplish for Stalin?

## A Tale of Truth and Two Journalists

MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE AND WALTER DURANTY

Ian Hunter,

*University of Western Ontario, Emeritus*

It is hard to credit that a decade has slipped away since the death of Malcolm Muggeridge on November 14, 1990. The most compellingly readable of journalists, hardly a day goes by that I do not recall one of Muggeridge's insights or marvel afresh at his prophetic vision.

Muggeridge's journalistic integrity was shaped by one searing experience; in 1932 he went to Moscow as correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*.

Joseph Stalin's twin manias—collectivization of agriculture and dekulakization of peasants—were then at their bloodthirsty zenith, but few Westerners could have guessed it from the sycophantic foreign reporting.

The Dean of the Moscow press corps was Walter Duranty of the *New York Times*. Joseph Alsop would later say of him: "Lying was Duranty's stock in trade."

For two decades Duranty was the most influential foreign correspondent in Russia. His dispatches were regarded as authoritative; indeed Duranty helped to shape U.S. foreign policy.

His biographer, Susan Taylor (*Stalin's Apologist*, Oxford University Press, 1990) has demonstrated that Duranty's reporting was a critical factor in President Roosevelt's deci-

sion in 1933 to grant official recognition to the Soviet Union.

Duranty, an unattractive, oversexed little man, with a wooden leg, falsified facts, spread lies and half truths, invented occurrences that never happened, and turned a blind eye to the man-made famine that starved to death more than 14 million people (according to an International Commission of Jurists which examined this tragedy in 1988–90). When snippets of the truth began to leak out, Duranty coined the phrase: "You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs."

This phrase, or a variant thereof, has since proved useful to a rich variety of ideologues who contend that a worthy end justifies base means. Yet when the Pulitzer committee conferred its prize on Duranty (in 1932, at the height of the famine) they cited his "scholarship, profundity, impartiality, sound judgment, and exceptional clarity."

One story that circulated among Moscow correspondents trying to explain Duranty was that he was a necrophiliac; in exchange for favourable reporting, the Soviet authorities may have allowed him unsupervised night access to the city morgues. Whether true or not (and Duranty's biogra-

pher, Susan Taylor, leaves this question open), certain it is that the regime had some sort of hold on Duranty; they showered benefits on him—a fancy apartment, an automobile, and fresh caviar daily.

Enter Malcolm Muggeridge. In the spring of 1933 Muggeridge did an audacious thing; without permission he set off on a train journey through what had formerly been the breadbasket of the Soviet Union, the Ukraine and North Caucasus. What Muggeridge witnessed, he never forgot.

In a series of articles smuggled out in the diplomatic pouch, he described a man-made famine that had become a holocaust: peasants, millions of them, dying like famished cattle, sometimes within sight of full granaries, guarded by the army and police. "At a railway station early one morning, I saw a line of people with their hands tied behind them, being herded like cattle into trucks at gunpoint—all so silent and mysterious and horrible in the half light, like some macabre ballet."

At a German co-operative farm, an oasis of prosperity in the collectivized wilderness, he saw peasants kneeling down in the snow, begging for a crust of bread. In his Diary, Muggeridge wrote: "Whatever else I may do or think in the future, I must never pretend that I haven't seen this. Ideas will come and go; but this is more than an idea. It is peasants kneeling down in the snow and asking for bread. Something that I have seen and understood."

But few believed him. His dispatches were cut. He was sacked by the *Guardian* and forced to leave Russia. Muggeridge was vilified, slandered and abused, not least in the pages of the *Manchester Guardian*, where sympathy to what was called "the great Soviet experiment" was de rigueur.

Walter Duranty's voice led the chorus of denunciation and denial, although privately Duranty told a British foreign office acquaintance that at least 10 million people had been starved to death—adding, characteristically, "but they're only Russians."

Beatrice Webb (Muggeridge's aunt by marriage) admitted that "In the Soviet Union, people disappear," but she still denounced Muggeridge's famine reports as "base lies." The Very Reverend Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury, applauded Stalin's "steady purpose and kindly generosity." George Bernard Shaw made a whirlwind tour and pronounced himself fully satisfied that there was ample food for all in the worker's paradise.

If vindication was a long time coming, it cannot have been sweeter than when Duranty's biographer, Susan Taylor, wrote in 1990:

But for Muggeridge's eyewitness accounts of the famine in the spring of 1933 and his stubborn chronicle of the event, the effects of the crime upon those who suffered might well have remained as hidden from scrutiny as its perpetrators intended.

Little thanks he has received for it over the years, although there is a growing number who realize what a singular act of honest and courage his reportage constituted.

Alas, when these words came to be written, Muggeridge had died. Still, they are worth remembering.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Characterize the nature of Walter Duranty's reporting on the Ukrainian famine.
2. How did Malcolm Muggeridge contradict Duranty?
3. What was the contemporary reaction to Muggeridge? Why?