

**Dancing with Stalin**  
**Speech at Cambridge University, February 6<sup>th</sup> 2009**

**1) Welcome**

I would like to begin by thanking Cambridge University Ukrainian Society for inviting me to present this lecture on the Holodomor or Genocide Famine of 1932- 1933 and all of you who are here this evening for displaying an interest in this tragic episode in Ukrainian history. I am conscious of the responsibility that I bear to provide you with a true account of the history of the Holodomor and also to convey the experience of the millions of victims. Ukraine in 1933 may seem remote from this ancient and beautiful university town in 2009. However, the story of the Holodomor goes to the core of what makes us human. During this speech I will of necessity refer to states and nations but my intention is not to divide or condemn but to convey my understanding. No nation, no ethnic group bears responsibility for the famine of 1932-1933. Stalin and his associates planned the mass starvation of Ukrainians and signed the orders and directives. However as Tychyna says-

The Human heart only  
Is our enemy  
And who can find the cure  
For our humanity?

The Convention on Genocide is based on a conception of the intrinsic value of every nation, every individual and the belief that we all have a duty to understand, protect and cherish human diversity.

**2) Opening- Dancing with Stalin**

I first travelled to Ukraine in 1993, flying KLM from Amsterdam to Kyiv and, as we descended slowly towards the Ukrainian Capital, wiled away my time by staring through the cabin window. It was difficult to imagine that this hypnotic landscape of seemingly endless fields had been the scene of Europe's largest famine, a famine engineered by the Soviet leadership. In 1933 Stalin had introduced a number of measures which included removing almost everything edible from the rural population and sealing the borders of Ukraine and ethnically Ukrainian regions of the Russian republic to stop starving peasants fleeing. By the spring of that year the pastures below would have been dotted with decomposing corpses and mass graves. In between the fields there would have been abandoned villages where everyone had died and others where people ate sorrel nettles, and willowroot to survive. In the years afterwards families would be shipped in from provinces elsewhere in the Soviet Union and the abandoned cottages would once more be filled with the bustle of family life- a pot bubbling with soup on the stove a gold icon glinting in the candlelight. The years before and after the Holodomor saw a wave of executions targeted on Ukraine's cultural elite and the forcible Russification of educational institutions and mass media.

The word Holodomor is a compound term derived from the Ukrainian words for “hunger” and “plague”. It is important to recognise that other areas of the Soviet Union were affected by famine in this period. However, the Holodomor has a number of characteristics which distinguish it from these other superficially similar events. To begin with it is linked to a wave of executions focused explicitly on Ukraine’s political, cultural, and spiritual elites, which began in 1930 and has no equivalent in other regions of the Soviet Union. The enforced confiscation of most edible material from rural Ukraine and rural Ukrainian regions of the Russian Republic and the sealing in of these regions, in other words enforced starvation, linked to an ethnically specific area in early 1933 is a feature not repeated elsewhere in the Soviet Union. Finally the settlement, from 1933 onwards, of people from other regions of the Soviet Union into areas where much of the Ukrainian population had been exterminated can be linked to statements by communist functionaries expressing a wish to crush Ukrainian national feeling. These three features are a kind of unholy trinity which elevate the Holodomor beyond the realms of agrarian policy and endow it with the characteristics of genocide.

There is no doubt that in 1933 diplomats and journalists were aware that there was something unique about the famine raging in Ukraine. The Welsh Journalist Gareth Jones heard about the famine and decided to find out what was happening for himself. In March 1933 he travelled to Moscow and took the long train journey south to the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. The snow had fallen heavily as he walked along the railway tracks into the countryside and saw that ‘there was no bread, many children had swollen stomachs nearly all the horses and cows had died and people themselves were dying’.

*I noticed frequently patches where the dry skeletons of last year’s weeds were peeping above the snow... [I] heard the villagers say ‘We are waiting for Death’.*<sup>1</sup>

His colleague Malcolm Muggeridge also visited Ukraine and the North Caucasus in early 1933 and wrote,

of the battle that is going on between the Government and their peasants. The battlefield was as desolate as in any war, and stretches wider..... On one side, millions of peasants, starving, often their bodies swollen, with lack of food; on the other, soldiers, members of the GPU [the political police], carrying out the instruction of the dictatorship of the proletariat. They had gone over the country like a swarm of locusts and taken away everything edible; they had shot and exiled thousands of peasants sometimes whole villages; they had reduced some of the most fertile land in the world to a melancholy desert.’<sup>2</sup>

The voices of Jones and Muggeridge were two rare examples of human and journalistic *integrity*- they wrote of what they had seen without regard for the impact it would have on their careers. However, most of the journalists based in Moscow knew of the famine but were happy to conceal the deaths of millions of people in return for their pay cheques.

---

<sup>1</sup> The quotes from Gareth Jones’ articles are taken from “A Grain of Truth; the Biography of Gareth Richard Vaughan Jones” By Dr Margaret Siriol Colley, Nottingham 2005

<sup>2</sup> “The Soviet’s War on the Peasants,” Fortnightly Review, XXXIX, May 1933, p. 564.

I called this lecture ‘Dancing with Stalin’ but really the historical record shows that journalists, writers and academics have been performing a conjuror’s sleight of hand with the truth, shuffling words like a magician’s pack of cards, dexterously diverting the eye away from the uncomfortable reality depicted in the photographs of corpses in the state archive of Ukraine and towards a partial account of the truth. Magic, of course loses most of its charm when the secret of the trick is exposed. However, much the revisionist historians, who in recent decades have challenged what they call the totalitarian paradigm of Soviet History, argue that the famine was due to bad harvests and bungling incompetence, behind them we see Stalin signing the New Year Telegram of 1 January 1933, a death warrant for the Ukrainian countryside.

I will show, later on in this speech that one of the main revisionist historians whose work continues to dominate the account of the Holodomor in English universities appears to have been guilty of a misrepresentation of the case for the Holodomor and show that his views, and those of the other revisionists, are no longer tenable because of a basic error-*he chose to ignore the entirety of the eyewitness testimony which shows that more than just grain was taken away from Ukraine.*

We now know what happened. But why did the Soviet Leadership try and destroy the Ukrainian nation as an independent political cultural and social entity during the 1930’s. To answer that question we need to look at the country itself.

### **3) What is Ukraine**

Ukraine is both vast and yet strangely invisible in much of the Western world, still viewed through the prism of media and Soviet era stereotypes; yet it is the largest country whose borders are entirely in Europe and if you stand in a field of outside Kyiv it is easy to imagine that those gold stalks, sprinkled with poppies like blood, roll on forever. The country rears like a dragon over the black sea, its vast and diverse terrain encompassing the jagged peaks of the Crimea, the rolling Steppe and the Carpathians whose lush pine forests are haunted by bears, wolves and spirits.

Ukrainians are one of three Eastern Slavic nations, the other two being the Belarussians and the Russians, which emerged after the fall of the medieval state Rus, whose capital was Kyiv. The histories of the nations had followed very different courses with Russia developing into an Empire, while Ukraine and Belarus were often under foreign domination. At the time of the first world war Ukrainians, paradoxically, had begun to develop a thriving cultural life but were bereft of all political institutions a nation in spirit but, in political terms, an outlying province of the vast Russian empire. This lack of a sustained period of political independence and stability may be due to Ukraine’s geographic position at the crux of Europe and Asia. The lush ‘black soil’ rich and moist as gateaux, of its vast central plain has been fought over by Turks, Tartars, Russians, Poles, Lithuanians, and Germans. However, for most of its existence the country has been subsumed within the Russian state and the city of Kyiv is for some Russians the mother of all Russian cities. The Tsarist regime looked to eradicate Ukraine’s cultural distinctness by drastically curtailing the use of Ukrainian, which it termed the “little

Russian language” under the decree of 1876 known as the Ems Ukaz<sup>3</sup>. Valuev, the Minister who initiated this clampdown on Ukrainian language stated the official view that ‘there was no little Russian language’<sup>4</sup>. This project of reintegrating Ukraine culturally within Russia can be seen as arising out of a view that there was one Great Russian nation at the time of Rus, which branched out in the thirteenth Century, as the Russian historian Vernadskiy argued, into the Little Russians, White Russians, and Great Russians<sup>5</sup>.

In this view Ukraine’s cultural distinctness is in a sense an aberration, the Ukrainian language is a dialect of Russian, and the existence of Ukrainians threatens Russia’s own view of its history as the inheritor of Kyiv Rus.

For many people, both Russians and others influenced by this Russian account of history, Ukraine is a province of Russia and Ukrainian is a dialect of Russian. Later on I will show that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is still influenced by this perception perhaps because the United Kingdom does not have courses in Ukrainian studies. The pen of the civil servant who wrote the FCO’s papers on the Holodomor in some draughty Whitehall office was guided by a mind which saw Ukraine as simply part of Russia and some British academics share that perception seeing Ukraine almost as a kind of mad experiment carried out by a deranged professor in front of a sceptical audience. National identity is weak, they mutter stroking their chins, the country will soon lose its independence, the culture is artificial, and the language a hybrid of Polish and Russian. However, at the time of the revolution in 1917, Ukraine was undeniably a nation but a nation without a state. Events in Russia, particularly the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, would result in a new political order being brought to Ukraine at bayonet point.

#### **4) All animals are equal**

But some are more equal than others is the slogan adopted by the pigs who come to power in Orwell’s animal farm. This simple phrase sums up the paradox of the revolution which is that, in the name of equality a small clique seized power and raised themselves above the mass in whose name they claimed to govern. Indeed Lenin<sup>6</sup>, as he stepped of the train in Petrograd and ascended the steps to the dais in front of the deputies of the gathering of soldiers and workers deputies on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1917 was undergoing a process of transfiguration. If the people gathered before him had a faith in his capacity to transform their lives then he was gripped by an equally firm conviction in his own abilities. The April Theses which he announced were a kind of road map to Utopia. They comprised four areas of work which were intended to transform the party into a communist party. He would not have known, but as we imagine the scene, we can see

---

<sup>3</sup> Savchenko, Fedir (1970). *Zaborona ukrayinstva 1876 r.* 2nd ed. Munich. p 381

<sup>4</sup> *Secrety Valuevskoho Tsyrukulyara 1863 Roku.* Panchenko Wolodymyr. *Ukraina Incognita.* Za Zahalnoyu red L. Ivshynoi. 2<sup>nd</sup> publication Fact. Kyiv 2003

<sup>5</sup> *Two Conceptions of the History of Ukraine and Russia,* Polonska- Vasylenko, Natalya. AUSB Publishing. London 1968

<sup>6</sup> The account of Ukrainianisation draws on numerous works by Kulchytsky and Mace

over him the transparent spectre of the Holodomor for the theses were intended to transform the state into a Soviet state. If he had convinced himself that in a way he had grasped the geography of the human mind and understood how to lead the mass of the Russian Empire towards equality what he could not have seen was the price in blood that would be paid. He was, however, at one with Stalin in his conviction that Human life – provided of course we exclude his own life- could be sacrificed in the interest of humanity and his contempt for the country whose destiny he now held in his rather small pallid hands. Russia, he said, and excuse me for a crudity that is not mine, ‘is shit’. It was not only the country that he had in mind, its fields, rivers, and cities, but also the people. They were the excrement over which he strode. The country was the clay that he would mould into a communist paradise.

The revolution that took hold of Russia in February 1917 would be transformed into a communist revolution with the seizure of control by the Bolsheviks at all levels, of the Soviets which had sprung up as the power of the Tsar’s state collapsed. These Soviets or Councils were in the immediate aftermath of the revolution a reflection of the fragmentary political parties and diverse groups vying for power. Lenin’s slogan ‘all power to the soviets’ was linked to his strategy of ensuring that these councils would be stuffed with representatives of the party which he controlled. Power to the people meant in effect the concentration of power in the party. Lenin’s demand for the creation of a Soviet rather than a Parliamentary Republic can be seen as a demand for absolute control for the Soviets would be controlled by the party and the party by Lenin. The transfiguration of the small émigré politician into a red Messiah was complete and, once Lenin had ascended those steps to an altitude above the workers he would stay there as his corpse stays now, still idealised by some emblematic of a delusion that equality can be achieved by dictatorship. Lenin himself used the word to describe the government he envisaged a dictatorship which, he said, would be based not on law, not on the formal will of the people, but on violence, or as we say now, on terror. Within a few weeks of coming to power Lenin elevated terror into a principal of the state with the establishment of the All Russian Extraordinary Commission which would terrorise political opponents.

However, if Lenin, perhaps in ways unknown to himself, was motivated by the desire to control the society in which he emerged and reduce the party activists to little more than marionettes at the end of the long strings gathered in his hands we must acknowledge that many of his followers believed in the communist ideal. Boris Antonenko Davidovich, whose work ‘Death’ is one of the most significant works of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, understood how the ideal of equality could be used to seduce people into acts of brutality and ultimately result in the Holodomor and the Gulag. The book documents the progress of a young communist activist in the 1920’s who, seduced by the ideals of the party and also by the need for acceptance, ultimately kills a farmer in one of the skirmishes between party members and peasants opposed to the regime<sup>7</sup>. Edmund Burke said that all that is necessary for evil to triumph is that good men shall do nothing. We know now that evil can triumph because of good people who are motivated by an absolute belief in an ideal and are eventually prepared to kill on its behalf. The Bolsheviks, at least initially,

---

<sup>7</sup> For an abridged Ukrainian version see “Rostrilyane Vidroddzhennya- Antolohiya 1917- 1933” Lavrinenko Paris 1959- Kyiv 2004 pp 493- 564

believed that they, and above them Lenin, were gathering power from people in order to liberate them.

The intention to create a dictatorship was not masked by the Bolsheviks but the phrase dictatorship of the proletariat was always used. However, as I have described, the proletariat, indeed all sectors of society were deprived of power and all of the Soviet Union would be subject to the terror of the secret police, the Chekists. Declarations about freeing the workers from exploitation would be adopted by people who perhaps believed in them and could not see that by purging the soviets of other parties they had in effect handed their freedom on a plate to the small caucus at the top of the party structure, a pyramid containing the mummified corpse of political accountability.

This was the nature of the state into which Ukraine would be incorporated with the signing of the treaty which created the Soviet Union on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1923 . Why, however, did a party so dedicated to seizing and retaining power allow the formation of a Ukrainian state and indeed a separate Ukrainian communist party after they had seized the country? The initial name of the of the Ukrainian State that the Bolsheviks created in Kharkiv on 25 December 1917, while the Bolsheviks were still struggling with the Ukrainian national movement for power, was the Ukrainian People's Republic. This was identical to the name given to their fledgling Ukrainian state by the nationalist. The similarity between the names is not accidental. Lenin wanted to assure Ukrainian society that national autonomy would be preserved not in a "bourgeois" form, but in the form of the 'workers' and peasants' State'. So briefly for a while there were two Ukrainian People's Republics in the same country, one nationalist, one soviet, like Siamese twins with their hands on one another's throats.

In April 1918 the Bolshevik Communist Party of Ukraine was created, however, this party was given the task of struggling for the 'revolutionary union' of Russia and Ukraine that is the destruction of the state whose name it bore. The appearance of an autonomous party and state masked the extension of one man's grip over the lives of more and more people.

We can say that, as the dictatorship deluded the workers into believing that they had power, so too the Ukrainian nation was seduced by the creation of a virtual state that bore its name. Eventually a Soviet Ukrainian republic would be created as the party sought to defuse resistance by the policy of Ukrainianisation. While the Bolsheviks secured control, creating temporary councils, which included local communists, the Chekists, the activists, and the soldiers followed in their wake, murdering anyone who might threaten the regime. The nationalist movement which opposed them split, apart the smaller faction under Petliura seeking protection and patronage from the Polish leader Pidsulski. The larger section of the nationalist movement was too weak militarily to resist and was seduced by the promise of autonomy offered by the Bolsheviks. Eventually the country would be split with the Western provinces of Galicia and Volhynia being incorporated into Poland but most of the country falling into the hands of the Bolsheviks. As the communists looked to defuse separatist movements, not just in Ukraine, but in the other republics a virtual federation a union of notionally independent states was created. But

each of them was one of the blocks of the pyramid on which the Bolshevik party stood. Soviet Ukraine appeared on the map but her fields were littered by corpses left in the wake of the Chekists who had been instructed in 1923 to deal with a long list of enemies of the Soviet State, ranging from members of non soviet communist parties to the former owners of small shops.<sup>8</sup>

### 5) The Executed Renaissance

Those who argue that Ukraine's national identity is a kind of collective delusion must at least acknowledge that the country reappeared on the map in 1917 and that, despite the chaos and instability of revolution and civil war, a thriving and distinct political cultural and artistic life developed very quickly. The materialisation of the country centuries after all traces of political independence had been abolished is evidence that the cultural distinctness of Ukraine, its language literature and songs continued to exist flowing through time like the underground stream at in Tychyna's poem "Golden Echo"<sup>9</sup>. Lenin, who while he was in Krakow attended a lecture by the émigré Ukrainian writer Bohdan Lepkyj<sup>10</sup>, was aware of the power of Ukrainian national feeling and initially the Soviet Union allowed a large degree of cultural autonomy under a policy known as Korenizatsiya. Although the Bolsheviks had conquered Ukraine they could not retain control of the country by armed force alone but needed to convince Ukrainians that the Soviet power was also their own Ukrainian government. In April 1923 Trotsky gave a speech at the 7<sup>th</sup> All Ukrainian Party Conference in which he said that "the alienation of the governing party and soviet apparatus from the fundamental mass of Ukraine's population was dangerous'. He particularly emphasised the danger of a lack of understanding with the peasantry and he urged the adoption of a nationalities policy which paid particular attention to schools, to culture, and to language. Even Stalin echoed this message of national understanding when he said at the 12<sup>th</sup> gathering of the Russian communist party that the 'Soviet power had to become for non Russian peasants their power' and use the 'native language' of each Soviet republic. Korenizatsiya is then the enrooting of Soviet power in the non Russian peasantry and the policy had a different national specific name in each of the republics where it was applied, in Ukraine it was Ukrainisatsiya, literally, making Ukrainian.

The policy of Ukrainianisation began with an announcement at the 8<sup>th</sup> all Russian congress that members of the Russian Communist Party in Ukraine were required to use the Ukrainian language. However the policy ran into an immediate obstacle a shortage of Ukrainian party members and even by 1923 only 737 of 11826 party workers claimed to have knowledge of Ukrainian.

Gerhard Simon, German authority on the national politics of the Kremlin, argues that Korenizatsiya was intended to prevent the development of the nationalist movements in the USSR<sup>11</sup>. Ukraine's aspirations towards independence would be sated by the creation

---

<sup>8</sup> Chas Nazriv. Dobkin Oleksiy. Initial. Lutsk 1998. pp 40- 41

<sup>9</sup> Rostrilyane Vidroddzhennya- Antolohiya 1917- 1933. Lavrinenko, Y. Paris 1959- Kyiv 2004 pp 24- 25

<sup>10</sup> Bohdan Lepkyj- Poyeziyi. Radyanskyj Pysmennyk Kyiv 1990 p 15

<sup>11</sup> Ukrayinskyj Istorychnyj Zhurnal- 2005- No 2 P 120

of a Soviet Ukrainian state. However, the politics of Korenizatsiya were only useful to a certain degree and it quickly became apparent that the Kremlin could not restrain Ukrainianisation to a policy merely of applying a national veneer to Soviet power. Kulchytsky writes that the policy quickly moved beyond being a bureaucratic campaign and became an instrument of the country's national renaissance, a renaissance which threatened Soviet power by offering a different vision of the country's development. Simon makes it clear that the Soviet authorities knew they were walking on the edge of a knife, a knife that could be laid at the throat of Soviet communism by an independent political movement. This explains the paradox that in Ukraine the policy of fostering Ukrainian culture was accompanied by continuous attacks on "Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism" and great writers such as Kulish attacked their own country's aspirations. However, if there was repression, the need to create the impression that the Soviet state in Ukraine was rooted in the country's own national culture meant that even the secret police were encouraged to communicate in Ukrainian. A generation of writers who would come to be known as "the Executed Renaissance" after the anthology compiled by Yuri Lavrinenko and published in Paris in 1959, flourished in Ukraine during the 1920's under these benign conditions. He had not heard Stalin's phrase 'a destructive blow', uttered in 1932 as the dictator planned the Holodomor but used a similar term 'terrorist blow' to refer to the genocide famine. He collated the work of these authors from publications that had been kept in the archives of Ukrainians and Ukrainian cultural institutions in the Diaspora.

Until 1930 Ukrainian poetry blossomed like the sunflower on the dust jacket of Tychyna's first collection, only to be annihilated in the subsequent Stalinist inferno. During the 1930's, 226 of 253 Ukrainian writers were executed or rendered inactive by the Soviet Police. They died in the underground basements of police stations, in arctic labour camps, they were shot and tortured, they died of hypothermia, exhaustion, malnutrition. Only a few survived.

Lavrinenko's anthology covers the period 1917-1933 after which he wrote 'Moscow's adopted a policy of "Colonial provincialisation" towards Ukraine and many of the works of these authors were banned'. The story of this renaissance is best summarised by Khvylovyj whose slogan 'Away From Moscow!' would be followed by his suicide in 1937. He took his own life to avoid the executioner's bullet or a death by exposure and malnutrition in some labour camp. His legacy remains the prose oeuvre which depicts the convulsions affecting Ukraine and *Vsesvit*, a literary magazine which to this day acts as a window on world literature for Ukrainians.

There is no doubt that some Ukrainian writers were drawn by the vision of equality and internationalism and became unwitting servants of their nation's destruction. Some, like Tychyna, clearly grasped at an intuitive level the true nature of the men who cloaked themselves in the rhetoric of equality, the closing lines of 'Instead of Octaves and Sonnets' ask 'Shall I stoop, to kiss the Slippers of the Pope'. We know that the Pope of these lines was the high priest of the communist state that would be built on the ruins of the Ukrainian republic, whose birth and death were witnessed by Tychyna. He saw too that the upsurge of energy unleashed by the volcanic awakening of Ukraine in 1918

carried with it the potential both for spiritual regeneration and violence. That indeed is the significance of the Crow who appears in the final Poem of Solar Clarinets 'Gold Echo', the Angel of Death hovering over a national revival.

However, although Ukrainian communist party chiefs had echoed the view of their Russian colleagues, that national politics were a system of double accounting or a deception designed to defuse political opposition, for a while pursued a policy of cultural independence. I have mentioned that the country's borders and the distribution of ethnic Ukrainians has shifted over time and, on 21 May 1927, M Skrypnyk, Ukraine's leading national communist politician raised the question of Ukraine's borders and annexing those territories adjacent to Ukraine where ethnic Ukrainians were in the majority. Kaganovich, who would later become one of the architects of the Holodomor, drafted the request for the annexation of these ethnic Ukrainian territories to the republic. The head of the Ukrainian delegation that travelled to Moscow to discuss this question in the 1920's, observed that the possible extensions of Ukraine's borders met with massive opposition from Russians on the Central Committee. However, as a sop to Skrypnyk's wish to extend the borders, the policy of the Ukrainianisation of these areas, notably the Kuban and the Northern Caucasus, was supported by the centre. In December 1928 the Communist leaders adopted a three year plan for strengthening the use of Ukrainian language and culture.

Stalin's transformation from support for Communism with a Ukrainian face into the shadowy presence behind the activists smashing doors down and removing food at gunpoint can be explained by his need to gain political support in the 1920's and to crush opposition in the 1930's. The policy of Ukrainianisation would ultimately fail to defuse resistance to the Soviet state and particularly, the policy of collectivisation. The story of the Holodomor is at its most basic a struggle for control over the endless and infinitely fecund fields of the Ukrainian Republic and the attempt to engineer a communist state by violence. Although the revolutionaries had talked of the dictatorship of the proletariat it would be one man who waded to the top through a river of blood in the boots and uniform that he carried in a grotesque but significant gesture. Stalin was at war, but at war with the stuff of humanity itself.

We have looked at how Ukrainian culture flourished in the 1920's but we must now consider how the agricultural policies pursued by the communist state would lead to a war between the leadership of the party and the Ukrainian peasantry that were the bedrock of Ukraine's identity the repository of its language, its songs and its folk poetry.

## **6) Field of Dreams**

We have seen how the Bolsheviks gained control of Ukraine and won support from much of its population by the creation of a virtual state where Ukrainian language and culture masked the power of the party. However, the Ukrainian peasantry would remain a source of resistance to Soviet power in Ukraine<sup>12</sup>. I have so far emphasised how Lenin

---

<sup>12</sup> The account of the legislative base of the Holodomor, the law on natural fines etc is drawn from Holodomor 1932- 1933 Rokiv V Ukraini Yak Henotsyd. Kulchytsky S. Nash Chas.Kyiv 2008

concentrated power in his own hands but it has to be recognised that he saw himself as serving an ideal, the ideal of communism based on reordering the economic relations in Society. Engels and Marx had combined classical economic theory with a Utopian vision of a society free from economic exploitation. It is worth noting that Engels' father owned a factory in Manchester over the Pennines from where I live and that Marx's work was financed by the sweat of the proletariat to whom he promised liberation, even as Engels lamented the poverty that helped finance his own privileged life. To use the extremist language favoured by some, Marx was a parasite and Engels an expropriator. In the society which they envisaged would develop, the Bourgeoisie, the owners of the means of production would be vanquished, the state would wither away and we would live in harmony. Each would give according to his ability and each would receive according to his needs. The future they envisaged was as vague and shadowy as the clouds of smog drifting over nineteenth century Manchester.

The programme that the Russian Communist party adopted in 1919 foresaw the creation of a system of collective agriculture and collective farms. The ideas that Marx had formulated while hunched over his notes in the reading room of the British museum were to be tested on the fields of Ukraine. Market relations would be abolished and economic activity controlled by the state. The peasant would be forced at bayonet point through the gates of an egalitarian heaven. There is no time to trace in detail the various shifts in Soviet policy as the need to generate tax revenues was balanced against the Utopian vision of collective agriculture. We must skip forward to 2 September 1930 when Stalin wrote a few sentences that would change the countryside forever as he initiated the campaign for the final imposition of collective agriculture. The letter that Molotov subsequently received would result in a slew of directives over the coming months but reality, obscured by this blizzard of paper is quite simple. The control that peasants had over their land and their lives would be ripped out of their hands by the organised power of the state. The Kulak or in Ukrainian, Kurkul, that peasant who had perhaps with their own sweat and enterprise become a little more well off were targeted as the 'chief and most ardent enemy of collectivisation' in a plenary resolution of the Ukrainian communist party of December 1930. The attack on the Kurkul was the main weapon in the war to drive peasants into the collective farm by creating terror. However, there was no clear definition of what constituted a Kurkul so the threat of being accused of being more successful and wealthy than other peasants could be used against anyone. In halls with armed activists stood round them, in villages where churches had been destroyed peasants signed up to the collective. A Chekist document from 1930 states that, the individual farmers in one district were to be subjected to grain and meat requisitions until they themselves would ask to join the Kolhosp. In 1932 the campaign of dekulakisation was strengthened in Ukraine as thousands of people were forcibly torn from their homes and settled elsewhere in the Soviet Union. By the end of 1931 the campaign of dekulakisation ceased because most peasants had now joined the collective farm and been stripped of control over the land they lived on and the crops they grew. An ideology that had promised equality had resulted in the enslavement of many of the peasants. During 1931 the chaotic reforms resulted in a paradox that peasants would find themselves surrounded by food but hungry as the dead hand of the state took bread from their mouths.

## 7) Prelude to the Holodomor

Give us this day our daily bread. These few simple words sum up why most researchers think the Holodomor happened. Stephen Wheatcroft claims that the famine was due to grain being taken for economic reasons. Deaths by famine were caused by a mixture of brutality and incompetence.

In fact the Holodomor happened not because grain was taken away but because everything edible was stripped from Ukraine and peasants prevented from fleeing in early 1933. Think about it. If you have no bread you eat something else. If you have nothing else to eat you starve. It's quite simple.

It is true that during 1932 grain was being requisitioned from all across the Soviet Union, a fact which is used by revisionist researchers to call into question the ethnically targeted nature of the Holodomor. However, from August that year onwards Stalin had become increasingly concerned at the possibility of Ukraine separating from the Soviet Union. In a letter of 11<sup>th</sup> August to Kaganovich he stated that he believed that Ukrainian nationalists working together with Polish spies were preparing to sever Ukraine from the Soviet Union and that the Ukrainian party was becoming a 'caricature of a parliament'. He stated bluntly that 'Unless we begin to straighten out the situation in Ukraine, we may lose Ukraine'<sup>13</sup>. His correspondence with Kaganovich is now well known and indeed is not linked to the Holodomor by researchers who are unsympathetic to recognising the Holodomor as genocide. This is rather curious given that the letter initiated the installation of Balyckyj to head up the Secret Police, and conduct a wave of executions and arrests in Ukraine which, as we will see, acted as a blanket under which the Holodomor was perpetrated.

On 7<sup>th</sup> August 1932 the Soviet Union introduced a law to strengthen the defence of Socialist property popularly known as the law of five ears of grain, this allowed peasants to be shot, or if there were extenuating circumstances, jailed for 10 years for taking grain that was state property<sup>14</sup>. This meant that the peasantry could be murdered for trying to eat the crops they had grown. Although the law was applicable to the Soviet Union it was linked to specific measures which, as I will illustrate, would result in the massively high death toll in Ukraine early in 1933. This was followed by a law specific to Ukraine on the 15<sup>th</sup> August which forbade the sale of bread to peasants until the collective farm had met its quota for the bread requisitions by the state.<sup>15</sup> The Ukrainian peasant was thereby prevented from either foraging for food or buying bread.

---

<sup>13</sup> The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-1936. Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2003. Pp. 179-181.

<sup>14</sup> Holodomor 1932- 1933 V Ukraina- Dokumenty i Materialy. Redaktor Pyrih, R. KMA. Kyiv 2007 pp 282- 283

<sup>15</sup> Holodomor 1932- 1933 V Ukraina- Dokumenty i Materialy. Redaktor Pyrih, R. KMA. Kyiv 2007 pp 286- 287

During the Summer and Autumn of 1932 Stalin perceived the autonomy of Ukraine and Ukrainian regions of the Russian Republic as a threat to the integrity of the Soviet state. On 22 October 1932 he sent an 'Extraordinary Commission', led by his henchman Kaganovich, to the North Caucasus which had a substantial Ukrainian population concentrated in the Kuban region. In early November 1932 Kaganovich wrote in his diary that there were organised groups resisting soviet power and linked this to the use of Ukrainian language in Kuban<sup>16</sup>. His solution was to cordon off some of these villages to place them on the black board which meant the confiscation of all products from the stores and the prohibition of trade within these villages, it was in effect a death sentence. Although his diary reveals that he was targeting Ukrainian regions of the North Caucasus his public pronouncement at the Presidium of 23<sup>rd</sup> November deviously referred to the need to concentrate all the pressure for grain requisitions on the Kuban because the quality of the bread was better there, a pretext as thin as a cobweb<sup>17</sup>. The Black Board was mainly targeted on culturally Ukrainian villages and prevented the influx of goods from other areas; became one of the key components in the machinery of mass starvation. According to the former head of the archives of Ukraine, Hennadiy Boryak<sup>18</sup> this system, which had been occasionally used from 1930 onwards, was applied to villages inhabited by 5 million people across Ukraine and Kuban in 1933. The Ukrainian Communist party began placing villages on this black board system en masse from December 6<sup>th</sup> 1932 onwards.<sup>19</sup>

The extension of the black board across much of Ukraine was accompanied by the introduction of natural fines. On 9<sup>th</sup> November 1932 Soviet Ukraine introduces a secret law that is central to the Holodomor and allowed peasants who failed to produce grain, to meet requisitions by means of confiscating other foodstuffs.<sup>20</sup> The law itself talked of meat and potatoes but the evidence, as we will see, is that everything was confiscated from most of rural Ukraine early in 1933.

By December of that year the country, in common with much of the Soviet Union, was experiencing shortages and some people were beginning to distend like grotesque balloons of skin with hunger. Although we have noted some peculiarities regarding the situation in Ukraine and in particular the growing concern at the threat of autonomy some researchers argue that the famine in Ukraine was identical to the famine elsewhere. That case is untenable when we examine the documentary base for the events of 1933. At a politburo session of 27<sup>th</sup> November Stalin spoke of the need to strike a 'destructive blow'<sup>21</sup> against krestyany (peasants) in the collective farms who were resisting grain requisitions. This verbal permutation is probably because as we have noted in their private correspondence and diaries, Stalin and his henchmen could admit a hostility towards Ukrainians. In their public pronouncements they sought to maintain the illusion of a voluntary union of peoples opposed by the evil bourgeois nationalists. At a meeting

<sup>16</sup> Komandyry Velekoho Holodu, Kyiv. 2001. – p.254.

<sup>17</sup> Holodomor 1932- 1933 Rokiv V Ukraini Yak Henotsyd. Kulchytsky S. Nash Chas.Kyiv 2008. p 285

<sup>18</sup> At a Round Table Discussion of the Holodomor at the Ukrainian Embassy on June 10 2008

<sup>19</sup> Holodomor 1932- 1933 V Ukraina- Dokumenty i Materialy. Redaktor Pyrih, R. KMA. Kyiv 2007 p 449

<sup>20</sup> Holodomor 1932- 1933 V Ukraina- Dokumenty i Materialy. Redaktor Pyrih, R. KMA. Kyiv 2007 pp 376- 378

<sup>21</sup> Tragediya Sovetskoy Derevny. Moscow. 2001 Volume 3. – pp .557-559

on 10<sup>th</sup> December Stalin harshly criticised Skrypnyk, the champion of Ukrainianisation in the North Caucasus of ties to Ukrainian nationalist organisations. It is however the secret central committee resolution of 14 December<sup>22</sup> regarding grain requisitions in Ukraine, the North Caucasus and Western Oblasts which reveals the link between the requisitioning of food and the attack on Ukrainian nationalism. Under this resolution the campaign of food requisitioning was to be strengthened while the party in these regions would be purged of counter revolutionary elements and in particular the “bourgeois nationalists” in the Ukrainian communist party. The decree also required the Russification of education and publications in the Kuban. The destructive blow would fall on the Ukrainian countryside for as Stalin said ‘the nationality question is in the essence of the matter a question of the peasantry’<sup>23</sup>.

### 8) The Crushing Blow

The willingness of revisionist researchers to overlook the final round of searches which resulted in everything edible being stripped from Ukraine is the sleight of hand which makes the Holodomor, as a genocide, vanish. However, commonsense, if nothing else, requires us to see that when Stalin arranged for everything edible to be confiscated from Ukrainian areas and sealing the borders it was more than coincidence. The case for the Holodomor as genocide rests on the eyewitness testimonies now running into the hundreds of thousands which say that during a final round of searches everything edible was taken from Ukraine and on four documents-

the New Year Telegram to the Ukrainian farmers  
the Directive of 1933 to seal the borders of Ukraine and Ukrainian areas  
the operative order No.1 of 5<sup>th</sup> December (which talked about the “organised sabotage of bread collection and theft” in Ukraine  
the operative order No.2 of 13<sup>th</sup> February (which talked about liquidating the nationalist underground in Ukraine).

The New Year Telegram, when studied together with the eyewitness testimony and the Directive of 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1933 tell us how the Holodomor was implemented, all foodstuffs were confiscated and the borders were sealed. The orders tell us why, because they show that the starvation of the peasantry was accompanied by executions and terror against a mythical nationalist underground that was hiding grain. I say mythical because search after search in the later part of 1932 had failed to uncover significant quantities of bread and a fairy tale had grown up, despite clear signs of the beginning of mass hunger, about the farmer hiding bread.

The New Year Telegram seems quite innocuous. It was sent to the communist chiefs of Ukraine on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1933 and required them to make everyone in the collective farms aware that

---

<sup>22</sup> Holodomor 1932- 1933 V Ukraina- Dokumenty i Materialy. Redaktor Pyrih, R. KMA. Kyiv 2007 pp 476- 478

<sup>23</sup> The Ukrainian Weekly, June 24, 1984, No. 26, Vol. LII

- if people gave up bread that they had been hiding in the next round of searches they would not be repressed.
- If they continued to hide bread they would face the severest methods of punishment detailed in the Law of 7<sup>th</sup> August 1932, the law of five ears, that is they would be shot.

This may be the most lethal telegram in history<sup>24</sup>. The first point shows that all bread would be taken from Ukraine. However, the second point was addressed to those peasants who did not give up their bread, which in effect meant the vast majority. How would you find out if people were hiding grain/bread? The only way was to search. If bread was found during the course of a search you would be shot. But what would happen if nothing was found?

Most of the villagers in Ukraine knew that as of November 1932 if no bread was found during a search other food would be confiscated, the official term for this was natural fines, and the law talked of confiscating meat and potatoes. However, the evidence is that everything edible was stripped. The telegram had initiated the mass theft from Ukrainian peasants of all their food. Fedir Kapusta, who was born in the Poltava district in 1900, remembered seeing the brigades of activists gather everything from the village, potatoes, cabbages, pumpkins. Hryhoriy Moroz, born in 1920 in Sumy district, remembers the activists removing food that was being cooked and throwing it out of people's houses and interrogating people.

'What are you subsisting on'

'I have nothing'

'Then why are you living'

'Well because I am'

'Why have you not perished' - and here the activists would use the word *zdokh* which is used of the death of an animal rather than a human being.

The eyewitness testimony reveals that entire villages were wiped off the map. Hanna Yermolenko, who was born in 1915, remembers that her village, Katerynka near Kirovograd ceased to exist after the Holodomor. She recollects the activists in early 1933 going from house to house and removing everything edible. She had hidden a few beans in a glove which she concealed in the ceiling. The activists found what can only have been a pathetic morsel and beat her up. They then beat her mother to death in front of her<sup>25</sup>.

Teodora Soroka, who was born in 1924, remembers the activists gathering everything from her house even taking soup off the stove and throwing it into the yard<sup>26</sup>.

---

<sup>24</sup> Holodomor 1932- 1933 V Ukraina- Dokumenty i Materialy. Redaktor Pyrih, R. KMA. Kyiv 2007 p 569

<sup>25</sup> Ukrayinskyj Holocaust 1932- 1933- Svidchennya Tykh Shcho Vyzhyv- Yuri Mytsyk Kyiv 2005 p 182

<sup>26</sup> with the exception of Hanna Yermolenko all the testimonies are taken from Holodomor 1932- 1933 Rokiv V Ukraini Yak Henotsyd pp 304-307

The directive of the communist party and the soviet government prohibiting the departure of starving peasants from Ukraine and the Kuban, issued on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1933, stated that in the Kuban and Ukraine a massive departure of peasants 'in search of bread' has begun into other regions of the Soviet Union. As we have noted the organisers of the Holodomor referred explicitly in correspondence to the need to target Ukrainians but in public pronouncements often used synonyms and the letter referred to 'krestyany' (peasants) as a synonym for Ukrainian peasants. It claimed that 'this departure of peasants, like the departure from Ukraine last year, was organised by the enemies of Soviet power, the Socialist Revolutionaries and the agents of Poland, with the goal of agitation 'through the peasants' in the northern regions of the USSR against the collective farms and against Soviet power as a whole. Last year the Party, Soviet and Chekist organs of Ukraine were caught napping by this counter-revolutionary trick of the enemies of Soviet power. This year we cannot allow a repetition of last year's mistake.'

The Party and the Plenipotentiary of the OGPU [*political police*] of both Northern Caucasus and Ukraine were not to allow the massive departure of peasants from these regions, or to allow peasants to move between North Caucasus and Ukraine. The Russian and Belarusian Parties and the OGPU were ordered to 'immediately arrest all "peasants" of Ukraine and the North Caucasus who have broken through into the north and, after separating out the counter-revolutionary elements, to return the rest to their places of residence'. The GPU transport section was given a similar order.

The directive was signed by the Chairman of the Council of Commissars of the USSR: V. M. Molotov Secretary of the Central Committee of the Pan-Russian Communist Party: J. Stalin. So we have a telegram which initiated the stripping of all food from Ukraine the sealing in of individual villages and the arrest and return of starving peasants fleeing from Ukraine and Ukrainian speaking regions of the USSR.

The order, the directive to stop starving peasants fleeing and the eyewitness statements tell us how the Holodomor was inflicted. The other two documents the operative order No.1 of 5<sup>th</sup> December which talked about the 'organised sabotage of bread collection and theft' in Ukraine and operative order No.2 from 13<sup>th</sup> February which talked about liquidating the nationalist underground in Ukraine are the pretence, the wave of the magician's wand. Of course Stalin who had organised the stripping of all food knew that peasants were not really Polish spies, he was concerned that Ukraine might break free and this was a pre-emptive strike. An order to exterminate Ukrainians by famine would have stripped bare the true nature of the party and exposed the lie on which it was based, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat would have been exposed as a cabal of murderers. He had to create a pretence that peasants were not fleeing because they were starving but really because of the evil machinations of Marshall Pidsulski. Operative orders Nos. 1 and 13 were intended to create the impression that there was a network of spies in Ukraine and indeed the OGPU under Balyckyj did conduct arrests, searches and executions. The blood of innocents was spilled to give credence to a lie but a lie that Stalin feared might become true. Ukraine might break away. A communist leader speaking in the Kharkiv region in 1934 said 'Famine in Ukraine was brought on to

decrease the number of Ukrainians, replace the dead with people from other parts of the USSR, and thereby to kill the slightest thought of any Ukrainian independence.<sup>27</sup>

Balyckyj, the Chief of the Political Police in Ukraine had given the game away when he said in front of an Italian Diplomat 'the ethnographic material will be changed'<sup>28</sup>. The letter in which these words are cited makes ugly reading for the Diplomat concerned was a fascist and an anti-Semite. But we must set that aside and reflect that he was trying to convey a true picture of Soviet reality to his fascist masters and that this quote would seem to fit in with two other curious aspects of the Holodomor. The people who were to be settled in the regions purged of much of their Ukrainian population would need food. Some limited food relief was disbursed to some peasants early in 1933 and this fact is cited by Wheatcroft and the Holodomor deniers as proof that the Holodomor was an accident, it is portrayed as genuine humanitarian aid. In fact the food was 'loaned' to peasants who were able to assist with the Spring sowing campaign and was simply to enable a limited number of peasants to live for long enough to maintain the continuity of the agricultural cycle. Postyshev the functionary in charge of the sowing campaign who toured Kyiv Oblast in 1933 made it clear that aid distributed in hospitals was to be targeted on those who could quickly return to work- the rest were to be left to die<sup>29</sup>. By the summer of that year millions of Ukrainians would have died and measures to replace them began. On August 31<sup>st</sup> 1933 The Council of Peoples' Commissars of the Union of the USSR resolved that 'the resettlement of 10 thousand families to Kuban and Terek, and 15 to 20,000 families to Ukraine (Steppe) by the beginning of 1934' would be organised. Stalin took care to oversee the work of changing Ukraine's ethnography and Kaganovich wrote to him in October 1933 reassuring him that these families would be resettled by the end of the year. The resettlement was accompanied by the Russification of media and education in areas such as the Kuban. The ethnographic material had been changed.

### 9) Calling a spade a spade?

We have seen that Stalin organised the mass starvation of Ukrainians in early 1933. Does this constitute Genocide? The words of the Convention of 1948 are quite clear, genocide is 'any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such including -

Killing members of the group and deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.

There are researchers who are aware of the facts above but argue that the Holodomor was not genocide. The official position of the Israeli government is that 'for us the Holocaust is the only genocide'.

---

<sup>27</sup> V. Danilov et al., *Sovetskaia Derevnia Glazami OGPU\_NKVD*. Vol. 3, book 2. Moscow 2004 Danilov, V et al P. 572

<sup>28</sup> *Lettere De Kharkov- La carestia in Ukraina e nel Caucaso Del Nord Nei Raporti dei Diplomatici Italiani*. A Cura Di Andrea Graziosi – Torino 1991. P 168

<sup>29</sup> *Holod 1932- 1933 na Ukraini Movoyu Dokumentiv*

However there are some matters where debate is not appropriate. Enforced starvation is clearly inflicting on Ukrainian peasantry 'conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part'. Genocide is a legal term and academics such as Ellman and Schneider are placing their own opinions above the letter of international law.

Lemkin himself, who wrote the convention, in a chapter of an unfinished history of genocide discovered by Roman Serbyn, spoke of -

the classic example of Soviet Russification – the destruction of the Ukrainian nation. As long as Ukraine retains its national unity, as long as its people continue to think of themselves as Ukrainians and to seek independence, so long Ukraine poses a serious threat to the very heart of Sovietism. It is no wonder that the Communist leaders have attached the greatest importance to the Russification of this independent[-minded] member of their "Union of Republics," have determined to remake it to fit their pattern of one Russian nation. For the Ukrainian is not and has never been, a Russian. His culture, his temperament, his language, his religion - all are different. [...]

Lemkin referred to the mass executions of Ukraine's elites its

leadership, religious, intellectual, political, its select and determining parts, are quite small and therefore easily eliminated, and so it is upon these groups particularly that the full force of the Soviet axe has fallen, with its familiar tools of mass murder, deportation and forced labor, exile and starvation. The attack has manifested a systematic pattern, with the whole process repeated again and again to meet fresh outburst of national spirit. The first blow is aimed at the intelligentsia, the national brain, so as to paralyse the rest of the body. [...] Going along with this attack on the intelligentsia was an offensive against the churches, priests and hierarchy, the "soul" of Ukraine. Between 1926 and 1932, the Ukrainian Orthodox Autocephalous Church, its Metropolitan (Lypkivsky) and 10,000 clergy were liquidated. [...] The third prong of the Soviet plan was aimed at the farmers, the large mass of independent peasants who are the repository of the tradition, folk lore and music, the national language and literature, the national spirit, of Ukraine. The weapon used against this body is perhaps the most terrible of all - starvation. Between 1932 and 1933, 5,000,000 Ukrainians starved to death

Lemkin's description of the genocide in Ukraine in the 1930's rings true. The view that the Holodomor was an accident or was part of a wider Soviet tragedy ignores the wave of assaults on Ukraine's elite.

### **10) A tragedy of the entire Soviet People?**

Current Russian historiography points to the instance of famine as a tragedy of the entire Soviet People. V Danilov and I Zelenin argue, correctly, that the law of five ears applies

to all of the Soviet Union. However, they ignore the New Year Telegram, the Directive of January 1933, the orders to liquidate nationalism, and the mass confiscation of food from rural Ukraine early in 1933. In this view the Holodomor is somehow cut adrift from the distinct processes operating in Ukraine and Russia. It is of course true that the expropriation of grain affected all bread producing regions of the Soviet Union in 1932. However the mass and coordinated round of searches in 1933 combined with a blockade to stop starving peasants fleeing is limited to Ukraine and Kuban. There were occasional and uncoordinated episodes in other areas of food requisitioning to a similar degree. But there was no co-ordinated mass starvation of an ethnic group combined with the mass murder of its political, cultural and spiritual elite.

If the famine had been a tragedy which affected Russia as much as Ukraine then we would see demographic evidence that vast numbers of people starved in both republics. Mark Tolts, a demographer at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, outlines the pressure on Soviet demographers to boost the numbers of the population and the chaotic state of demographic data<sup>30</sup>. However, the census statistics show that the Ukrainian population of the Soviet Union was 31,194,176 in 1926 and 26,421,212 in 1937, it had shrunk by 16%; whereas the Russian population had grown from 77,791,124 to 93,933,065. The officials who compiled the 1937 census would pay with their lives for their professionalism. However, we know that the collection of demographic data for this period was chaotic. According to Skrypnyk, Balyckyj had admitted that 8 to 9<sup>31</sup> million people died of hunger in Ukraine and the Kuban. Kondrashyn, the leading Russian researcher of this period, has recently suggested that deaths in Ukraine and Kuban were higher than in Russia because the area is more compact<sup>32</sup>. Again thanks to the magic of words the truth vanishes as if it had never been. The explanation that he gives this single sentence is a crude attempt to divert attention from the documentary evidence. We are dealing with a crime comparable in scale to the Holocaust but one from which the world averted its eyes. Even today academics with ties to Russian universities are reluctant to acknowledge the existence of the documents and the implication of the testimonies that we have discussed.

## 12) You cannot hope to bribe or twist

Hilaire Belloc penned a charming little ditty which sums up many people's view of the press

---

<sup>30</sup> "The Failure of Demographic Statistics: A Soviet Response to Population Troubles,"

Paper presented at the IUSSP XXIVth General Population Conference, Salvador-Bahia, Brazil, August 18-24, 2001

<sup>31</sup> This quote was published in the West along with many other sources, such as Duranty which give high totals for the Holodomor. Kulchytsky and others argue for lower totals based on the Census of between 3 and 5 million and on migration statistics which may have been manipulated. However there was continuous pressure on demographers to inflate population statistics so the words of the people in charge cannot simply be dismissed on the basis of demographic evidence. Also the concept of only counting excess deaths is questionable- the vast majority of all deaths in the Ukrainian countryside during the Holodomor, including those within the natural death rate, may well be attributed to the famine. Even if you are due to die a premature death by enforced starvation is still murder.

<sup>32</sup> see <http://www.day.kiev.ua/153901/> for Kulchytsky's analysis of Kondrashin's views

You cannot hope to bribe or twist  
Thank God! The British Journalist  
But seeing what the man will do  
Unbribed there's no occasion to

However it was an American, Walter Duranty, who wrote for the New York Times, who became the monarch of falsehoods concerning the Holodomor. Muggeridge described him as 'the biggest liar I have met in 50 years of journalism'. However, Duranty's work became the most authoritative view of the Soviet Union. He privately admitted that as many as 10 million people may have died of famine in 1933. In public he claimed that there was no serious famine in the Soviet Union. He retains, after death, the honour of the Pulitzer Prize. He was however, merely the lead violin in an orchestra of liars. Eugene Lyons, a journalist based in Moscow at the time of the Holodomor, recalls how journalists systematically discredited both the famine and Gareth Jones

Throwing down Jones was as unpleasant a chore as fell to any of us in years of juggling facts to please dictatorial regimes... we admitted enough to soothe our consciences but in roundabout phrases that damned Jones as a liar<sup>33</sup>

Gareth Jones was banned from returning to the Soviet Union because his articles gave a true account of the starvation conditions he saw in the winter of 1933. His reward was to have his articles passed over by publications such as the Economist. The liars and charlatans of the press corps dined in relative luxury in Moscow while hundreds of miles South bodies were gathered in carts and tipped into mass graves.

### **13) History always repeats itself**

The first time as tragedy, the second as farce. The dominant orthodoxy in British and indeed American universities is that the Holodomor was not Genocide. James Mace who painstakingly collated the eye witness testimonies, which are one of the key bases of evidence for the Holodomor certainly felt that he had been hounded out of Western academe and stated that some academics accused him of falsifying history. The most vocal ally of the Russian view, and the most influential researcher of recent decades, Stephen G Wheatcroft, took a decision early on in his career to ignore the vast volume of eyewitness testimony and, with his mentor Davies, did valuable work unearthing much Soviet archival material but painting a revisionist view of the Soviet union as a country run in effect by well meaning incompetents trying to industrialise a backward country at breakneck speed. The famine was, they argue, the result of cock up rather than conspiracy. More recently in a work published in 2004 they have argued that the issue of some grain relief to Ukraine in early 1933 indicates that there was no Genocide<sup>34</sup>. I have dealt with the fact that the evidence shows some relief was issued to allow the spring

---

<sup>33</sup> More than a Grain of Truth- the Biography of Gareth Richard Vaughn Jones page 303

<sup>34</sup> R. W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931-1933*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. xvii 555 pp.

sowing to go ahead a nicety which is entirely absent from their work. The mass searches preceding this specific and targeted food relief are ignored.

Rather curiously they sent this book to Stanislav Kulchytskyy, the leading Ukrainian Holodomor researcher, in 2004 with a note stating that Conquest had now changed his mind and did not believe that the Holodomor was Genocide. Kulchytskyy's response was a detailed explication of the New Year Telegram and the concept of natural fines combined with the eyewitness testimony. His work is the major source for this lecture and builds what seems to be an unanswerable case. However, his arguments are left unanswered by Wheatcroft who instead wrote a letter to a wide circulation publication in Melbourne the Age, published on November 20<sup>th</sup> 2007, which stated that 'Most advocates of the Genocide claim, including the Ukrainian President, cite the work of Robert Conquest. With respect, they should be aware that Dr. Conquest no longer supports this claim. He recently told me that it was no longer his opinion that Stalin purposely inflicted the 1933 famine. Rather, he argued, 'he (Stalin) could have prevented it but put Soviet interest other than feeding the starving first, thus consciously abetting it'<sup>35</sup>.

In fact the argument for the Holodomor as Genocide is based not on Conquest's point of view but on hundreds of thousands of eyewitness testimonies and the documents showing that massive enforced starvation was inflicted on Ukraine in 1933. Wheatcroft ignores the natural fines issue instead suggesting that the food was requisitioned for economic interest, an argument that can be thrown into the garbage along with the pots of stew and the flower seeds all of those economically valueless foodstuffs which were taken from people in 1933. You cannot export a pot of Borsch that has been tipped into the mud.

He is, however, incorrect in his characterisation of Robert Conquest who remains unwavering in his view that the Holodomor was an act of Genocide. As he wrote in Standby Magazine in September 2008

The U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, drafted before much was really known about the Terror-famine, opens by saying that 'in time of peace or in time of War' it is a crime under international law to commit 'acts with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as such' by 'deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part' ....

It is proven that the mass deaths from starvation were due to the removal of foodstuffs by the authorities, following decrees from above. The decrees applied to specified areas, especially the Ukraine, but also the largely Ukrainian-inhabited Kuban, the Don and later other north Caucasus regions. There were also blockades against their getting food from the north (in each case the villages were harder hit than the towns). There is some dispute about certain points, but not on the essentials. Stalin starved others besides Ukrainians. But he was capable of

---

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/news/letters/decision-a-win-for-science-over-ideology/2007/11/29/1196037070785.html?page=fullpage>

various verbal variations – as when he and his supporters argued that the Doctors' Plot of 1953 was not anti-semitic since several gentiles were also arrested.<sup>36</sup>

I telephoned Dr. Conquest in his office at the Hoover Institute on February 3rd 2009. He was surprised to discover that his views had been misrepresented. The letter that Wheatcroft wrote does not actually articulate any meaningful argument against the Holodomor. If there are those here who have believed his vociferously expressed claims about the Holodomor in the past it is time to realise that this Colossus of Soviet studies has feet of Clay.

### 13) Lies Damned Lies and Diplomacy

Auden described the 1930's as 'a low dishonest decade' and the behaviour of the British Diplomatic Corps during this period shows that they were willing to ignore the deaths of millions of people in the interest of not upsetting Uncle Joe. As the authors of the Foreign Office and the Famine note 'Britain ...was the first European nation to establish diplomatic relations with Moscow after the revolution, London knew more, with the possible exception of Berlin, about the situation in the Soviet Union than any other Western government.'<sup>37</sup> Sir Laurence Collier, head of the Foreign Office Northern Department, wrote that 'we have a certain amount of information about famine conditions in South Russia [but] we do not want to make it public, however, because our relations with the Soviet Government will be prejudiced'<sup>38</sup>. The diplomats kept silent as report after report dropped onto the desks of their Whitehall offices.

Anyone who writes to the British Government asking them to recognise the Holodomor as a Genocide receives a similar blandly worded response composed of a few sympathetic words, the Holodomor was a terrible man made tragedy, a few comments about how some Minister or minor royal has laid a wreath in honour of the dead at the Holodomor memorial, and a statement that there is no consensus among academics about the Holodomor being a genocide. In 2007 I obtained the academic material which is used to underpin the government's argument that the Holodomor was not Genocide, the research paper produced by the Ministry's own internal academics at the request of the British Ambassador in Kyiv. I have the letter that his Excellency wrote requesting the research to be undertaken which suggests, in bloodless corporate language that 'we need to get our lines straight' about the famine, particularly in view of the Ukrainian government's wish to see the Holodomor recognised as a Genocide. Part of the letter has been withheld under Freedom of Information Act on the grounds that it might damage relations with Ukraine. The researcher replies to the Ambassador that he has always sided with those historians such as Wheatcroft and Davies who argue that the famine was not Genocide. The subsequent paper he produces includes a rehash of their arguments, an acknowledgement, which significantly is not referenced, that there is some evidence of a

---

<sup>36</sup> See <http://www.standpointmag.co.uk/patriot-poet-and-prophet-september?page=0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C9>

<sup>37</sup> Carynnyk, Marko (et. all) The Foreign Office and the Famine: British Documents on Ukraine and the Great Famine of 1932-33. Kingston, Ontario, Limestone Press, 1988, pg. 63.

<sup>38</sup> More than a Grain of Truth- the Biography of Gareth Richard Vaughn Jones page 303

policy of deliberate starvation of the Soviet Peasantry. The paper appears to accept Russian views about the lack of a distinct historical process operating in Ukraine.

The context of Soviet nationalities policy and the final fatal round of searches are ignored. My lobbying seems to have produced one change in the official response- the word Holodomor is used. The Government has in May 2008 promised to work with Ukraine to raise awareness of the Holodomor. But the research team, and as a result the Ministers, are stuck with a dated account of the Holodomor which ignores the eye witness testimony. The final argument in the paper is that Britain opposes retrospectively applying international law and that the Holodomor predates the Convention is clearly untenable. The Convention was written in 1948 and this approach would rule out the Holocaust as an act of Genocide. In fact The U.N. Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity<sup>39</sup> eliminates the argument that acts of Genocide committed prior to the Genocide Convention are not subject to prosecution.

In my subsequent correspondence with the Desk Officer for Ukraine at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office he argued that the famine was not specific to Ukraine because it also affected the Kuban, a statement which shows that he was not familiar with the primary sources on the Holodomor. He also, following one of Wheatcroft's statements on Conquest, which I addressed earlier, states in one of his e mails that Robert Conquest no longer believes the Holodomor to be a Genocide. At the present time therefore we can expect to see some government participation in commemorative events but, behind the public sympathy, the British state will not accept the reality of the Holodomor. Indeed so far only 14 states have so far recognised the Holodomor as an act of Genocide and 6 states have recognised it as a criminal act of the Stalinist regime<sup>40</sup> and the European Parliament has now condemned it as a crime against humanity.

One other country which seems to be unable to recognise the Holodomor as Genocide is worth mentioning here. The United States recognises the Holodomor as a criminal act and in 2006 the U.S. Congress passed HR562 for the construction of a Holodomor Memorial in Washington, DC, which authorised the Government of Ukraine 'to establish a memorial on Federal land in the District of Columbia to honor the victims of the Ukrainian famine-genocide of 1932-1933'. However, according to Morgan Williams 'the United States Congress has never officially, upfront, directly, and in a Resolution for this specific purpose, ever Resolved that the Holodomor is a genocide... despite heavy lobbying from Ukrainian Americans and Armenian Americans. Such direct and specific actions through Resolutions by the U.S. Congress regarding genocides, for many years and through several U.S. Presidents have been strongly opposed by the Office of the U.S. President and the U.S. Department of State.'<sup>41</sup> But why?? I hope that one day I can return to you with an explanation.

#### **14) Holodomor.org.uk**

---

<sup>39</sup> U.N. GAOR, 23rd Sess., Supp. No. 18, at 40, U.N. Doc. A/7218 (1968).

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.ua/mfa/ua/publication/content/14528.htm>

<sup>41</sup> In an e mail of 31 December 2008 to the Holodomor Commemoration Working Group

In 2007 I established my site [holodomor.org.uk](http://holodomor.org.uk) to campaign for the British government to recognise the Holodomor as a Genocide and succeeded in gaining an offer of publication for my translations of Tychyna, from Poetry Salzburg Review, two achievements which make me proud. I would like to thank Jeff Mowatt who made the sight possible and the editor of Poetry Salzburg Review for displaying a courage that is rare in the poetry world and being the first small press publisher to make Ukrainian literature in translation available to a wider public. However, it is in a way a sad comment on England's perception of Ukraine that we should have to campaign for this appalling act to be acknowledged and the absence in English cultural life of both the Holodomor and an awareness of Ukrainian identity and culture is lamentable.

I will end this lecture by affirming that we can change the image of Ukraine in the U.K. Although the government is unlikely to revise its stance on the Holodomor soon because BP needs the vast seas of black gold locked in Russia's Siberian regions should campaign because we have a duty to the past and, most importantly, to the dead who deserve to have a true account of why they were murdered embedded in England's culture. This lecture may be the only lecture given from John O' Grouts to Lands End in which the New Year Telegram and natural fires are mentioned. Elsewhere, beneath baroque stonework or in brick built seventies polytechnics the misleading views of revisionist historians will be repeated. There is a danger that the voices of the still living witnesses will not be heard here in England. But if we campaign and make sure that the truth is known to a wider public we can expose the flawed research which ignores the testimony of the victims and the laws allowing enforced starvation together with the cynicism of a political elite which values a barrel of Brent Crude more highly than the moral obligations that make us human.

Those politicians, and diplomats who know of what happened in 1933, but choose to avert their eyes or keep silent have made a bargain with Satan, selling their souls for their careers. While dancing with Stalin on the graves of the dead they have forgotten their obligations before humanity. The Holodomor was a crime against each one of us. We have to remember the truth together and resolve that such acts will not be allowed to re-occur. There is no other path to a better world.