

### 3) EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS AND MEMOIRS

#### Introduction

This section contains descriptions, reports, and memoirs of the famine by eyewitnesses and contemporaries.

In *Kapoot*, Carveth Wells, a world traveler and writer, notes that “the farther we penetrated into the Ukraine” in July 1932, “the less food there was and the more starvation to be seen on every side.” This is followed by one of the first reports of 1933 about the famine, filed by Gareth Jones: it was immediately disputed by the *New York Times* reporter Walter Duranty. Two other journalists, Malcolm Muggeridge and William Chamberlin, both saw the famine as a struggle between the Soviet state and the peasantry and blamed the authorities for it.

The French journalist Suzanne Bertillon interviewed Martha Stebalo, an American citizen of Ukrainian origin who had visited famine-stricken Ukraine in July–August 1933. She concludes that the Kremlin organized the famine to destroy Ukrainian hopes of self-rule.

Harry Lang, a journalist with the Yiddish-language *Jewish Daily Forward* (New York), provides horrific details of the famine, notes the resistance of Ukraine’s peasants to collective farming, likens a village to “cemeteries of houses,” and recognizes that the famine was man-made. He visits a model Jewish collective farm, noting that aid from Jews living abroad helped save its members from starvation.

Whiting Williams, who traveled in Ukraine in 1933, describes how peasants hoped to save their children by abandoning them in Kharkiv. He was told that these “wild children” would be “unloaded out in the open country—too far out for it to be possible to walk back to town.”

Eugene Lyons describes how Western journalists downplayed or failed to report on the famine. A onetime fellow traveler, Lyons directs his ire at the Pulitzer Prize winner Duranty of the *New York Times*. Ewald Ammende’s *Human Life in Russia*, the first major study of the famine, gives a scathing analysis of the staged visit to Ukraine in the late summer of 1933 by the former French prime minister Edouard Herriot, who denounced reports of the famine as Nazi propaganda.

Victor Kravchenko and Lev Kopelev both took part in the grain-requisition campaigns. Kravchenko describes how one of Stalin’s emissaries, Mendel Khataevich, insisted that grain be requisitioned mercilessly from the peasantry. Kopelev admits to a fanatical belief in the regime at the time of the famine.

Accounts by four Western ex-communists follow. Freda Uitley notes that the famine was particularly intense in Ukraine and was caused by Soviet policies, which “deliberately left the peasants to die of starvation.” Describing a visit to a lifeless village near Kharkiv, Fred Beal states: “I have seen dead people who had died naturally, before. But this was from a cause and a definite one. A cause which I was somehow associated with, which I had been supporting.” Adam Tawdul, who went to the USSR to work as an engineer in 1931, met the Ukrainian minister of education, Mykola Skrypnyk, who told him that eight million had died in Ukraine. The secret-police chief Vsevolod Balytsky told Tawdul that the number was eight to nine million. The well-known writer Arthur Koestler describes seeing starving men, women, and children, whom his traveling companions dismissed as kulaks.

Two selections deal with the reaction to the famine on the part of Ukrainians living in Poland. Stepan Baran, a politician and journalist, describes how hungry Ukrainians trying to flee to Poland and Romania were shot by Soviet border patrols. Milena Rudnytska, a political leader and feminist, reports that although the Council of the League of Nations did not deny the

existence of the famine, it did no more than instruct its president to turn to the International Red Cross. Thus, according to Rudnytska, “[T]he League of Nations, under the pretext of procedural impediments, washed its hands in the manner of Pilate.”

This section concludes with comments by the post-Stalin Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and by Viacheslav Molotov, a principal organizer of the Holodomor. Khrushchev attributes the lack of information about the famine to fear of Stalin, while Molotov denies that it ever occurred.

**Carveth Wells, *Kapoot: The Narrative of a Journey from Leningrad to Mount Ararat in Search of Noah’s Ark* (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1933). Excerpts, pp. 113–16, 120–22.**

Grant Carveth Wells (1887–1957) was an explorer, world traveler, and writer who described his travels in the following books: *Six Years in the Malay Jungle* (1925), *Let’s Do the Mediterranean* (1928), *In Coldest Africa* (1931), *Adventure* (1931), *Exploring the World* (1934), *Bermuda in Three Colors* (1936), *Panamexico* (1937), *North of Singapore* (1940), *Introducing Africa* (1944), and *The Road to Shalimar* (1952).

The extraordinary thing was that the farther we penetrated into the Ukraine, which used to be the “Granary of Russia,” the less food there was and the more starvation to be seen on every side. Hour after hour the train passed through country that looked very much like North Dakota or Saskatchewan except that it was covered with weeds as far as the eye could see.

Farm houses were in ruins everywhere, roofs gone, fences broken down, wagons without wheels, farming implements lying about in every stage of *kapootness* while wretched-looking peasants with rags tied around their feet were to be seen wandering about aimlessly and watching the train go by without a smile on their faces.... None of us knew what tragedies had been enacted here as a result of trying to force the people to join collectivized farms and the liquidating of the Kulaks. Once or twice a day we would pass a long freight train that had been shunted into a siding to permit our passage, loaded with so-called Kulaks who were being transported to Siberia, where they would be liquidated by Nature or by the bullet of a taskmaster in a lumber camp.

The sight of these poor people, riding behind the bars of cattle trucks, was pitiful....

Packed like sardines, without any sanitary arrangements whatever and with only the food and water that the people themselves may have thought of bringing, thousands and thousands of helpless human beings have been transported from their homes to the worst districts of Russia’s arctic regions....

We ourselves happened to be passing through the Ukraine and the Caucasus in the very midst of the famine in July, 1932. From the train windows, children could be seen eating grass. The sight of small children with stomachs enormously distended is not at all uncommon in Africa or other tropical countries, but this was the first time I had ever seen white children in such a state.

Although we did not know it, there happened to be in Russia about the same time as we were, two American girls, Miss Alva Christensen and Miss Mary Degive of Atlanta, Georgia. Describing one of the scenes they witnessed, these two young explorers of the Soviet Union state:

“At one table sat five Soviet officials, partaking of expensive liqueurs and chocolate cakes covered with rich cream. This does not coincide with Communists’ stories of sacrifice for the sake of the masses. We thought of that little incident many times when we saw the swollen bellied Russian children on all fours eating grass like so many sheep!”....

Here is an extract from Zetta’s [his wife’s] diary....

...We have arrived at the station. My God! What a sight! I shall never forget it. Poverty, filth, disease and hunger everywhere. Women in rags and tatters are lying about in the dust and dirt half asleep with emaciated little babies sucking at their empty breasts. The people’s clothes are actually tied on with bits of string and they look as if they had lived in them for years without taking them off. I can see one poor woman with four small children. The smallest looks about a week old and is nursing at one breast while another about year old is tugging at the other. Now she has moved the year old baby and is nursing a two year old and pushing the oldest child away. She is nursing all three children while she herself is chewing on a small cucumber. There are pieces of old watermelon rind on the ground about her. I see a little girl who looks about ten years old to judge from her skinny little body but her face looks like that of a woman thirty years old. She is taking care of a tiny baby whose face is purple with the cold. Even I am cold at this hour of the morning. I smiled at the child but she didn’t smile back; I’m wondering if she has ever learned to smile.

**[Reuters], “Famine in Russia. Englishman’s Story. What He Saw on a Walking Tour,”**  
***Manchester Guardian*, 30 March 1933. Online at**  
**[http://colley.co.uk/garethjones/soviet\\_articles/walking\\_tour.htm](http://colley.co.uk/garethjones/soviet_articles/walking_tour.htm).**

Gareth Jones (1905–35) was a journalist and foreign-affairs adviser to Prime Minister David Lloyd George of Great Britain. In early 1933, following a trip to Germany, he traveled to Russia and Ukraine. On his return to Berlin in late March he issued a press release on the famine that was published by many newspapers. Walter Duranty of the *New York Times* tried to discredit Jones’s report in his article “Russians Hungry, But Not Starving,” published on 31 March 1933. Banned from returning to the Soviet Union, Jones left in late 1934 for the Far East, where he was killed, apparently by bandits, in August 1935.

*Berlin, March 29*

“Russia to-day is in the grip of famine, which is proving as disastrous as the catastrophe of 1921, when millions died,” said Mr. Gareth Jones, formerly one of Mr. Lloyd George’s political secretaries, when he arrived in Berlin this morning on his way to London after a long walking trip through the Ukraine and other districts of the Soviet Union.

Mr. Jones, who speaks Russian fluently, is reporting to the Institute of International Affairs to-morrow. In an interview with the New York “Evening Post,” Mr. Jones said that famine on a colossal scale was impending. It meant death to millions by hunger and the beginnings of serious unemployment in a land which has hitherto prided itself of every man having a job. This summed up Mr. Jones’s first-hand observations.

The arrest of the British engineers in Moscow is a symbol of panic, and is a consequence of conditions worse than in 1921, when millions died of hunger (declared Mr. Jones). The trial, beginning on Saturday, of the British engineers is merely a sequel to the recent shooting of 35 prominent workers of agriculture, including the vice commissar in the Ministry of Agriculture, in

an attempt to check the popular wrath at the famine which haunts every district of the Soviet Union.

I walked alone through villages and twelve collective farms. Everywhere was the cry, "There is no bread; we are dying." This cry came to me from every part of Russia. In a train a Communist denied to me that there was a famine. I flung into the spittoon a crust of bread I had been eating from my own supply. The peasant, my fellow-passenger, fished it out and ravenously ate it. I threw orange peel into the spittoon. The peasant again grabbed and devoured it. The Communist subsided.

A foreign expert returning from Kazak[h]stan told me that one million out of five million have died of hunger. I can believe it. After Stalin the most hated man in Russia is Bernard Shaw; to many of those who can read and have read his descriptions of plentiful food in their starving land the future is blacker than the present. There is insufficient seed. Many of the peasants are too weak to work the land. The new taxation policy, which promised to take only a fixed amount of grain from the peasants, will fail to encourage production because the peasants refuse to trust the Government.

In short, the Government's policy of collectivisation and the peasants' resistance to it have brought Russia to the worst catastrophe since the famine of 1921 swept away the population of whole districts. Coupled with this, the prime reason for the breakdown is the lack of skilled labour and the collapse of transport and finance.

**Walter Duranty, "Russians Hungry, But Not Starving. Deaths From Diseases Due to Malnutrition High, Yet the Soviet Is Entrenched. Larger Cities Have Food. Ukraine, North Caucasus and Lower Volga Regions Suffer From Shortages. Kremlin's 'Doom' Denied. Russian and Foreign Observers in Country See No Ground for Predictions of Disaster." *New York Times*, 31 March 1933. Online at [http://colley.co.uk/garethjones/soviet\\_articles/russians\\_hungry\\_not\\_starving.htm](http://colley.co.uk/garethjones/soviet_articles/russians_hungry_not_starving.htm).**

Walter Duranty (1884–1957) was a journalist who served as Moscow bureau chief for the *New York Times* from 1922 to 1936 and received the Pulitzer Prize in 1932 for his reporting on the Soviet Union. Some of Duranty's writings on the Soviet Union have been deemed controversial, especially those on the famine, the severity of which he downplayed, and for which he has been posthumously criticized. In addition to his many articles on the Soviet Union, Duranty authored several books on the USSR, among them *Red Economics* (1932); *Duranty Reports Russia* (1934); *The Kremlin and the People* (1941); *USSR: The Story of Soviet Russia* (1944); and *Stalin & Co.: The Politburo, The Men Who Run Russia* (1949).

Special Cable to *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

MOSCOW, March 30.—In the middle of the diplomatic duel between Great Britain and the Soviet Union over the accused British engineers there appears from a British source a big scare story in the American press about famine in the Soviet Union, with "thousands already dead and millions menaced by death from starvation."

Its author is Gareth Jones, who is a former secretary to David Lloyd George and who recently spent three weeks in the Soviet Union and reached the conclusion that the country was "on the verge of a terrific smash," as he told the writer.

Mr. Jones is a man of a keen and active mind, and he has taken the trouble to learn Russian, which he speaks with considerable fluency, but the writer thought Mr. Jones's judgment

was somewhat hasty and asked him on what it was based. It appeared that he had made a forty-mile walk through villages in the neighborhood of Kharkov and had found conditions sad.

I suggested that that was a rather inadequate cross-section of a big country, but nothing could shake his conviction of impending doom.

#### *Predictions of Doom Frequent.*

The number of times foreigners, especially Britons, have shaken rueful heads as they composed the Soviet Union's epitaph can scarcely be computed, and in point of fact it has done incalculable harm since the day when William C. Bullitt's able and honest account of the situation was shelved and negated during the Versailles Peace Conference by reports that Admiral Kolchak, White Russian leader, had taken Kazan—which he never did—and that the Soviet power was “on the verge of an abyss.”

Admiral Kolchak faded. Then General Denikin took Orel and the Soviet Government was on the verge of an abyss again, and General Yudenich “took” Petrograd. But where are Generals Denikin and Yudenich now?

A couple of years ago another British “eyewitness” reported a mutiny in the Moscow garrison and “rows of corpses neatly piled in Theatre Square,” and only this week a British news agency revealed a revolt of the Soviet Fifty-fifth Regiment at Dauria, on the Manchurian border. All bunk, of course.

This is not to mention a more regrettable incident of three years ago when an American correspondent discovered half the Ukraine flaming with rebellion and “proved” it by authentic documents eagerly proffered by Rumanians, which documents on examination appeared to relate to events of eight or ten years earlier.

#### *Saw No One Dying.*

But to return to Mr. Jones. He told me there was virtually no bread in the villages he had visited and that the adults were haggard, gaunt and discouraged, but that he had seen no dead or dying animals or human beings.

I believed him because I knew it to be correct not only of some parts of the Ukraine but of sections of the North Caucasus and lower Volga regions and, for that matter, Kazak[h]stan, where the attempt to change the stock-raising nomads of the type and the period of Abraham and Isaac into 1933 collective grain farmers has produced the most deplorable results.

It is all too true that the novelty and mismanagement of collective farming, plus the quite efficient conspiracy of Feodor M. Konar and his associates in agricultural commissariats, have made a mess of Soviet food production. [Konar was executed for sabotage.]

But—to put it brutally—you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs, and the Bolshevik leaders are just as indifferent to the casualties that may be involved in their drive toward socialization as any General during the World War who ordered a costly attack in order to show his superiors that he and his division possessed the proper soldierly spirit. In fact, the Bolsheviks are more indifferent because they are animated by fanatical conviction.

Since I talked to Mr. Jones I have made exhaustive inquiries about this alleged famine situation. I have inquired in Soviet commissariats and in foreign embassies with their network of consuls, and I have tabulated information from Britons working as specialists and from my personal connections, Russian and foreign.

#### *Disease Mortality Is High.*

All of this seems to me to be more trustworthy information than I could get by a brief trip through any one area. The Soviet Union is too big to permit a hasty study, and it is the foreign correspondent's job to present a whole picture, not a part of it. And here are the facts:

There is a serious food shortage throughout the country, with occasional cases of well-managed State or collective farms. The big cities and the army are adequately supplied with food. There is no actual starvation or deaths from starvation, but there is widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition.

In short, conditions are definitely bad in certain sections—the Ukraine, North Caucasus and Lower Volga. The rest of the country is on short rations but nothing worse. These conditions are bad, but there is no famine.

The critical months in this country are February and March, after which a supply of eggs, milk and vegetables comes to supplement the shortage of bread—if, as now, there is a shortage of bread. In every Russian village food conditions will improve henceforth, but that will not answer one really vital question—What about the coming grain crop?

Upon that depends not the future of the Soviet power, which cannot and will not be smashed, but the future policy of the Kremlin. If through climatic conditions, as in 1921, the crop fails, then, indeed, Russia will be menaced by famine. If not, the present difficulties will be speedily forgotten.

**Gareth Jones, “Reds Let Peasants Starve. Famine Found Even in Large City in Ukraine,”**  
*New York American / Los Angeles Examiner (and other Hearst syndicated papers), 14*  
**January 1935. Online at [http://colley.co.uk/garethjones/soviet\\_articles/hearst3.htm](http://colley.co.uk/garethjones/soviet_articles/hearst3.htm).**

“The Communists came and they seized our land, they stole our cattle and they tried to make us work like serfs in a farm where nearly everything was owned in common”—the eyes of the group of Ukrainian farmers flashed with anger as they spoke to me—“and do you know what they did to those who resisted? They shot them down ruthlessly.”

I was listening to another famine-stricken village further down the icy railroad track along which I was tramping and the story I now heard was one of real warfare in the villages.

The peasants told me how in each village the group of the hardest-working men—the kulaks they called them—had been captured and their land, livestock and houses confiscated, and they themselves herded into cattle trucks and sent for a thousand or two thousand miles or more with almost no food on a journey to the forests of the north where they were to cut timber as political prisoners.

In one village which was inhabited by German colonists—and what a spotlessly clean and well-kept place it was!—they told me trainloads had left the district packed full of wailing farmers and their families.

Torn [a]way from their homes, prisoners of the heartless secret police and of the hated land army, which exists to drive the peasants to work, these formerly well-to-do farmers had as their only crime the fact that they had worked all day and into the night, had had little more land and had accumulated one or two more cows than others.

### *Ninety Children Die on the Train*

Some months later the news arrived in the district about the exiled colonists, and it was this: NINETY CHILDREN HAD DIED OF HUNGER AND DISEASE ON THE WAY TO SIBERIA.

The Communists I spoke to did not deny that they had ruthlessly exiled the hardest working farmers.

On the contrary they were proud of it and boasted that they would show no mercy to those who wanted to own their own land.

“We must be strong and crush the accursed enemies of the working class,” the Communists would say to me, “let them suffer now. We have no place for them in our society.”

Nor did they deny the shootings that had gone on in the villages.

“If any man, woman or child goes out into the field at night in the Summer and picks a single ear of wheat, then the punishment according to law is death by shooting,” the Communists explained to me.

And the peasants assured me that this was true.

The greatest crime in Russia is the taking of socialized property and murder is regarded as a mere relic of capitalist upbringing and comparatively unimportant compared with the sin of the mother who goes out to the field at night to gather ears of grain in order to feed her children.

### *Betrays Mother: He Is a Hero!*

One child who denounced his mother to the secret police for plucking wheat at night was made into a great hero throughout Russia.

His praise was lauded in all the schools as the boy who was noble enough to betray his mother for the good of the state!

Tramp! tramp! tramp! on I went from village to village, hearing all this news. Everywhere the same tale of hunger and terror.

In one place the folk whispered how some miles away the peasants had refused to give up their land and cows and form a Communist collective farm.

“So they sent the Red army soldiers to force them,” they told me. “But the soldiers would not shoot upon their fellow peasants.

“What did they do? They called the YOUNG COMMUNISTS in from the town and THEY shot down all the peasants who would not give up their land and their cows.”

Throughout Russia there have been these small revolts, but they have been easily and bloodily crushed.

My shoes were becoming worn out by plodding along on the mixture of grit and stones and ice on the railroad track and each step brought a new cold squelch of hardened snow or a new stone through the soles.

But I was buoyed up by the desire to solve a problem—why was there a famine in one of the richest wheat growing countries in the world? And to each peasant I asked; “Potchemu golod?—why is there a famine?”

### *Famine Is No Fault of Nature*

The peasants replied: “It is not the fault of nature. It is the fault of the Communists.

“They took away our land. Why should we work if we have not our own land?

“They took away our cows. Why should we work if we have not our own cows and if we have to share what is our own with all the drunkards and lazy fellows in the village? They took away our wheat. Why should we work, if we know that our wheat will be taken away from us?

“The Communists have turned us into slaves and we shall not be happy until we have our own land, our own cows and our own wheat again.”

Suddenly, however, there came a stop to my investigations. It happened in a small station, where I was talking with a group of peasants: “We are dying,” they wailed and poured out the old story of their woes. A red-faced, well fed OGPU policeman in uniform approached us and stood listening for a few moments.

Then came the outburst, and from his lips poured a series of Russian curses. “Clear away, you! Stop telling him about hunger! Can’t you see he’s a foreigner?”

He turned to me and roared: “Come along. What are you doing here? Show me your documents.”

### *A Welcome Anti-Climax*

Visions of a secret police prison darted before my mind. The OGPU man looked at my passport and beckoned to one of the crowd, whom I had taken to be an ordinary passenger, but who obviously was in the secret police.

He came to me and in the most polite and respectful terms bade me follow him. “I shall have to take you to the nearest city, Kharkov.”

At this moment a train came and we entered it.

Throughout the journey I impressed him with the fact that I had interviewed Lenin’s widow, and a number of commissars and great panjandrums of the Soviet régime, and by the time we reached Kharkov I believed he was thoroughly convinced that any real arrest of myself would plunge Russia and Europe and the United States into a world war.

For he decided to accompany me to a foreign consulate in Kharkov and he left me at the doorstep, while I, rejoicing at my freedom, bade him a polite farewell—an anti-climax but a welcome one.

My journey through the villages was over and I was in the chief city of the Ukraine, where all I saw confirmed my views of the Russian famine.

In the streets there were peasant beggars from all parts of the country who had fled from the hunger of the villages to seek food in the towns, and their pale children stood with outstretched hands crying: “Uncle, give us bread!”

I spoke with workers who told me that they had been dismissed from the factories, because the factories were slowing down their work, and when they were thus made unemployed they had their bread cards taken away from them and were ordered to leave the towns.

I saw a bread line of over a thousand nerve-wrecked people.

“We have been waiting here for nearly two days,” one of the women in the queue said to me, “and perhaps the supply will run out before we reach the first place.”

In another street I saw police driving away a hundred ragged men and women who had formed a bread line outside a store.

“We want bread,” they cried. “There is no more bread left,” yelled the police, but the crowd did not give up hope and would not.

### *Hundreds of Homeless Boys*

The most terrible sight, however, was the homeless boys, who wandered about the street in filthy rags, who were covered with the sores of diseases, and whose features were depraved and criminal.

Three hundred of them had been rounded up and were homed in the station, where I glanced at them through a window and noticed some lying on the bare ground in a severe state of typhus.

Those have been some of the results of the Soviet regime which I witnessed MYSELF.

Can it be wondered at that there has been a feeling of revolt among the population and that there have been plots within the Communist party itself?

The opposition is too weak to overthrow the regime which is powerfully entrenched, but nevertheless the disillusion and the despair of the masses of the Russian people, typified by the scenes which I have described in the Ukraine, are the real reason why Stalin was forced this Christmas and New Year to inaugurate a new reign of terror in the land of the Soviets.

**Malcolm Muggeridge, “The Soviet’s War on the Peasants,” *Fortnightly Review* (London) 39 (1933). Excerpts, pp. 558–61, 564.**

Malcolm Muggeridge (1903–90) was an English journalist and writer who wrote extensively on the Soviet Union, communism, and Christianity. He became the *Manchester Guardian’s* Moscow correspondent in 1932. He was the author of many books, including *Winter in Moscow* (1934), *The Thirties, 1930–1940, in Great Britain* (1940), *Jesus Rediscovered* (1969), and *Conversion: The Spiritual Journey of a Twentieth-Century Pilgrim* (1988).

With that inspired cynicism that characterized most of his slogans, Lenin defined revolutions as the conquest of bread. “Il a compris,” M. [Henry] Rollin says in his very remarkable book, *La Révolution Russe*:

que les révolutions n’étaient point une question de doctrine, mais un drame de la faim, et que la conquête du pain en réglait le cours, en dictait la tactique, en imposait les dogmes, suivant l’époque et les circonstances [that revolutions were by no means a question of doctrine but a drama of hunger, and that the conquest of bread determined their course, dictated their tactics, and imposed their dogmas, depending on the era and the circumstances].

The struggle for bread in Russia has now reached an acute stage. All other questions are superfluous. It is war between the Government and the peasants, and this year’s spring sowing will be a—perhaps the—decisive battle. After fifteen years of Bolshevik rule, large areas, some the most fertile, notably the North Caucasus, the Ukraine, and the Volga districts, are quite without bread; the population is, in the most literal sense, starving; even in the large towns the food-shortage is acute, and every day grows more acute. More serious, the soil itself is impoverished, choked with weeds; at least 70 per cent of live-stock and horses have been killed to eat or have died of starvation; and the peasantry everywhere hate and distrust the Government. The Communist Party, using its familiar weapons, hysterical propaganda and brutal coercion, is making a desperate effort to deal with this situation. On the success of its effort depends the whole future of the Soviet regime.

The Bolsheviks achieved power mainly by giving the land to the peasants; thereby, however, they created a problem, an internal conflict which, far from being settled, has steadily grown more acute. Their dreams and plans were essentially urban; proletarian Big Business; Marx-Ford Bourneville; and depended for their fulfilment on a working class aristocracy being able, like the Tsarist aristocracy before it, to exploit the peasantry, to use them, as Stalin put it once, as “reserves of the proletariat.” On the other hand, as long as the peasants owned their land and worked it as independent proprietors the “reserves of the proletariat” were unrealisable; and to take away the land from them meant a battle between the Soviet Government and the major part of the population of Russia. Or, put another way, the Soviet Government had to choose

between famine and the abandonment of its plans, between Nep (the New Economic Policy) and Socialism, between yielding to the individualistic instincts of the peasants and building a new social order in a desert....

...It soon became apparent that something would have to be done about the “reserves of the proletariat,” or the old difficulty, the difficulty against which every revolutionary government has sooner or later run its head, the difficulty of famine, would arise. To meet this difficulty, the policy of collectivization was introduced. Thousands of stalwart Communists were sent into the villages to cajole, or more often to coerce, the peasants into joining collective farms....

The Bolshevik mind found in collectivization a perfect solution to its difficulties. Farms should be like factories; peasants should read newspapers and be a proletariat; tractors should replace horses; food production, like coal production, should be planned; the “reserves of the proletariat,” like the proletariat itself, should be brought into a form in which propaganda and the G.P.U. could conveniently get at them, make them into material for building Socialism. It was rather like the dreams of Victorian philanthropists; inconceivable and horrible to anyone having even a remote connection with earth, with the seasons, with the labour of sowing and the joy of harvest; plausible enough in some stuffy café or committee room.

In any case, collectivization was a colossal failure. The ten thousand stalwart Communists proved to be vigilant and effective on the “kulak front,” and grossly incompetent, sometimes corrupt, on “the agricultural front.” Agriculture went completely to pieces. Last year the Government had to reduce its exports of grain practically to nothing and, despite military measures in many districts, was unable to collect enough food to feed the town populations. Shooting and exiling thousands of peasants (nicknamed kulaks), some even of the stalwarts and unfortunate agronomes sent to advise them, has not helped to repair the consequences of two years of incompetence and neglect. This year began with starving and resentful peasants; unploughed, unweeded fields; a desperate lack of cattle and of transport; town rations reduced to a pound and a half of bread, nothing else, and that, in the case of the unemployed and of many workers’ dependents, withdrawn....

On a recent visit to the North Caucasus and the Ukraine, I saw something of the battle that is going on between the Government and the peasants. The battlefield was as desolate as in any war, and stretches wider; stretches over a large part of Russia. On the one side, millions of peasants, starving, often their bodies swollen with lack of food; on the other, soldiers, members of the G.P.U. carrying out the instructions 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. The conquest of bread, like the conquest of glory, seemed a vain pursuit.

Now the same soldiers and members of the G.P.U. have been entrusted with the task of producing abundance out of the desert they have themselves made. If they succeed, it will be by organizing a kind of slavery beside which serfdom was riotous freedom; if they fail, it will mean sooner or later, and sooner rather than later, the end of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

**Stepan Baran, “Z nashoi tragedii za Zbruchem” (About Our Tragedy beyond the Zbruch), Dilo (Lviv), 21 May 1933, p. 1. Translated by Bohdan Klid.**

Stepan Baran (1879–1953) was a lawyer, journalist, and political figure in Galicia before World War I and during the interwar period. In 1918–19 he was a member of the National Council of

the Western Ukrainian People's Republic and secretary for rural affairs in its first government. In 1914–18 he served as editor in chief of the weekly *Svoboda* (Liberty), the organ of the Ukrainian National Democratic Party, and in the interwar period worked as a journalist for the newspaper *Dilo* (Deed). In addition to his many articles, Baran was the author of four books.

We do not often receive direct news from beyond the Zbruch [River] about the greatest tragedy that our people has ever undergone during the course of its thousand-year history. There are no personal ties at all between our countrymen in Galicia or in Volhynia and our conationals in the Dnipro region [of Ukraine] today. Those excursions that some of our people made from time to time over the past several years on the occasion of various jubilees and gatherings have also ceased. And they did not explain anything to us about events taking place in Greater Ukraine, for those unsympathetic to the Bolsheviks were not allowed to see anything with their own eyes, while sympathizers of the Red regime presented everything in the best light. All this has now ended... Despite all the efforts of the State Political Administration (GPU—formerly the Cheka), Sovietophilism today is not making any headway in our circles...

A reason for this is the echoes of the [seemingly] inhuman groans of martyred victims, millions of our peasants, that break through to us from time to time across the dense Bolshevik border. More than one victim who attempted to break out of the Bolshevik hell has been covered forever by the waves of the Dnister [River]. More than one has died from the bullets of the Muscovite Red Army. And those—not very many, after all—who managed to break through to us—our everyday people—relate horrors that remind one of Dante's *Inferno*.

Not long ago, during the winter months, when the waters of the Dnister were frostbound, masses of our refugees tried to cross to the Bessarabian side, to Romania. Almost all of them lost their lives. Only a few reached Bessarabia alive, most of them with bullet wounds. The European press has given some coverage to this tragedy of Dnipro [Ukraine]. Some of its correspondents even went to the scene, spoke with the tormented victims, and described them. And that was all. The conscience of Western Europe was not moved, as it has its own worries and often falls under the influence of Red propaganda in the press. Obviously, hope of trade interests with the communist East exerts its own influence.

An unprecedented famine, thoroughly reminiscent of the days of 1922, now extends across the fertile Ukrainian black earth. Ukrainian peasant farmers, who with the work of their hands and the bounty of their fertile soil fed the vast lands of Europe—to say nothing of the hungry of Muscovy—and lived in relative affluence themselves, are now dying of hunger. This is not being caused by flood or drought, nor by any other natural disaster, but only by the mad experiments of today's leaders of the Red regime. The peasants of Greater Ukraine, as basically everywhere in the Soviet Union, have been expropriated. State farms and collective farms have turned them into serfs, casting them into poverty unknown in history by any other serfdom. From the Zbruch to the endless steppes, one hears the groans of millions of dying peasants who are wasting away in despair, seeing no assistance of any kind, even moral, from any quarter. For the most part churches have been closed, the priesthood destroyed, and those remaining are without rights.

The Ukrainian national movement has been smothered by shootings, [imprisonment or exile in] the Solovets [Islands], prisons, and [exile to] Siberia. Its formal remains are also being liquidated. Moscow is attaching itself even more firmly [to Ukraine] than under Peter and Catherine....

...Now, the Red Kremlin has gone even further. Our peasants near the Polish border are being [uprooted and] resettled in the depths of Muscovy or Siberia to make room for Muscovite peasants and turn them into a barrier against Ukrainian influences from the west. The border [area] has been planted thickly with an army of Muscovite origin. The eastern side of the Zbruch now looks like a real military line that is difficult for a civilian to cross even at night, as in wartime. We are informed of this by refugees who recently managed to wade across the Zbruch, for most of them died from bullets or fell into the hands of the Bolshevik guards. They arrived as living skeletons because the famine there is terrible. Even dogs are being killed, and today's slaves of the collective farms are being fed dog meat, for in fertile Ukraine neither bread nor potatoes are to be had. The Commune has taken everything from the village, and the Ukrainian village is perishing helplessly. Salvation is to be found by fleeing across the Zbruch....

...[I]f it were not for the extraordinarily strong Bolshevik border guard details, armed with machine guns and field artillery, Eastern Galicia and Volhynia would be flooded with tens of thousands of our peasants from beyond the Bolshevik border posts....

**Suzanne Bertillon, “L’effroyable détresse des populations de l’Ukraine” (People of Ukraine in Terrible Distress), *Le Matin* (Paris), 29 August 1933, p. 1. Translated by Iryna Fedoriw.**

Suzanne Bertillon (1891–1980) was an anti-Soviet French journalist and writer, a participant in the French resistance during World War II, and a niece of the famed French criminologist Alphonse Bertillon. She was the author of many books, including *Le paradis en IIIe classe (au pays des Soviets): choses vues* (1935), *Vie d’Alphonse Bertillon, inventeur de l’anthropométrie* (1941), and *La tentation chimérique* (1953).

American country folk of Ukrainian origin who, after a twenty-year absence, received special permission from the Soviet authorities to spend a month in their home country, provide moving descriptions of the pitiful state of the villages and their emaciated compatriots.

*Where cases of cannibalism appear  
But the harvest is good.*

From every corner of the world, one hears alarming echoes of the situation in Soviet Ukraine.

The official press of the USSR admits that foreign journalists and tourists are prohibited from entering Ukraine without special authorization. What horrible event could be taking place in the country once known as the “breadbasket of Europe”? This is revealed by two travelers who returned from Ukraine on August 12 after their one-month stay.

Martha Stebalo and her husband (the two travelers in question) emigrated from Ukraine, their native land, in 1913 to settle in the United States. They were ordinary peasants. In 1918 they adopted American citizenship but continued to maintain ties with their relatives, who had stayed behind. I shall allow Martha Stebalo to explain:

“The letters from Ukraine were rare but more and more pressing; they begged us to send supplies and money. We satisfied the demands. I would send money to our family on a regular basis; in return, the Soviet authorities notified us that the money had been delivered safely.

On July 1, 1933, as members of a tourist group who wanted to visit the USSR, we boarded a cruise ship in New York for Europe; we wanted to see our family and our native land again. On July 14 we disembarked in Leningrad and started for Moscow. In Moscow we asked

permission to go to Ukraine. We would learn later that all other tourists were refused such authorization, but it was granted to us, doubtless because we are uneducated peasants. Moreover, two days prior to our return we were given an offer to take charge of a collective farm.

In Moscow, those friends who knew of our intention to go to Ukraine warned us that it might be difficult to obtain necessary supplies there, so we would do well to bring nonperishable provisions. In a Torgsin (a store servicing foreigners only), we bought two hundred pounds of flour, ten pounds of cheese, and four pounds of herring, sausage, and smoked salmon. In fact, food is rationed in Moscow, but the citizens are able to find necessary provisions. In addition, we had nine poods (228 kilos) of clothes brought as part of our luggage.

After a two-day trip in a grimy train car, we arrived in Kyiv. We found the city little changed, but in the outskirts we were surprised by the way people looked. Most of them stayed on the ground, unable to move, their legs swollen. They seemed feeble and ill. Others walked bent over, their eyes wide and staring. Nobody spoke.

### *Ruin, hunger, and silence*

We left Kyiv to go to the surrounding villages where we had left relatives. How surprised we were to see, instead of the pretty and jolly villages we used to know, gloomy ruins, not a flower to be seen, torn-down fences, leafless trees, hopeless silence, no more dogs barking or poultry running, and an atmosphere of death. With heavy hearts we arrived in our native village, got off the train, and saw people coming toward us. The people looked large in size. "Oh, well," I thought, "We were misinformed. These people are fat, so they must be well-fed." But when they approached us, we realized that their stoutness was due to the swelling of their limbs. Their bodies were covered with leaking sores and gave off a rotten smell; in place of clothes they wore rags.

The word spread that the Americans had arrived. My husband asked to see his mother, whom he had not seen for twenty years. Alas, she had not escaped the lot of the others. She was like the rest of them, swollen and covered with sores. And when she finally realized that we were her children, she put her hands together and started to cry, unable to say a word. I learned that for more than a year she had not received any of the money or provisions I had sent her, contrary to what the Soviet authorities told us.

Then I asked whether there was some sort of epidemic that was making everyone suffer from abscesses and swelling. They were afraid to answer, as they were constantly spied on; every denunciation that proved true was rewarded with a bit of food—and what one would not do to receive a piece of bread! In short, I learned that, forced by hunger to put something into their stomachs, they had been eating tree leaves, scraping tree trunks and eating the bark, and trying to make a mixture of sawdust and grass. I learned that everyone was dying, and though the harvest was good, no one could touch it, as the fields were under surveillance by guards on watchtowers with orders to shoot anybody approaching them.

I left this miserable village to go to Podilia, where my mother and my brothers lived in Pysarivka. I found the same desolation there. Our house was empty. I asked whether my relatives had moved out.

"No, they are dead..."

"But that is impossible. I received a letter from them only a month ago."

"They've been dead since then. They died of hunger. We are all going to die. In this village of eight hundred people, one hundred fifty have already died since last spring, even

though during the war only seven of ours were killed. No births this year either, except for one stillborn baby. Ah! If only someone could help us.”

“But is there any authority to which you could appeal?”

“Nobody. It’s the authorities themselves who are most relentlessly set on our destruction. They want us to perish. This is an organized famine. The harvest has never been so rich, but we are forbidden to touch it. If we are caught cutting a few stalks, it’s either jail or the firing squad, and in jail you will die of starvation by the third week.”

### *Famished*

So I opened my packages of flour and herrings. They started grabbing the food with their bare hands, swallowing it as fast as they could. It was a horrifying spectacle to watch these poor people stuff themselves in this manner.

“Wait,” I said, “you are going to choke. You are not used to eating so much at once. You need to cook the flour.”

“No, no! We want to eat. Ah! To have something in the stomach. Let us eat. You don’t know what it is like to want to eat.”

Alas, two of them died during the night. Their stomachs were no longer accustomed to digesting food. I was told that the only survivor of my family was a 22-year-old boy. He was only as tall as a child, covered with sores and ulcers, and so weak that he could hardly stand.

“But,” I said to him, “can’t you work? Don’t they need anybody to gather the harvest?”  
“I am too weak. There are still some who can work. They are employed from three o’clock in the morning to eleven o’clock at night, and they are given a bushel of grain as payment. They are the luckiest. Nobody needs us. We cannot belong to the Komsomol or any other organization. We are regarded as sons of kulaks because Ukraine used to be rich at one time.”

I went a few miles outside the village to see some friends of mine who were still alive. It was late when I arrived there, and night was falling. They begged me to stay with them.

“It’s too dangerous for you to be outside at this hour. You can get killed. There isn’t a crime that people would not commit to find something to eat.”

I didn’t sleep a wink at night. Often the children would wake up, crying, “Hliba, hliba, holodni” (Bread, bread. We are hungry). Their parents would shut them up, but two minutes later the crying would resume.

### *Scenes of horror*

“Is it true,” I asked their parents, “the misery is such that there are cases of cannibalism?”

“That is why we didn’t want you to go out at night. People who venture out at this hour run the risk of being killed as grub for these unfortunates. The dead are not buried in coffins. The bodies are covered with a few spadefuls of dirt and then dug up at night. The Kripaks in the village of Chahiv ended the lives of their two children and ate them afterwards. A few days later they learned that a child had just died; they went and dug it up.”

In a village near Odesa, a woman from Kyiv came to visit her godson, a seven-year-old boy. On entering the house, she saw both parents slumped in their chairs, with a strange, stupefied look on their faces.

“Where is my godson?”

No answer. After a long silence they took her to the cellar, and there in a barrel she saw quarters of salted meat. Ah, who will help us and relieve us of this misery? What have we done to deserve such suffering?

In 1931, when I visited the Museum of the Revolution in Stalingrad, I saw photographs of the famine of 1921. Ten years later, the Soviets agreed to accept the truth of the facts. The photographs displayed skeletal figures covered with rags, their bones protruding through the skin. The interpreters assured us that at that time in the Samara region people had eaten human flesh.

**Suzanne Bertillon, “La Famine en Ukraine [Famine in Ukraine]. Systematically organized, it strives to destroy a people whose only crime is their aspiration to freedom. More witnesses’ accounts corroborate Martha Stebalo’s story of the terrible misery of her compatriots.” *Le Matin* (Paris), 30 August 1933, p. 1. Translated by Iryna Fedoriw.**

The map shown here makes it easy to see the importance of Ukraine, too often ignored by the public at large.

Ukraine has a territory of 680,000 sq. km. (France, 542,000) and is populated by 31 million inhabitants. It is one of the richest countries in the world on account of its legendarily rich soil, as well as what is beneath the soil.

It has large deposits of iron in Kryvyi Rih, the Donets coal basin, and manganese mines, to mention only the most important raw materials.

Cultivated land represents 53 percent of the territory (France, 56 percent) and produces grain, sugar, grapes, fruit, and 86 percent of the famous Russian cigarettes. In addition, its population contributed 4 million soldiers to the tsarist army.

This is what attracts the “robbers of the homeland.” This is the country that the Soviet government wants to destroy systematically.

Alas, too often in history the strongest have lived to the detriment of the weakest; neither the tsarist nor the Soviet government showed restraint in dealing with Ukraine. Both fully applied the formula “might makes right.”

After the war, this barbaric rule was countered by Wilson’s noble dogma of “the right of nations to self-determination,” which the Soviet government abused in Machiavellian fashion to instigate troubles in our colonies, without ceasing to torment Ukraine for all that. The Soviet constitution of 1923 appeared to give full autonomy to Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkestan, etc. That was only in theory, so as to produce a favorable effect on foreign countries; in reality, they never ceased to treat these territories as conquered lands, much more harshly than any European nation ever treated its colonies.

### *Ukrainian and Russian*

They left these peoples with hardly anything but the right to speak their own language; hence one can establish that the Ukrainian language is completely different from the Russian language. There is as much difference between a Ukrainian and a Russian as there is between a Pole and a Russian. A nation’s autonomy is not real until its people obtain political and economic freedom, and yet Ukraine does not benefit from any of its riches. It is under the exclusive sovereignty of Moscow and, against its will, under the communist regime.

Moreover, it is in order to destroy all irredentist elements that the Soviet government has systematically organized the horrifying famine that is currently raging, in hopes of completely destroying a whole nation whose only fault is its aspiration to freedom.

The famine is confined to Ukraine and the North Caucasus; in other parts of the USSR food is rationed, but people manage to survive, and the Soviet press just recently printed in

*Pravda*: “Peace and order prevail throughout the country; hundreds of collective farms delivered their grain requisitions; the standard of living is very high.... Russia is making great strides toward the wonderful life that Stalin has predicted for it....”

Yet the stories of travelers returning from there contradict this statement completely. I return to the account of Martha Stebalo (an American countrywoman of Ukrainian origin who has just come back from her trip).

#### *Komsomol members*

After having described the hideous destitution of the population in *Le Matin* yesterday, she continued on the same note:

“Very often it is Komsomol members, brigades of fanaticized young people, who are in charge of agricultural work in Ukraine. They may have undergone very intense political training, but they have only a rudimentary knowledge of agriculture, so insufficient that they want to husk millet seed before sowing it.

The taxes imposed on the population of this unfortunate country in preparation for the famine are devastating. I can give you a few examples: the regular tax is 35 rubles per person per year, as well as other taxes in kind, which vary. For example, when they still had cows, they had to pay 100 rubles per year per cow and provide the government with 175 liters of milk. In the same measure, taxes were imposed on anything owned. If they were not paid on time, they would be doubled and even, in case of a second failure to pay, tripled. If a peasant remains unable to pay, his possessions are confiscated: this is what has happened throughout Ukraine.

On top of these mandatory taxes, there are so-called “voluntary” ones to allow the government to purchase planes, tractors, etc. Recently a “voluntary” tax to promote world revolution was abolished.

Those unable to pay the taxes are pronounced “class enemies,” “saboteurs,” and “bandits”; they are often deported to unknown destinations.

#### *Eat to survive*

This regime has swiftly reduced the country to its present condition. Having no more poultry or livestock, people started to kill cats and dogs for food; then horses became weaker and weaker, dying in their turn. To prevent rotting and the outbreak of disease, authorities butchered the dead horses, covered them with carbolic acid and lime, and then buried the carcasses. At night people would come and dig up the carcasses; they would immerse pieces of meat in water, dry them, and eat. There are not even any horses there today.

Sometimes, in the country, one sees a group of houses with black banners, meaning that the village is empty. Everyone has died of hunger.

#### *Other accounts*

Here are some clippings from the foreign press that confirm Martha Stebalo’s story. *Chas* (Time), Romania, August 19:

The accounts of two Czechoslovakian workers who have just returned from the USSR and shared their impressions at the Prague Socialist Club:

“The famine in Kyiv is terrible. People sit on the ground in the street, drinking water from a used can. They stay this way for several days, having no strength to pick themselves up, and they end up dying right there. At the marketplaces in Kyiv there are eight to ten corpses every night, quickly stripped of their clothing. In the morning, wagons arrive to take them to the

burial grounds. In streets far from the city center, corpses remain until they decompose completely. Often two or three corpses of persons who have died on board streetcars are carried out. In the main street, groups of children beg for a piece of bread and, at the same time, steal anything within reach.”

The pamphlet *Brüder in Not* (Berlin). A sample excerpt from an eyewitness account: “The famine of 1921 was significant, but the current situation is beyond any comparison. In many villages 50 percent of the inhabitants are dead. Many houses remain empty and fall into ruin.”

M. Auchagen, a professor at the Oriental Institute, says on the basis of testimony from German settlers returning from the USSR:

“Famine reigns in southern Ukraine and the North Caucasus, more terrible than that of 1921. In Kharkiv, corpses remain on the ground. In the Taganrog district, a woman killed her three children to feed herself. In Kryvorizhia, a woman was arrested because she had killed her husband. In Sofiivka, a village in the Stavropol district, almost half the inhabitants have died of hunger.”

Excerpts from the memorandum of Dr. Otto Schiller, who visited the North Caucasus this spring:

“Since the autumn of 1932, the food situation in the whole region has become catastrophic. The population is being reduced by deportations and numerous deaths from hunger. Villages are becoming depopulated, and cases of cannibalism are frequent.

... The number of deceased will increase by next autumn. Nobody is offering any help to the population; the authorities are completely indifferent. This famine is much more severe than that of 1921, when five million people died of hunger. The starving population could be saved if it had access to the grain that the Soviet government has exported abroad. The present crisis can end only with the death of most of the population.”

The appeal of Cardinal [Theodor] Innitzer, archbishop of Vienna, published in the *Reichspost* and widely reprinted in the foreign press, requests that an emergency aid mission be sent to the regions suffering from starvation. He relies on the testimony of Gareth Jones, a former secretary of Lloyd George (*Manchester Guardian*), and above all on an extremely detailed memorandum by Dr. Ewald Ammende, who, having already contributed to the humanitarian action of 1921 (the Nansen mission and the American Relief Committee), is now trying to achieve the same result.

The Stockholm *Aftonbladet* writes on August 14:

“The mysterious measures taken with regard to foreign newspaper correspondents in Moscow to prevent them from traveling far from the capital are about to be explained. Ukraine and the neighboring regions are in revolt. All railways are being patrolled by troops. Trains are packed with soldiers dispatched to the endangered regions. Details are unavailable for the time being, but we are certainly on the brink of disastrous events.”

**Harry Lang, “Seen and Heard in the Villages of the Ukraine,” *Jewish Daily Forward* (New York), 27 December 1933. In *Holodomor Studies* 2, no. 2 (Summer-Autumn 2010): 218–19, 221–28. Excerpts. Translated by Moishe Dolman.**

Harry Lang (1884–1970) was a journalist, writer, and activist in the labor and socialist movements in the United States. Lang was a writer and labor editor of the Yiddish-language *Jewish Daily Forward* (*Forverts*), published in New York, when in the summer and early fall of

1933 he and his wife, Lucy (Robbins), traveled in the Soviet Union, including Ukraine. Upon his return to the United States, Lang wrote a series of some thirty articles about the trip that appeared in the *Forward* from late November 1933 to February 1934. In 1935 Lang wrote several articles based largely on his earlier accounts for a Hearst newspaper, the *New York Journal*. Following their publication, Lang was expelled from the Socialist Party and almost lost his job at the *Forward*.

Our automobile speeds along.... Before our eyes, fields spread out both near and far. Everywhere we see piles of raked-up grain—here corn, there wheat, somewhere else plain hay fodder. The grain has been cut down from the fields, but no one has taken it away to thresh. The hay has not been taken away to the stables. The piles of grain and hay are already soaked and have begun to rot....

No people are to be seen in the fields. We've traveled throughout the Ukraine, to Ukrainian villages. The world has heard—and has not heard—that over the course of the year these villages were the site of a terrible famine....

...[L]ast spring and summer a curtain descended over Soviet Russia, her provinces and districts, as well over the separate Soviet republics. On the face of it, it would seem that the Soviet government felt it necessary that no one from the outside world should come near, peep in or hear a sound.

Voices have nevertheless broken through—indeed voices from the Ukraine. When it proved impossible to completely stifle these voices, statements were issued to the effect that these voices only came from certain places, insignificant corners of the great country, in which there had occurred an incidental hunger, the result of a crop failure in the local fields.

If there was “something else” at play in addition to this crop failure, and if this “something else” actually maintains a grip on the greatest part of the country, the authorities have used all their strength to keep it hidden from the world.

In Russia itself, however, they have not been able to conceal it. They cannot use walls to block the cities from the villages, so in the cities people are aware of what was happening in the villages. Moreover, it was even government policy that the city *should* know. It was written in the cities that the peasants wished to starve them. They, the peasants, had earlier refused to sow the fields, and subsequently refused to gather the grain that had been sown. What's more, the city was sorely needed. Young and old were sent from the city to work in the fields. Factories were shut down and industrial workers were sent to overnight become agricultural labourers. People in the city have thereby become very familiar with what was happening in the fields. But to allow foreign correspondents there was not in Moscow's interests.

When I informed a colleague, an American journalist in Moscow, that the itinerary of my voyage included the Ukraine and White Russia [Belarus], he exclaimed:

“They won't let you travel there...”

And when I told him that everything was ready and that I was to depart the next day, his eyes bulged as he examined my passport. Yes indeed, it stated my profession: journalist.

The situation of the foreign journalists in Moscow thus became clear to me....

I travelled to Ukrainian villages before I arrived in Kiev. With me was a person who was interested that I should receive a full understanding of everything that has taken place, and what a Soviet village with *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy* now represents....

In the world it is proclaimed that Stalin's collectivization has prevailed.... In the Ukraine, it is said to be self-evident. The Ukraine is covered with *kolkhozy*. This is the case according to

the statistics. The world believes in statistics; but beneath statistics there always lies something else. What is underneath the statistics concerning the *kolkhozy*? What happens in the *kolkhozy*? The dissatisfied peasants who were forced into them have not yet become satisfied. They have invented the most diverse forms of sabotage, from inflicting harm upon the fields to inflicting damage upon the field machinery, all so that the *kolkhozy* should be of no benefit to anyone.

In hundreds of villages the beginning of each sowing season is accompanied by a direct strike. The peasants refuse to do anything; should a strike during the sowing season be broken, they attempt a new one during the gathering of the grain. But a strike is easily broken: The authorities arrest an entire village of peasants, together with their wives and children. They set them to work in a *sovkhos*, a government-owned farm where the peasants work like factory labourers, or they make them toil in mines (as coal diggers), or they send them to work on the roads, or to be woodcutters in the forests, and so forth. The whole process is a system of prison labour.

Still, the peasants' taste for struggle against the imposed "collectivization" does not end with strikes. They permit the establishment of a *kolkhoz*, but take to sabotaging it. Last spring a popular method of sabotage involved the kernels that are thrown into the tilled soil. The peasants slit their own throats this way. Like everything else, these kernels are, of course, purchased from the government. A *kolkhoz* buys these kernels and pays the government one way or the other—if not from its revenues, then from its own produce. Moreover, the *kolkhoz* operates according to "piecework." The measure of the work each person does is calculated. Subsequently, this measure is tabulated according to hours and days, and, in proportion to the day's work, each peasant receives bread, other articles and, from time to time, small amounts of money. When someone ruins the kernels, the *kolkhoz* becomes a debtor. It must pay for the ruined kernels as well. Atonement falls on everybody's head. Each member of the *kolkhoz* thereby becomes a debtor to the government. He becomes its body-and-soul slave, together with all the members of his household. This does not stop the peasants. They are not bothered by what will happen to them in the future; that's how embittered they are.

Every act of sabotage brings death. People are shot on the spot. This, too, does not frighten the peasants.

Another form of sabotage consists of damaging tractors....

For damaging a tractor the penalty is death....

Last summer, cutting stalks was a widespread tactic employed throughout Russia. Further episodes of famine had been expected; the wish was to conceal something for oneself. In the *sovkhosy*, even more stalks had been cut down than in the *kolkhozy*. This represented direct theft from the government. The Soviet newspapers designated such stalk-stealers *striguni* and did not cease to write about them. For shearing stalks the penalty is death. This, of course, did not lead the peasants to discontinue the practice.

There are also *striguni* in the Ukrainian village in which I was now staying. Officials have arrived in order to completely dissolve the *kolkhoz*, confiscate the entirety of its possessions as well as all the fields and establish a *sovkhos*.... The officials have not come to listen to the opinions of the peasants; the latter have been condemned in advance. The officials have come to take an accounting of the village, the entirety of which has to all intents and purposes been placed under arrest.

The officials who have arrived are from Soviet institutions specializing in village life. The authorities bustle about in boots and short leather coats. They are accompanied at all times

by soldiers in long great-coats, rifles perched on their shoulders. The peasants wear rags<sup>1</sup> wrapped around their feet. Their *rubashkas* [shirts] and coats are no better. The officials and soldiers go around constantly carrying pieces of black bread. They have brought these with them from the places from whence they had come; you can't get any in the village. The village receives a fixed amount of bread and no more....

We depart for more distant villages....

Our automobile again drives through heaps of soaked, rotting grain....

Heaps of wheat have been raked up haphazardly. No peasant hands have come into contact with them.

And this is the cause of the famine which struck the country throughout the year and which can soon return. This famine did not stem from a poor harvest in the fields, but from a harvest of party manoeuvres and a harvest of peasant mistrust of the state. Everyone here knows this, and the present situation confirms it.

During spring, Stalin turned to the villages with the following appeal:

“Sow and you will have!”

This should have been an encouragement to the peasants: that they might sow the fields and profit thereby. The government would not torment them with new “experiments.” There was no great reverberation, so Stalin subsequently made the following appeal:

“Render the *kolkhoznik* a man of means!”

There was laughter throughout the country, so he added:

“This time we mean business.”

As such, during the summer the villages became virtual prison camps. This started as soon as the cutting began. And I am a witness: fields under the watchful eye of rifles....

Driving from village to village we come upon a village of death....

Several dozen little houses, the doors nailed up, not a single creature inside, not a single creature in the gardens and fields surrounding dead chimneys on the roofs, dead windows.

A human figure appears in the distance. A soldier's great-coat shuffles along from a road to our side.... He arrives at the spot where we have stopped, carrying two loaves of black bread under his arms. He answers my escort:

“Yes, more than half the people died of starvation. Those that survived left...”

And he indicates two nearby villages:

“Same thing over there.”

“And in another area, just over there, also... It was a horrible year.”

Cemeteries of houses.

What is he doing here?

He's been placed on guard duty.

He watches over death....

We approach several houses. It's frightening. We want to look at these tombs....

He leads us to a place, a piece of sunken clay earth like a shallow grave, and points:

“Here lie the masters of the village...”

There is no shape of a grave. The dead were buried there with no nearby marker.

The piece of empty ground in which they lie is directly opposite and not far from the little houses where they lived. Others lie right next to the doors of their little houses. Members of a family would bury each other. The soldier tells us of a girl who looked on as her mother buried

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<sup>1</sup> I assume here a typographical error of one Yiddish letter in the original, which not changing would have us reading that the peasants wore shovels or spatulas (and not rags) wrapped around their feet.

her father. Later it happened that the girl buried her mother and her little brother. And then she went away from there. She is somewhere in Kiev....

He indicates to us two small houses where bodies were lying, certainly for a couple of weeks, until soldiers were sent into the village to gather all the dead. His speech becomes more and more difficult; he is getting all choked up.

Of course he knows how it came to be that so many starved to death. He makes no mention of crop failure in the fields. He talks about what it was like earlier in the villages: The peasants refused to do anything, so no bread was delivered to them. In other words, it was a revolt: revolt by starvation, revolt by swollen bellies and revolt by mass death....

In this village there was, in fact, a *kolkhoz*, but even with a *kolkhoz* the peasants did not want to work. They did not want the *kolkhoz*.... [T]he *kolkhoz* never functioned.

Something still remains in the dead *kolkhoz* amidst the dead little houses: the bell which had been suspended on a fence in the middle of the village....

A bell to call the dead...

Bells to rouse people to work can be found in all *kolkhozy*. The peasants were accustomed to waking up in the morning when the cocks would begin to crow. O, how the peasants were accustomed! They would sing at work. This is something you don't hear now. It goes without saying that the Ukrainian song of the field, of the steppe, has become famous throughout the world. In the Ukraine itself, however, the song is silent. There is no singing in the Ukrainian fields.

On a holiday in the Ukraine, the peasant women used to dress up in flowery dresses, with ribbons and beads of all colours and embroidered jackets. Now you don't see this. Now, you only see Ukrainian peasant clothes at a masked ball in New York...

Leaves from the trees have fallen over the dead village. An autumn wind has carried them over the dead houses. We bid farewell to the soldier. He glances at the two loaves of black bread under his arm as if to say: "This is what I have to show for my guard duty over this extinct village."

We leave him, alone, amidst the dead little houses and amidst the leaves from the trees which are falling upon them. Great flocks of birds drift over the piles of rotted wheat. We hear their cry. Leaving the dead village, we again come to a gate with two red, but broken-off flags and a Soviet star next to them and a photograph of Stalin... There is something symbolic in this picture...

**Harry Lang, "A Trip to the Jewish *Kolkhozy* of Ukraine and White Russia," *Jewish Daily Forward* (New York), 30 December 1933. In *Holodomor Studies* 2, no. 2 (Summer-Autumn 2010): 229–40. Excerpts. Translated by Moishe Dolman.**

...Several miles from Kharkov...you wind up on a gravel side-road. This brings you to a gate with a Yiddish inscription: *Royteh Shtern*....

Upon entering *Royteh Shtern*, I beheld this little scene: A quiet war was taking place between a horse and a tall Jew in big boots. The Jew sought to drive the horse into a stream, but the horse would have none of it. The Jew stood on the bank. He wanted to wash the horse. Meanwhile, the horse went into the stream, took a few steps deeper into the water, but then soon turned back. The Jew drove him again and again; the horse refused to be "disciplined." Ducks were sitting near the stream. They seemed to be waiting for the Jew to finish with the horse so as to go in and give a real swimming lesson. It was an idyllic little country scene. I thought—I

hoped—that here in Royteh Shtern I would find a peaceful, happy life, the peace of the country and the happiness of “socialized” Jews on the land, of Jewish kolkhozniki.

Although it is only six years old, through labour and economy Royteh Shtern has become a successful settlement.... Altogether in this kolkhoz there are approximately four hundred souls....

This kolkhoz strictly complies with all the Soviet kolkhoz regulations, turning over to the government its percentage of grain, paying its taxes punctually and participating in the government “loan” campaigns....

Who are they, these Jewish kolkhozniki?....

All came from cities and towns, this one from the Vinnytsia district, that one from Nikolayev, another from Berdichev. Some are from the Khersonschina, in Ukraine, where there had been Jewish villages or settlements as far back as Czarist times.... For the most part, though, they are new hands on the field. They are former *lishentsy*<sup>2</sup> from the very recent past, town-dwelling families who until the revolution lived from trade with peasants from the neighbouring village and who after the revolution found themselves déclassé.

This chapter of déclassé Jews contains tragedies which have not yet been revealed to the outside world....

In the yard of the kolkhoz, at the midpoint between the houses and the stables, I encountered the tall Jew with the big boots who had previously been driving the horse to the stream.... Speaking with him, I made a remark about “better times.” He shrugged his shoulders and muttered:

“Sure, if you can sleep through a night of woe, in the morning things become easier... Your troubles are still there, but you get used to them...”

He examined his boots.

“They cost me a year of work,” he continued, showing me a calculation explaining how he could afford the boots.

He had totalled the extra days’ work in the kolkhoz he and his wife had squeezed in over the course of the year and the food they acquired in consequence. To this he added what they didn’t get because it was unobtainable, as well as the food they did not consume so as to save up a little something in order that he might indeed be able to get a pair of boots....

A kolkhoz may not provide bread for itself; it must depend upon the “centre”; it must be under the control of the regime.

An absurd state of affairs ensues, even when the government eventually pays for the grain it takes from the kolkhoz. It gives the kolkhoz the cheapest price. Afterwards the kolkhoz has to pay for the baked bread it takes in. It soon notices that the money received for the grain is not sufficient for the bread baked from the same grain.

The whole cooperative set up in Russia—the inland Soviet trade between institutions—is subject to the severest curses from every kolkhoz throughout the land.

Nor may a kolkhoz decide to make for itself a festival and, let’s say, slaughter a calf for everyone. The person, as well as the calf, is under government control.

It is existence under police surveillance, in fact under a whole chain of police. There are kolkhoz committees which are responsible to higher committees, and the whole twisted committee system with police powers peers into your house and casts its eyes upon your table.

It feeds the people the way you feed cattle in the stable.

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<sup>2</sup> Those disenfranchised by the Soviet Constitution for, among other reasons, unacceptable political or class personal histories.

Sixty per cent of earnings are paid out at the halfway point of the year, the remainder at the end. But very often you discover at the end of the year that on the one hand the kolkhoz must give a “loan” to the government and on the other hand that it is in debt to the government.

The people have no faith in these “loans.” They know that these are not really loans, but rather another form of taxation. The debts owed by the kolkhoz to the government, however, are another matter. Try to buy certain products for the field in the various government institutions and you realize that a debt is a debt. This debt falls upon every member of the kolkhoz, and every individual becomes collateral....

Kolkhozniki give the impression of being oppressed convicts toiling in some field. They lie there, burying themselves in the ground. They bury themselves deeper and deeper, and over them stands the police “administration,” watching, counting, guarding....

In order to avoid persecution for something petty, in order to avoid attacks from the government committees, Jewish kolkhozy must profess to be “godless.”<sup>3</sup> That is to say, they must pass themselves off as made up of non-believers, as having nothing to do with anything of a religious nature.

For Jews, this however means more than expunging religion. It also means smashing the folk traditions of home life....

That *Royteh Shtern* is “godless” causes woeful heartache for the older kolkhozniki. On the eve of every Jewish holiday, all the kolkhozniki must assemble to hear a *drosheh*<sup>4</sup> from a party propagandist. This *drosheh* is replete with vehement curses heaped upon every Jewish movement in the world. As such, it seems that whatever bread the Jewish kolkhozniki of *Royteh Shtern* actually do sometimes receive comes at a price: helping to vituperate other Jews....

There is a Jewish school in *Royteh Shtern*; after all, it is a Jewish village. But the children are not interested, and the school is poorly attended.... The teachers have no eagerness to pursue their work because they are severely harassed by Party commissions. Every so often a blemish is discovered on this one or that one indicating some deviation from the “Stalinist line.” Nor do the children want the schools; there is no place for them in the children’s hearts. What, indeed, do these schools teach them? Everything which may be connected to Jewish intellectualism has been wiped out; after all, the latter represents “bourgeois justice.” Such is the interpretation of the Jewish-Communist course of study.... [T]he Jewish parents have concluded that it is better to send their children to the Ukrainian and Russian schools....

...What is the mood in the Jewish kolkhozy with regards to religion? Are there outbreaks of protest as in the non-Jewish kolkhozy?

A kolkhoznik from the *Nay-Zlatopol* [*Novozlatopil*] district speaks about this at a get-together of friends in a house in *Kharkov*. I gather from his words that it is bad for Jews to be protestors and rebels and it is bad for them to be quiet and compliant.

Should a protest occur in a Jewish kolkhoz, all soon receive a warning that they are former *lishentsy*,<sup>5</sup> and it is better for them to remain silent. This warning serves as another signal that the Jews should be content just to be permitted on the soil. Yet at the same time, Christian peasants come to the Jewish villages and hint that they, the Jews, should not remain aloof from some plan or other to drive away certain officials from the area. These hints are bitter, because they are accompanied by other insinuations to the effect that “the whole regime is in Jewish hands.”

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<sup>3</sup> In Russian: *bezbozhnik*. In Yiddish, this word connotes a generalized attribute of shamelessness.

<sup>4</sup> Yiddish/Hebrew: (religious) sermon. Here used ironically.

<sup>5</sup> See note 2 above.

In light of this, the Ukrainian Jews remember the frightful pogroms they endured during the years of civil war.

In short, the Jewish village has no inner peace, and events in the area are always portents of yet more cause for apprehension.

By means of help from relatives in America, the Jewish kolkhozniki managed to somehow tide over the famine which during the course of the year struck the whole countryside. Consequently, the Christian villages looked upon the Jews with a bitter envy.

But the kolkhoznik from the Nay-Zlatopol district spoke of wholly different encounters between Jewish and non-Jewish country people.

Several villages of Ukrainian peasants were arrested and exiled to Novo Seversk to mine for coal. Dozens came to Jewish villages to bid farewell. There were scenes of drama. The Ukrainian peasants wept. Many came to implore the Jewish villagers not to go should "the authorities" wish to send them to kolkhozy on land taken from those banished. Still others came to plead with the Jews to indeed go and to write the exiled about what becomes of everything...

Yes, to go or not to go: this has truly become a moral question for the Jews. But then who in Russia can decide for themselves whether to go or not to go?....

In the Nay-Zlatopol district there is a Jewish kolkhoz by the name of "Shock Worker." It was a functioning kolkhoz. Entire families worked: the women like the men, children like their parents. They worked year after year, day-in day-out, without rest, without holiday. Results, with respect to field crops, were great. So were achievements in the stables and in the production of grain and milk. But it was not so for the kolkhozniki. They alone were constantly exhausted and emaciated as a result of little food and a lot of government "manoeuvres"....

The managers of the kolkhoz were also members of the Party. Hence they were like landlords, and when it came to the distribution of food, they first accommodated those closest to them, people from their families....

I inquired of every Jewish kolkhoznik whose company I shared, whether in Ukraine or White Russia, as to the "national significance" of the Jewish kolkhozy. We know that this is a subject of discussion in foreign lands and indeed among ourselves in America. I got a lot of smiles. Others spoke with agitation:

"Do you people actually know what is happening to us? National significance? That rings hollow! So do we live as a distinct, integral nationality? So do we have proper Jewish schools for our children? Do they let us have a book, religious or secular? What do you mean, 'national significance'? Is not our national tragedy that you, in foreign lands, do not know what is happening to us?"

Their tragedy is also our own. One peek at the so-called Jewish country life in Soviet Russia and a chill travels through your every limb; a painful sadness begins to tug at your heart.

**Harry Lang, "Writer Quotes Soviet Official: '6 Million Died of Hunger,'" *New York Evening Journal*, 15 April 1935, pp. 1-2. Excerpts.**

*...Says Russian Famine Was Man-Made*

It may be news to the wide American public to learn that the Jewish press in this country is much better informed on Russia than the English language press, and that the *Forward* has for years supplied its readers with complete and unvarnished information on the tragedy of the Russian people under Bolshevism.

*Even the shock-proof world of today would shudder if it were to learn all the details of*

*the famine in Russia, especially in the southern, once fertile, territory of the Ukraine. It was a famine that did not spring from drought, from floods, from any act of nature. It was a man-made famine, a planned famine.*

While traveling in Soviet Russia, I often asked myself, “What has happened to civilization? We have a press boasting of its far-flung system of facilities unsurpassed in history. We have the technical marvels of telegraphy and radio, which in a few minutes bring the news of the least event in a remote corner of the globe to the whole wide world. And yet we have also developed systems of modern dictatorship which can prevent the starvation of millions of people, such as has occurred in Soviet Russia, from becoming known.”....

### *Article One*

I went to Soviet Russia as a freelance writer. I had no assignments, no duties to perform, no promises to fulfill. From country to country I traveled with one aim—to observe how people lived, to see where there is pain and where there is joy. I LOOKED FOR JOY IN SOVIET RUSSIA.

I am a Jew, and harbored nothing but hatred for the Russia of the Czars where my people had suffered so much. Full of hope I was now going to the new Russia to see the system which is trying to remake the entire world.

My Americanism had influenced me sufficiently to enable me to look at Soviet Russia with all the tolerance that the principles of American democracy stand for. My familiarity with the theories and practice of the labor movement equipped me especially to judge correctly what was going on under the Communist flag....

### *“Eating Dead Children Is Barbarism,” Says Poster Distributed in Villages*

In the office of a Soviet functionary I saw a poster on the wall which struck my attention. It showed the picture of a mother in distress, with a swollen child at her feet, and over the picture was the inscription: “EATING OF DEAD CHILDREN IS BARBARISM.”

I wondered. What was the purpose of such a poster? The Soviet official explained to me: “It is one of our methods of educating the people. We distributed such posters in hundreds of villages, especially in the Ukraine. We had to.”

“Is the situation that bad?” I asked in astonishment. “Are people really in such a condition as to eat their children’s corpses?”

The official was silent. It was a painful, disturbing silence.

“Not all our people are enlightened,” he remarked a little later.

Again I shuddered.

But I went down to the Ukraine and saw with my own eyes the destruction wrought there, the wreckage of a great country. I might have gone back to America after seeing Moscow and Leningrad. I had obtained a sufficient grasp of what life is under a dictatorship. I had seen the chasm between the Russia as she is painted abroad by the Soviet propaganda machine and the true Russia, unhappy, tortured, bleeding.

### *GOES TO INSPECT “BARRED LAND”*

But I felt it my duty to myself to go beyond that stage, to look into the heart of the land. After all, the two great cities were but shadows of an immense country. I decided to drink the bitter cup to the end....

### *TOLD SIX MILLION DIED OF HUNGER*

Only when I came to the Ukraine did I understand why Moscow kept foreign journalists out of it. A high Ukrainian Soviet official confidentially told me that 6,000,000 people had perished from famine in that territory alone, once the granary of Russia.

What I saw there made me think again and again:

“Why does not a new Jeremiah arise to lament in a voice that would make the whole world tremble the millions that are perishing on this soil? Why? Why?”

The harrowing facts I discovered in the Ukraine will be described in the following articles.

**Harry Lang, “Red Soldiers Turn Bandit to Avenge Fate of Kin,” *New York Evening Journal*, 16 April 1935, pp. 1–2.**

#### **Article Two**

We arrived in Kharkoff, then the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. The first street scenes I saw spoke their own language. Men and women were returning at sunset from the great tractor plant and other factories.

Their clothes were old, dirty strips of sacking. Their shoes were of shriveled leather or rotten rubber, full of holes.

Many women were carrying infants in their arms. There are no baby carriages in Soviet Russia.

#### *Ukrainian Soviet at Odds with Moscow*

And all, men and women alike, thousands of them, had lumps of black bread under their tattered sleeves. On the way, they nibbled at the bread and swallowed every crumb. The hand of hunger was sticking out from the mutilated chunks of bread.

A high official of the Ukrainian Soviet, with whom we established contact, confidentially advised me to take a trip to the villages. Only there, he said, would I see the full handiwork of the famine. And he added:

*“Six million people have perished from hunger in our country in 1932-33.” Then he paused, and repeated: “Six million.”*

Why should this Ukrainian official be interested in conveying that information to an American visitor? The answer is that the Ukrainian Soviet, the Ukrainian nationalists, are constantly at odds with Moscow.

The suggested trip cost me \$50 a day for the use of an automobile. The Ukrainian official accompanied me. We had a chauffeur. The road was grey gravel for stretches, and sticky yellow clay for other stretches.

#### *‘Impossible to Conceal Truth in Russia’*

No people were to be seen in the fields. On all sides were heaps of grain, corn or wheat, and ordinary hay. Although it was late in the Fall, the hay had not been stored. The grain had not been threshed and the shocks, soaked through and through, were already rotting.

It was morning. A vapor was rising from the damp and putrid shocks and heaps. It looked as if the fields were on fire. There were miles and miles and miles of such landscape.

My escort wanted me to see what the collectivized villages looked like. His heart was rent by the destruction of his people. Did the world know?

*The previous Spring and Summer a curtain had been dropped over certain provinces and regions of Soviet Russia. Yet within Russia, it was impossible to conceal the truth. It was impossible to erect walls between the cities and the villages.*

*The very political interests of the Soviet Government demanded that a cry should be raised in the cities that the peasants were seeking to starve the urban population. The Communist cry was that the peasants had refused to plow the fields, or to harvest crops. Factories were stopped and industrial workers were transformed overnight into agricultural laborers.*

The city people, therefore, knew only too well what was going on in the country. But foreign correspondents were a different matter. It was vital to the Soviet government that the outside world should not be able to penetrate to the countryside, and to hear the voice of the people. And now the curtain was lifting before me.

We were approaching the first village. The entrance was in the form of a crude gate made of stocks and stripped tree branches. The Soviet emblem, a star designed from sticks, was over the gate. In the center of the star, under glass, was a photograph of Lenin. Over it two red flags were hanging so as to form a crooked cross. One of the flags was tattered.

A soldier wearing a long army coat, with a rifle on his shoulder, was seated near the gate, his head partly sunk between his shoulders, his face buried in the collar of his coat. He was dozing. His bayonet, rising over his huddled figure, pointed straight upward.

#### *Officials Investigating 'Sabotage' Bring Their Own Food to Farm*

An investigation was going on when we arrived. Soldiers with rifles slung across their shoulders were standing at the doors of a couple of cabins. Other soldiers with fixed bayonets were on an army truck.

The investigation had to do with damaged tractors. The village had been collectivized, the peasants had been forced to join a kolkhoz—a collective farm. And now it was charged that the peasants had been “sabotaging,” a high crime indeed.

Officials in boots and short leather jackets were snooping about accompanied by soldiers. All the officials and soldiers carried chunks of black bread. They had brought their food supply along. They knew that in the villages it was impossible to obtain bread.

#### *MOTHER DROPS SICK CHILD IN ROADWAY*

With bated breath I was watching the Soviet investigators at work. Suddenly something else caught my eye. A peasant woman, dressed in something like patched old sacks, appeared from a side path. She was dragging a child of three or four years old by the collar of a torn coat, the way one drags a heavy bag-load. The woman pulled the child into the main street. Here she dropped it in the mud.

Everybody saw the scene, but no one made a move. My escort explained that he had long since grown accustomed to such sights. The peasant woman was the mother. The child's little face was bloated and blue. There was foam around the little lips. The little hands and tiny body w[ere] swollen. Here was a bundle of human parts, all deathly-sick, yet still held together by the breath of life.

The mother left the child on the road, in the hope that somebody might do something to save it.

My escort endeavored to hearten me. Thousands and thousands of such children, he told me, had met a similar fate in the Ukraine that year.

### *COMES TO VILLAGE INHABITED BY DEAD*

We visited one wretched village after another, until we came to the village of the dead.

Before us was a settlement of a few score houses. The doors were boarded up. Not a living creature in the gardens and the adjacent fields. Dead chimneys on the roofs, dead windows stared at us.

And then the image of a human stirred in the distance. The long overcoat of a soldier was dragging its way towards us....

“Here is where most of the inhabitants lie,” the soldier observed.

It did not look like a grave. There were no signs over it. The dead had simply been dumped into the ditch. How many were buried there? The soldier started to figure, and replied:

“A few dozen.”

### *2 Red Soldiers Become Bandits To Avenge Parents' Starvation*

The common grave was near the houses of the dead. Some of those who had perished were buried at the doors of their homes. Such was the case when a family buried one member after another. The soldier named a girl who had seen her mother bury her father, and who then had to bury her mother. Later the girl buried her little brother next to her parents. Then she fled to Kieff. But before leaving her native village, she set fire to a stable full of army horses.

The soldier had two comrades in the Red Army. They were brothers from a neighboring village. They served in separate regiments, in different localities.

One of them heard reports of famine at home and obtained leave to visit his native village. When he arrived his parents were already gone, expired from hunger. He went off to bring his brother to show him their deserted homestead. When the two men completed their service terms they became bandits, roving the countryside at night, getting their revenge.

### *COLLECTIVE FARM FOISTED ON VILLAGE*

The soldier pointed out two houses where corpses had lain for weeks until soldiers were sent to the village to gather up the dead.

My escort knew all the facts given by the soldier, but he wanted me to get it direct from the source. It seems that a kolkhoz (collective farm) had been foisted on the village.

The soldier pointed out to us the house which had belonged to the peasant who acted as chairman of the kolkhoz. Nominally, the chairman had been a Communist. But he had ikons in his home, and the peasants would come there to kneel and to pray. The chairman was then expelled from the Communist party.

### *“STALIN ENTHRONED OVER DEAD WORLD”*

But there was a monument among the deserted houses to the dead kolkhoz. It was a bell used to awaken the peasants, to call them to work. The bellman was a loyal adherent of the kolkhoz. The peasants kept away from him. When half the village was already dead from hunger, he would still rise at dawn and ring the bell—as if to call the dead.

As we left the village of the dead, we passed a gate over which were waving two red flags with broken poles. There was the customary Soviet emblem over it—the star.

A picture of Stalin was in the center. There was something symbolic about the photograph: Stalin enthroned over a dead world.

Harry Lang, "Street Bands in Kiev Steal Food from Starving Women," *New York Evening Journal*, 17 April 1935, pp. 1–2.

### Article Three

We were shaken by the scenes of famine in the Kharkov zone of Russia where we saw the village of the dead, its residents starved. But the Ukraine has a population of more than 30,000,000. What were conditions in the other sections? We proceeded upon our trip of investigation, and went to Kiev, the ancient capital of Russia, now capital of the Ukraine.

The main street of the city, the famous Krestchatik [Khreshchatyk], told a harrowing tale of famine at first glance. It was early in the morning. The sidewalks were crowded, thousands marching to work carrying their rations of coarse black bread. It was their breakfast—at which they nibbled on their way. Hunger was the standard of living in Soviet Russia.

#### *Woman Slumps To Ground—Dead*

Suddenly I saw a woman, still young, drop to the ground. She had an empty basket in her hands, and the basket rolled down the sidewalk. Her arms were convulsed for a moment, then they stretched out. Her eyes opened wide once or twice, then they closed. Her head shook fitfully, then it hit the stone pavement, and relaxed into stillness.

The passersby kept marching. Not one of them turned around. My first thought was that the woman had slipped and fallen by accident. I made a move to help her rise. With me was a man from my hotel. He quickly stopped me:

*"Don't! Under no circumstances should you go! It is not fitting for you, a visitor, a foreigner, to interfere."*

It appeared that this tragedy was a common occurrence. People enfeebled by starvation just collapsed in the streets and died. But why did it not attract attention? Were all those passersby heartless? Far from it. But everybody knew his own helplessness, that the dead were better off than the living.

#### *Haunted by Vision of Clutching Hands*

I was haunted for a long time by the vision of those outstretched still hands, that convulsed head, that empty basket rolling on the sidewalk.

I became a prey to conflicting moods. Now I felt crushed, almost paralyzed. Now I felt the impulse to run and to shout from the house-tops.

It was the season of the Jewish new year. I visited the central synagogue. It was crowded with thousands of worshippers, despite the threats of persecution by the Communist godless society.

*There is a special Jewish prayer which enumerates all the known forms of death. Its text contains a reference to death from famine. While I was in the synagogue, the man officiating at the services recited that prayer. When he came to the words, "And he that dies from hunger," he repeated the last word three times with burning anguish. Thousands of Jews sobbed and cried after him:*

*"Hunger, hunger, hunger!"*

I went down the Basin st., the Bowery of Kiev. In the United States I had heard many stories of the excellent care taken by the Soviets of homeless children. All over Russia I heard references to the "bandits"—the homeless children of the civil war period that had now reached maturity. Their number was legion in Kiev. Many of these street wolves were already in their

twenties.

Basin st. was the headquarters of these “bandits.” It also was the stamping ground of veterans of the Red Army, a ghastly collection of cripples and invalids pursuing unsavory affairs. The two parties were in alliance. The cripples acted as spotters, the street wolves carried out the open robberies.

I saw a woman carrying away food from the “open market” in Basin st. The street wolves prefer to attack women. One of them swooped down upon her and bit her arm. She dropped her food, and shrieked. The “bandit” snatched his loot and fled. A crowd formed quickly, but no one even tried to catch the thief. The policeman who came up to comfort the woman remarked:

“It’s the hunger that’s driving them on.”

### *Robbery Gets No Attention With Hunger in Every Throat*

And hunger was the immediate subject of conversation in the crowd. The woman was holding her wounded arm. Some distance away, the crippled soldiers laughed leeringly. No one talked of the robbery. The word famine was on everybody’s lips. Indeed, it was not banditry, it was calamity which filled the air.

I went to one of the Kiev cemeteries which had a special famine section. As far as the eye could see, hundreds of new graves stretched before me. They held the victims of starvation of part of 1932 and part of 1933. They were like the graves which follow a war or an epidemic. There were no headstones, only wooden sticks with numbers.

During the critical famine months, there were scores of daily burials. Sometimes the corpses would lie in the open on the grass for days until their turn came to be interred. Mourning relatives stood watch over their dead ones day and night. Huge armies of crows and ravens circled over the corpses and rent the air with their calls.

### *CEMETERIES HOLD MANY LIVING DEAD*

One of the grave-diggers came up to me and started a conversation.

“You are looking at our fresh graves?” he said. “You see, Kiev has also made its contribution to the second five-year plan. Tell my brothers in America about it.”

Cemeteries in Soviet Russia are seldom if ever visited by foreign correspondents. Yet what testimony they have to offer! For there are living people among the graves.

In the Kiev cemetery I saw hundreds of people scarified by the GPU, bearing the marks of torture from persecution and hunger. They stood over the graves of their dear ones and begged the dead for bread.

It was a damp day. The old trees in the cemetery were dripping. The cemetery fence had been removed to complete the construction of a factory. Its stones, boards, nails all had gone into the five-year plan. Even some of the headstones had been removed as building material.

I walked along until I came to a woman sobbing and crying aloud.

“What shall I tell you, my dear sister? You are well off. You see nothing, you hear nothing. Mother wanted to come and join you today. But she hasn’t the strength. We have nothing to eat at home, dear sister. Do you remember the beautiful home which we once had?” She was talking to the dead.

### *YOUNG MOTHER PLEADS FOR DEATH*

A young man, with his eyes half-closed, was addressing himself to two graves over which stood one headstone:

“Can you do nothing for me? Nothing? How long must I continue to suffer?”

A young woman dressed coarsely was sitting on the ground at the foot of a fine monument. Her sleeves were torn. Against the shining marble, she formed a striking contrast. It was her mother’s grave. She murmured something in Russian about mama taking her away. At her side was a boy. He wore a cap with a Soviet star. In his hands was a piece of black bread. He tried to bite at it, but tears were in his eyes.

The entire cemetery was peopled with such scenes.

**Harry Lang, “Peasants in Russia Burn Wheat Fields in Hunger Revolt,” *New York Evening Journal*, 20 April 1935, pp. 1–2. Excerpts.**

#### Article Five

We took a motor trip from Kieff, the present capital of the Ukraine, into the country, and came upon a new sight. A field, with the crops still lying on it, was burning. As in other zones, the grain in the province of Kieff had also been left to perish. But sunshine had dried the stacks and, to prevent the Government from saving the wheat, rebel peasants had set it on fire at night.

As far as the eye could reach, the bread field was in flames. Troops had been called out to combat the conflagration, but they were helpless. Groups of soldiers were struggling to remove the stacks from the path of the fire.

#### *‘Rather Death Than Slavery’*

Other soldiers were seated on two army lorries, wearily watching the weird spectacle. Peasants driving by in their carts did not even turn to look at the burning field. They feigned indifference.

Here was a new form of revolt. Its silent slogan was: Destroy everything and perish from hunger! There are times when people would rather have death than slavery.

In Soviet Russia, bayonets and hunger march side by side. Frequently, as our car passed through wooded zones, I observed muddy side roads leading into the forest.

There I saw parties of peasants, surrounded by armed soldiers, doing forced labor. Some of the convicts were women with infants in their arms. My escorts, including the chauffeur of the Soviet-owned car, explained that the prisoners were rebels, strikers, who refused to join in *Kolkhoz* (collective farm) work.

#### *Woman Carries Dead Child to Cemetery*

We arrived in a town about 60 miles from Kieff. Here I witnessed a singular funeral procession. It was the Jewish Sabbath, on which day no burials are allowed by the Mosaic law.

A Jewish woman, carrying a dead child in her arms, was making her way to the cemetery. The child, about three years old, had died the night before. The mother, who shared quarters with other families having children, could not keep the little corpse at home.

All the other children were bloated from hunger. The mother was going to stay with her dead child at the cemetery until sundown, when she would dig a little hole in the ground and bury him.

Not a single person accompanied the woman. When I stopped her, she hugged the little corpse. She talked in a voice that snapped in the middle of words. A month earlier she had buried in the same fashion another child of hers. Both children had died from hunger.

I wanted to know about her husband. Yes, she had had one, a worker, but he had been

sent down to Odessa. For a while he had sent her a little money.

Then she received a notice from the Odessa Soviet that her husband was dead.

It was just like a war notice. She wanted to investigate, but could not get permission to leave. Perhaps her husband had been shot. She did not know.

I obtained the services of a man to perform the rites of an undertaker and grave-digger. Only when the dead child was removed from her arms, to be put away until nightfall, did the woman break down. She cried:

“There are still people with hearts left in the world.”

And I, a stranger from faraway America, wept with her.

### *BERDICHEFF NOW TOWN OF MUDHOLES*

We continued on our journey until we came to Berdicheff, once a lively Jewish trading center in the sugar-beet district. The city now seemed to sink in mud holes.

Soldiers and police were driving the townspeople to work in the fields, as the peasants in the country had refused to dig the beets. The whole region was in a state of terror.

*People would rather [have] died from hunger than labor in the fields. Why? Because they demanded bread for their toil. Some wanted more bread, better bread, not the coarse black stuff baked with straw, which the Soviet supplied.*

A large modern bakery had been installed some months earlier in Berdicheff. The Communist managers and the bakers, it was revealed, had formed an alliance to steal flour and bread from the Government bakery.

Here was a new sidelight on the famine—bakers going hungry and forced to steal bread! Yet they knew that their crime involved more than theft, that they would be charged with a conspiracy against the state. The main cause of all Soviet crime is hunger, but the Soviet Government is not interested in the cause of crime....

Finally, we left the Ukraine and started for the Soviet Republic of White Russia. We were passing through fields flooded by Autumn rains.

In the middle of the night armed soldiers boarded our train. We learned from them that the entire territory was under martial law. The peasants had refused the orders of the local Soviets to dig ditches and drain the roadways. They demanded bread. Troops had been called to drive them to the task.

### *SAYS ALL ROADS LED TO FAMINE*

The woman conductor on our train warned me to watch my things.

“People are hungry,” she said. “Look out, when the train stops at stations somebody might get on board and steal your provisions.”

It became clear that all the roads of the land led to famine.

### **Harry Lang, “Soviets Seized Cash Sent by U.S. Kin to Starving Russians,” *New York Evening Journal*, 23 April 1935, pp. 1–2. Excerpts.**

My trip to Soviet Russia was part of a world’s tour which took a year and included 19 countries. As a Socialist, as a lover of freedom, and as a Jew, I went to Russia full of fervent expectations.

I came out crushed, shell-shocked. Nowhere did I see suffering on such a titanic scale. Nowhere did I find the tragedy of a great people so effectively concealed behind a conspiracy of

silence.

That conspiracy hid from the eyes of the world not only the famine of millions, but also the iron shadows of that famine, which strangled the cries of the victims. They were the shadows of inquisition which followed in the wake of the famine.

### *Dollars Sent by U.S. Kin Seized*

The first of these shadows was the “Dollar Inquisition.” Before I left the United States, I knew that the Jews of this country were aroused by numerous reports of a system of extortion and torture practiced by the G.P.U. on relatives of American immigrants.

The latter, replying to appeals for help from their starving kinsmen in Russia, sent them small money orders. The famine had impoverished the Soviet State treasury. The coffers of the G.P.U. were empty. The G.P.U. then launched an organized campaign to extort the American dollars as a source of government revenue.

This “Dollar Inquisition” caused the American Jewish Congress, led by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, to call meetings of protest.

The Hebrew poet laureate in Palestine, Chaim Nachman Bialik, had gathered a mass of authentic evidence proving conclusively that the G.P.U. was terrorizing all the Jewish communities in Russia, imprisoning people just because they had relatives in America, and holding them as hostages until ransom arrived....

Behind the appalling scenes of the famine that I had witnessed stretched the second iron shadow of the Russian tragedy.

There was revealed before me a spontaneous general strike of millions of peasants.

### *PEASANTS RESIST COLLECTIVIZATION*

Hundreds of villages, without leadership, were offering resistance to the Stalin system of collectivization, which forced them to turn their homes, cattle, fields and implements into government-operated enterprises. The peasants who had made the revolution in order to gain the land now found themselves deprived of their gains.

Millions resisted passively. Others resorted to sabotage. Beneath the cloak of the famine a grim and silent war was being waged. It was waged with arson, with theft, with crafty means of vengeance.

Peasants joined collective farms in order to wreck them from within. They destroyed their livestock, neglected their fields and stubbornly marched to death. It was a war for bread, perhaps the most gruesome war that has ever been fought....

The third shadow of the famine reached as far as America. It is still in our midst. While the Soviet propaganda machine would have the American people believe that the Russian people are happy, another arm of the Soviet Government gathers and solicits American dollars for victims of hunger in Russia.

Every year hundreds of thousands of immigrants in this country send to their relatives in Russia food parcels and money orders through the Torgsin. The advertisements of the Torgsin appear in our press....

We are told that everybody in Russia is employed. Yet the records of the Soviet Torgsin and its innumerable agencies will show how many unemployed immigrants in America keep their employed relatives in Russia alive.

Most of these immigrants are Jewish workers. I interviewed hundreds of their relatives in Russia.

### *RUSSIAN WORKERS ENVY U.S. FREEDOM*

All of them gave me the same message to bring home, namely, that the workers of Russia envy American freedom, American democracy. More than once I was told:

“Tell American labor not to be misled by the false friends of the Soviet Union. They are the enemies of the Russian people. Many of them are big industrialists and promoters who seek to make money doing business with the Soviet Government.

“These Wall Street friends of Bolshevism think that we are different from other human beings, that the Russian people like their oppressors. Tell them in America the truth about us.”

Appalled as I was by the excruciating sights of the famine, I was even more appalled by the task of conveying the truth, conveying a picture of the monster which created the famine—the monster of dictatorship.

**Whiting Williams, “My Journey Through Famine-Stricken Russia,” *Answers* (London), 24 February 1934. Excerpts, pp. 16–17, 28.**

Charles Whiting Williams (1878–1975) was a writer and lecturer on labor-management relations. On the basis of his observations of working conditions and workers’ attitudes in various countries, Williams wrote books and articles, including *What’s on the Worker’s Mind, by One Who Put On Overalls to Find Out* (1920), *Full Up and Fed Up: The Worker’s Mind in Crowded Britain* (1921), *Horny Hands and Hampered Elbows: The Worker’s Mind in Western Europe* (1922), *Mainsprings of Men* (1925), and *America’s Mainspring and the Great Society: A Pick-and-Shovel Outlook* (1967). His experiences are described in Daniel A. Wren, *White Collar Hobo: The Travels of Whiting Williams* (1987).

...[D]uring the last twelve months, in one European country, millions of people have died of starvation.... Dying in a land which was formerly one of the richest of all the peasant states....

“Only the strong will see next summer’s sun,” said the chambermaid in a Soviet hotel in which I stayed at the beginning of the tour which took me through the length and breadth of the Russian Ukraine. I laughed at her.

Travelling by rail to Kharkov, the capital of this great agricultural and industrial province, I talked in German to an engineer who was in the same coach.

“You know that starvation has been killing off people here by the million?” he said....

“Nonsense,” I said. “The thing’s crazy! If there were anything like that happening, the whole world would be ringing with it and organising relief.”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, let’s ask the conductor,” I said. He was passing through the coach just then.

“My own daughter died of hunger just three months ago to-day,” he said simply, when we put the question to him.

Even then I could hardly believe that there had been anything beyond, perhaps, a few isolated deaths in remote villages. But as I went through the country, and particularly in the Donetz Basin, I found that the engineer had not lied....

...Once I was off the beaten track which the tourists follow I saw with my own eyes the victims of famine. Men and women who were literally dying of hunger in the gutter.

Have you ever seen a human being in the last stages of starvation? If you have done so once, you can never mistake the signs. The swollen faces and ankles which follow the

breakdown of the body's normal functioning set the final seal of famine upon the emaciation of long-continued want....

...[T]he worst memory I have brought out of Russia is the children. There was one youngster I saw in Kharkov. Half-naked, he had sunk, exhausted, on the carriage-way, with the kerbstone as a pillow, and his pipe-stem legs sprawled out, regardless of danger from passing wheels.

Another—a boy of eight or nine—was sitting among the debris of a street market, picking broken eggshells out of the dirt and examining them with heartbreaking minuteness in the hope of finding a scrap of food still sticking to them. His shrunken cheeks were covered with an unhealthy whitish down that made me think of those fungoid growths that sprout in the darkness out of dying trees.

I saw him again in the same place the next day—motionless now with his head sunk between his knees in a piteous abandonment.

While eating in a restaurant in the same town I saw a girl of twelve run up the steps towards a veranda table from which a customer had just risen. For a moment she hesitated; shrank back as if in fear as she saw the man look at her. Finally, reassured by his expression, she darted boldly forward, gathered the scraps he had left on his plate in her fingers, then turned and ran down the steps with her prize.

For all the world she was like a wild bird driven by a hard winter to a town garden. There was the same suspicion, the same holding back, and the same momentary boldness followed by headlong flight. Something, also, perhaps, of the same grace and beauty. I shall never see her again, but I cherish the hope that she will survive.

There are hordes of those wild children in all the towns. They live—and die—like wild animals.

Where do they come from? I made inquiries about them, and learned that last winter, when food supplies began to fail, large numbers of peasants left their villages and came into towns with their families, hoping that there they might get a chance to work—and eat.

There was neither work nor bread for them, and under a new regulation that required every adult in the towns to show papers to prove his right to be there, they were driven back to their foodless villages.

They believed they were returning to certain starvation. So they left the children behind. In the villages, they said, the little ones would inevitably die—in the towns, their chance of life might be slender, but it was at least a chance.

Something like 18,000 children were abandoned in this manner—abandoned because that was the only way in which their parents could help them—in Kharkov alone....

I saw some of the wild children of this winter being rounded up. A horse-drawn wagon lumbered along the street, with two or three policemen marching beside it. When they saw one of the little Ishmaels the police gave chase. If the youngster was caught, he was placed among the others already in the wagon....

Once, when the wagon stopped and a chase was in progress, two of the lads previously captured saw their chance, scrambled to the ground, and made off as hard as they could into a maze of narrow alley-ways.

I felt rather sorry for these youngsters, running back to the hardship and hunger of their life in the gutter, when, as I thought, they would have been fed and clad and educated in the institution to which they were being taken. But when I mentioned this to a Russian acquaintance he just stared at me.

At first I could not believe what he told me. Then I spoke to a number of other people. They all said the same thing.

These children were not sent to homes. Bread was too scarce. They were put into railway wagons and unloaded out in the open country—too far out for it to be possible to walk back to town.

And once, at least, three wagons filled with youngsters were shunted into a siding and forgotten for three days. When, at the end of that time, someone found them, not one of the children remained alive.

I don't pretend, of course, that this was a typical case. But what chance have children dumped out in the open country?...

**William Henry Chamberlin, *Russia's Iron Age* (London: Duckworth, 1935). Excerpts, pp. 82–89.**

William Henry Chamberlin (1897–1969) was an American historian and journalist who specialized in Russia, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War. He served as Moscow correspondent of the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Manchester Guardian* from 1922 to 1934. His most influential books include *Soviet Russia: A Living Record and a History* (1930), *Russia's Iron Age* (1934), and *The Russian Revolution 1917–1921* (1935).

Rumors of wholesale starvation in the villages, especially in the southern and southeastern provinces of European Russia and in Central Asia, began to filter into Moscow in the early spring. A clear intimation that things were happening in the country districts which the Soviet censors very definitely wished to conceal from the outside world was the unprecedented action of the authorities in forbidding several foreign correspondents to leave Moscow, and the establishment of a new ruling to the effect that no foreign correspondent could travel in the countryside without submitting a definite itinerary and obtaining permission to make the trip from the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs.

No such permissions were granted until September, when the new harvest was largely gathered in, the corpses had all been buried, the trucks which, during the late winter and early spring, made regular rounds in Poltava, Kiev, and other centres of the famine region, picking up the corpses of refugees from the country districts, had ceased to function, and conditions were generally more normal. After the prohibition had been lifted, I visited three widely separated districts of the Soviet Union—Kropotkin, in the North Caucasus, and Poltava and Byelaya Tserkov, in Ukraina. I talked at railroad stations with peasants ranging from the southeast corner of Ukraina, in the Donetsk Basin, to the northwestern part of Chernigov Province. On the basis of talks with peasants and figures supplied not by peasants, who were often prone to exaggeration, but by local Soviet officials and collective-farm presidents, whose interest was rather to minimize what had taken place, I have no hesitation in saying that the southern and southeastern section of European Russia during the first six months of 1933 experienced a major famine, far more destructive than the local famines which occurred, mostly on the Volga, in exceptionally bad drought years under Tsarism, second in the number of its victims probably only to the famine of 1921–22.

The first thing that struck me when I began to walk about in the Cossack villages in the neighborhood of Kropotkin was the extraordinary deterioration in the physical condition of what had once been an extremely fertile region. Enormous weeds, of striking height and toughness,

filled up many of the gardens and could be seen waving in the fields of wheat, corn, and sunflower seeds. Gone were the wheaten loaves, the succulent slices of lamb that had been offered for sale everywhere when I visited the Kuban Valley in 1924. At that time every Cossack settlement had its large number of fierce, snapping dogs, trained to guard sheep and cattle; now there was an almost ghostly quiet; the bark of a dog was never heard. "The dogs all died or were eaten up during the famine," was the general explanation of their disappearance.

In the first house which I entered, quite at random, in the *stanitsa*, or Cossack settlement of Laduzhskaya, southwest of Kropotkin (the Cossack *stanitsa* is usually much larger than the typical peasant village), I encountered a grim episode of what would officially be called "class struggle on the agrarian front." A handsome young Cossack woman, who had just given birth to a baby and who lived in the house with her mother, her husband being away on military service, told me how her brother, with some companions, had beaten a grain collector so badly that he died; and how he returned from serving a term in prison, where he received nothing but water and very little bread, so weakened that he, with his wife and five children, had all died of hunger and exhaustion in the spring....

In another *stanitsa*, Kazanskaya, which is picturesquely situated on a high bluff above the Kuban River, I called on the president of the local Soviet, Mr. Nemov, in an effort to obtain some official information about the mortality rate during the preceding winter and spring. Nemov scouted the stories of the peasants that a third or a half of the inhabitants had perished. "The population declined from about 8,000 to about 7,000," he declared. "About 850 died and another 150 were deported because they sabotaged the government's programme of grain collection." Mr. Nemov showed me mortality statistics for four months—January, February, March, and April. They indicated how the curve of death mounted upward as the peasants' last reserves of grain were exhausted toward spring. Thus 21 persons died in January, 34 in February, 79 in March, and 155 in April. This upward tendency most probably continued during May and early June, until early vegetables provided some relief.

Regarding the causes of the famine, the accounts of Mr. Nemov and of the peasants tallied fairly closely.... [I]t was the general testimony of the peasants that they could have pulled through if the local authorities had not swooped down with heavy requisitions. The last reserves of grain, which had been buried in the ground by the desperate peasants, were dug up and confiscated. A man named Sheboldaev, with a reputation for cruelty in "liquidating" kulaks in the lower Volga district, was made President of the North Caucasus, where the passive resistance was doubtless stiffer than in other sections of the country, because a considerable part of the population consisted of Cossacks, who had enjoyed a higher standard of living than the mass of the peasants before the Revolution and who had mostly fought on the side of the Whites during the civil war. Under Sheboldaev's orders whole communities, such as Poltavskaya, in the Western Kuban, were deported *en masse* to the frozen regions of the north in the dead of winter. Other villages which did not fill out the grain quotas that were demanded from them were "blockaded," in the sense that no city products were allowed to reach them. Local officials who protested against the pitiless repression were deposed, arrested, in a few cases shot.

Sheboldaev's methods, which were, of course, applied with the knowledge and approval of the central authorities in Moscow, squeezed out of the North Caucasus the full amount of grain which Moscow demanded.<sup>6</sup> But they turned what would otherwise perhaps have been a

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<sup>6</sup> How ruthlessly the fertile North Caucasus was plundered under the regime of collectivization is evident from the following figures, which Sheboldaev cited at the last Party Congress. The amount of grain realized by the state in the North Caucasus was as follows: 1928, 56,000,000 poods (a pood is about

hunger into a famine, and they left a diseased and weakened population (there was a tremendous epidemic of malignant malaria in the Kuban Valley in 1933) and a ravaged and devastated countryside which will require years of reconstruction before it can hope to regain its former prosperity.

In the villages around Poltava, a charming Ukrainian town built on a hillside with an abundance of leafy trees along its streets, and in the vicinity of Byelaya Tserkov, a small town southwest of Kiev, largely inhabited by Jews, I found much of the same situation as in the North Caucasus.... [P]eople often broke down and wept when they described what they and their relatives and friends had experienced during the preceding winter and spring. "No war ever took from us so many people," exclaimed one woman with whom I talked in Poltava. And in one veritable Village of Death (its name was Cherkass), some eight miles south of Byelaya Tserkov, I had it on the authority of the secretary of the local Soviet, Mr. Fishenko, that about 600 of the village's former 2,000 inhabitants had perished. Hundreds of others had fled. Fishenko's figure found abundant confirmation in the stories of the famine survivors and in the grim mute evidence of the numerous abandoned houses, with their weed-grown gardens and gaping doors and windows.

Two noteworthy features of the famine were that far more men died than women and far more *edinolichniki* (individual peasants) than members of collective farms. If in many districts 10 per cent of the collective farmers died, the percentage of mortality among the individual peasants was sometimes as high as 25. Of course not all who died passed through the typical stages of death from outright hunger, abnormal swellings under the eyes and of the stomach, followed in the last stages by swollen legs and cracking bones. The majority died of slight colds which they could not withstand in their weakened condition; of typhus, the familiar accompaniment of famine; of "exhaustion," to use the familiar euphemistic word in the death reports. Here and there one heard dark stories of cannibalism; in Poltava it was said that a trade in human flesh had been going on until the authorities discovered it and shot the participants. But apparently cannibalism had not been widespread. The famine area, so far as I could observe and learn from reliable information, included Ukraine, the North Caucasus, a number of districts in the middle and lower Volga, and considerable sections of remote Kazak[h]stan, in Central Asia. Northern and Central Russia and Siberia suffered a good deal of hardship and undernourishment, but not actual famine. The number of people who lived in famine areas was in the neighborhood of sixty million; the excess of deaths over a normal mortality rate can scarcely have been less than three or four million.<sup>7</sup>

There is something epically and indescribably tragic in this enormous dying out of millions of people, sacrifices on the altar of a policy which many of them did not even understand. The horror of this last act in the tragedy of the individual peasantry is perhaps intensified by the fact that the victims died so passively, so quietly, without arousing any stir of sympathy in the outside world. The Soviet censorship saw to that.

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three-fifths of a bushel); 1929, 92,000,000 poods; 1930, 123,000,000 poods; 1931, 187,000,000 poods; 1932, 112,000,000 poods; 1933, 133,000,000 poods. In other words, the state, during the last three hungry years, has been regularly taking from the North Caucasian peasants two or three times as much as the peasants gave up in 1928, when the situation with meat and dairy products was vastly better.

<sup>7</sup> The average mortality rate which I found with monotonous regularity in the districts I personally visited was about 10 per cent. If one makes allowance for normal mortality and also for the fact that the towns suffered much less than the country districts, the excess of three or four million still remains.

Of the historic responsibility of the Soviet Government for the famine of 1932–33 there can be no reasonable doubt. In contrast to its policy in 1921–22, it stifled any appeal for foreign aid by denying the very fact of the famine and by refusing to foreign journalists the right to travel in the famine regions until it was all over. Famine was quite deliberately employed as an instrument of national policy, as the last means of breaking the resistance of the peasantry to the new system where they are divorced from personal ownership of the land and obliged to work on the conditions which the state may dictate to them and deliver up whatever the state may demand from them.

**Louis Fischer, *Soviet Journey* (New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, 1935). Excerpts, pp. 170–72.**

Louis Fischer (1896–1970) was an American journalist who served as Moscow correspondent for *The Nation* from 1923 to 1938. Originally a communist fellow traveler and denier of the famine of 1932–33, he eventually became a critic of communism and the Soviet Union. He was the author of *Oil Imperialism: The International Struggle for Petroleum* (1926), *The Soviets in World Affairs* (1930), *The War in Spain* (1937), *Stalin* (1952), and *Lenin* (1964).

I had spent the month of October, 1932, traveling through the Ukraine. All over the countryside I saw grain which the peasants had left on the fields. It had rotted. It was their winter's food. Then those same peasants starved. They had been practising passive resistance against the government....

The peasants brought the calamity upon themselves. Yet one can understand what prompted this suicidal action. The Bolsheviks had launched the ambitious Five Year Plan. It had to be financed.... The worker paid in the form of reduced consumption goods. The peasant paid in the form of huge taxes. In many cases, the government took thirty, even fifty, indeed even sixty per cent of his crop....

It was a terrible lesson at a terrific cost. History can be cruel. The Bolsheviks were carrying out a major policy on which the strength and character of their regime depended. The peasants were reacting as normal human beings would. Let no one minimize the sadness of the phenomenon. But from the larger point of view the effect was the final entrenchment of collectivization. The peasantry will never again undertake passive resistance. And the Bolsheviks—one hopes—have learned that they must not compel the peasantry to attempt such resistance.

In the final analysis, the 1932 famine was a concomitant of the last battle between private capitalism and socialism in Russia. The peasants wanted to destroy collectivization. The government wanted to retain collectivization. The peasants used the best means at their disposal. The government used the best means at its disposal. The government won.

**Adam J. Tawdul, “10,000,000 Starved in Russia in Two Years, Soviet Admits,” *New York American*, 18 August 1935, pp. 1–2. Excerpts, p. 2.**

Adam J. Tawdul (1894–1976) was born in Omsk, Russia. He attended the Tomsk Polytechnical Institute and became involved in revolutionary activity in tsarist Russia. In 1913 he fled to the United States, where he became an active communist. On being hired by Amtorg as an engineer, he returned to the USSR in 1931 and worked at the Kharkiv Tractor Plant. Disillusioned with what he saw, he returned to the United States in 1934.

**...The acid test of all news from the Soviet Union remains to this day the suppression of the fact that at least 10,000,000 people perished from famine in that country in 1932-33. This figure was disclosed to me by high Soviet officials in confidential conversations.**

There are Communist and pro-Communist publications in this country which specialize in telling the “truth” about Russia—the Stalin truth. I was myself a voracious reader of these publications and a zealous believer in their “truth”—until I went to live in Soviet Russia and saw the reality....

Now I was a high Communist official in Russia, I mixed with the upper crust of the Soviet aristocracy, and none of them ever denied the facts of the widespread famine which their government officially suppressed from a gullible world.

Indeed, many of these Soviet potentates gave me data as to the extent of the catastrophe, and some of them even justified it as prudent policy for the solution of the agricultural problem....

The case of Nikolai Skrypnik [Mykola Skrypnyk], Stalin’s most trusted commissar in the Ukraine, attracted attention abroad. In 1933, after a stormy session with Stalin, Skrypnik returned to the capital of the Ukraine, Kharkov, where, according to an official announcement, he committed suicide. According to unofficial information, he was assassinated.

#### *Officials Justified Famine*

Skrypnik knew me as a child in Siberia. When he was a fugitive from the Czarist police, my father kept him in hiding in our home in Tomsk. He was a native Ukrainian, and I recognized him at the all-Ukrainian trade union congress, where I was present as a delegate, in spite of a lapse of many years. He was deeply moved when I introduced myself.

“So you are Adka!” he exclaimed, and vividly recalled my father, my home, and his own conversations with me when I was a lad. I became a friend of the Skrypnik household, and through it entered the highest Communist circles on a social basis, a rare privilege for even a foreign Communist in Russia these days.

“At least 8,000,000 people have already perished from the famine in the Ukraine and the Northern Caucasus alone,” Skrypnik told me one evening early in 1933, in the course of our many intimate conversations on the famine.

He was at that time insisting that Stalin change his policy and was even in favor of an understanding with the socialists and of a democratization of the Soviet system. According to Skrypnik, Stalin was ready to make peace with the socialist and liberal elements under the threat of the famine within and of Japan without.

“If Europe does not come to our aid now, we will go down, and the cause of the revolution will be lost for many generations,” Skrypnik told me. He had argued along the same lines with Stalin and was under the impression that Stalin was ready to institute reforms. He was quickly disillusioned, in spite of his past loyalty to Stalin, when he discovered that the Kremlin was cynical about the devastation wrought by the famine in his native Ukraine.

I was staggered by the figure of 8,000,000 deaths from starvation coming from such an authoritative source as Skrypnik, but I pursued my inquiries on the subject in other high quarters, only to find that Skrypnik’s figure checked with all official estimates of the victims of the famine.

**Adam M. [sic] Tawdul, "Russia Warred on Own People," *New York American*, 19 August 1935, pp. 1–2. Excerpts.**

***The Soviet Government published no statistics of the famine. Indeed, as far as the Soviet press was concerned the famine did not exist.***

Everybody in Russia knew, however, that ENTIRE PROVINCES in the South and in the East were being depopulated by starvation and epidemics....

"From 8,000,000 to 9,000,000 people have already perished in the Ukraine alone," I was told in 1933 by [Kliment] Voroshilov's right hand man in Kharkov, Balinsky [Vsevolod Balytsky] who hold [sic] the rank of a general in the Red Army.

"This is the figure that we have submitted to the boss [Stalin], but it is approximate, as none of us knows the exact numbers."....

Balinsky's figure may be regarded as the most authoritative official estimate available of the victims of the famine in the Ukraine, as Balinsky is a member of the executive council of the G.P.U. of the Soviet Union and was the representative of that all-powerful organization in the Ukraine....

The famine in the Ukraine and the North Caucasus mowed down from eight to nine million souls, but there was also fearful devastation by hunger in the Ural and Western Siberian zone....

"More than one million people died from hunger in the Urals, in the trans-Volga region and in western Siberia in 1932–1933," I was told by [Kazimir Petrovich] Lovin, the director of the Cheliabinsk tractor plant....

"The great majority of the deaths were among the non-Russian natives," Lovin observed, "such as Tartars, Kirghiz, Bashkirs and other nomads. The famine among these races coincided with the Soviet drive to settle permanently in collectives the native tribes and to consolidate thereby the Russian domination of the area."

Lovin, a relative of Stalin's last wife, was the czar of the Urals. His name was awe and his word was law to the local population. He discussed frankly with me the policies which made for the famine, and did not conceal the POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS which the Kremlin entertained in connection with the disaster.

On the basis of Balinsky's and Lovin's official estimates submitted to Stalin, a total of at least TEN MILLION PEOPLE PERISHED FROM HUNGER in the Soviet Union in 1932–33....

**Adam J. Tawdul, "Soviet Traded Lives for Power, Says Ex-Aide," *New York American*, 20 August 1935, p. 4. Excerpts.**

...."The famine must be artificially aggravated and actively exploited as a means of 'finishing with the Kulak' once for all," were the whispered views which I heard expressed more than once among the superior G.P.U. functionaries in Kharkov....

Said Comrade Lovin:

"The famine has been of great benefit to us in the Urals, in Western Siberia and in the Trans-Volga. In these regions the losses from starvation have mostly affected the alien races. Their place is being taken by Russian refugees from the central provinces.

"We are, of course, no nationalists. But as realists in politics we cannot overlook this advantageous fact. The Slav population in the borderlands is COMPELLED, for its own self-

protection, to support the Soviet Government.”....

If those Communist apologists in America who prattle about the freedom of nationalities in Russia could have heard Lovin’s cold-blooded statement of Russian imperialism and subjection of the minority races by the scourge of famine, they might have gained an insight into the real nature of the Soviet Government....

**Adam J. Tawdul, “Official Murder in Soviet,” *New York American*, 21 August 1935, p. 4. Excerpts.**

....Early in the Fall of 1933 I returned to Kharkov on the way from the North Caucasus. A little party was arranged for me at the village of Chuhuyevvo [Chuhuiiv], where certain functionaries of the Kharkov tractor plant and other Communist leaders were wont to stage drinking bouts behind lines of sentries, far from the eyes of the hungry population.

The party lasted a couple of days. Among those present was Tolmachev, the chief of the Communist Party control in Kharkov.

*Killed Own Children*

“The damned Kulaks are destroying their own children out of hatred for the Soviet Government,” Tolmachev began to relate his experiences to me as the head of a punitive expedition when our celebration was already in its second day and tongues wagged more freely.

“There was a wholesale anti-Kulak drive on in the province,” he continued. “I was in command of a detachment of 15 Communists sent down to supervise the operation, as Moscow had received reports that the local authorities were too soft in their actions.

“Our expedition worked smoothly and there was no resistance. Of course, the women and children were wailing without let-up. We discovered some concealed grain, made the necessary requisitions, evicted the Kulaks from their homes, arrested some and sent them off by the prison route to exile.

“Then we came upon a peasant who was strangely quiet, not only when we made an inventory of all his house and barn belongings, but even when we discovered a sack of rye under a pile of manure in the garden.

“The peasant’s wife, holding an infant at her breast, was moaning all the while, and pleaded especially with us to leave them the cow and a chest packed with garments.

“We went about our job and were on the point of taking the cow away when the peasant, although under guard of a soldier, suddenly jumped up, seized the infant out of his wife’s arms, and swung it against the corner of the house, killing it instantly.

“For a second I was dazed. Then I pulled out my revolver and shot him on the spot. The mother, with a frightful cry, threw herself upon me. I had to shoot her down too.”....

Tolmachev told me of the episode after he had been drinking for a couple of days. It seemed to me for a moment that, in spite of his hardened exterior, he felt the need of pouring out his “soul.” But he narrated it in a tone of indignation at the “Kulak,” and emphasized that he had been justified in his act....

Special detachments were assigned to gather corpses in city streets, at railway stations and along the railways where human bodies thrown off trains would be found. These squads of grave-diggers kept no records and left no traces. They dug “fraternal” graves and buried all the dead without bothering to identify them....

How many were buried in the villages without any formalities during the famine can

never be established....

Yet the horrors observed in the cities were but the remote reverberations of the quake which shook the countryside where the famine raged like an unchecked pestilence.

**Ewald Ammende, *Human Life in Russia* (London: Allen and Unwin [1936]; repr. Cleveland: John T. Zubal, Inc., 1984). Excerpts, pp. 223–29, 231–32, 243–45, 252–56.**

Ewald Ammende (1892–1936) was a Baltic German businessman, human-rights activist, and champion of national rights. He participated in international relief efforts during the famine of 1921–22 in Ukraine and Russia. He was the founder and secretary general of the Congress of Organized National Groups in the States of Europe, which first met in 1925 and was based in Geneva. He was the author of *Die Nationalitäten in den Staaten Europas* (1931) and *Muß Rußland hungern? Menschen- und Völkerschicksale in der Sowjetunion* (1935; published in translation as *Human Life in Russia* in 1936).

Among Moscow's guests of honour a special place must be assigned to the former French Prime Minister, Edouard Herriot; not only because his journey was a political event of the first importance which initiated a complete change in France's attitude towards Soviet Russia, but also because it was M. Herriot's ambition to give to his Russian journey and to the publication of its results the character of "a visit for purposes of study by an experienced administrator." .... M. Herriot's categorical declaration that there was no famine in Russia naturally made the very greatest impression throughout Europe....

...His action has had a disastrous influence upon the incipient will to bring relief to Russia which was beginning to make itself felt in a number of countries.... M. Herriot...not only disputed the existence of any famine in Russia; he went on to say generally that people who talked about a famine could be doing so only in the interests of a definite anti-Russian policy, of separatist tendencies, or the like....

It is significant that although M. Herriot was supposed to be travelling for information and in a private capacity, he was accompanied not only by French journalists and Soviet officials, but also by the French Ambassador, M. Alfand. One may fairly ask whether a journey undertaken to obtain the truth about Russian conditions could reasonably require the presence of the French representative accredited to the Kremlin.

...On August 26 M. Herriot arrived at Odessa in the Soviet vessel *Chicherin* after a "delightful journey."....

A few miles away from Odessa and Belyaevka [Biliaivka] is the site of the formerly flourishing German Black Sea settlements—now a scene of death and destruction. Dozens of letters on this point may be seen at the offices of the "Brethren in Distress" dating precisely from the period of M. Herriot's visit. The contrast is striking. In a later article (*Pester Lloyd*, October 1) M. Herriot confidently declares: "Nowhere did I find a sign of distress, not even in the German villages, which had been described as suffering from famine." According to the latest figures 140,000 Germans died in Russia in 1932–33....

After this first great piece of stage-management M. Herriot and his suite had completed their studies of Odessa and the surroundings and proceeded...to Kiev, the second stage of the visit to the Ukraine. Kiev is, of course, next to Kharkov, the town in the south most severely afflicted by the famine and its attendant phenomena. M. Herriot was now in the centre of the

agricultural district of the Ukraine, the best place from which to undertake a serious study of the position....

But what did the ex Prime Minister and skilled administrator do? The report published in *Pravda* on September 27 is so characteristic of the activities of M. Herriot and his suite...that I quote it at length.

“This morning M. Herriot arrived at Kiev, accompanied by his secretary Serlen, and the deputies Julien and Marcel Ray, former chefs de cabinet of the ex Prime Minister. M. Alfon, the French Ambassador, also arrived. They were accompanied by Helfand;<sup>8</sup> the deputy president of the Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce, Velitchko; the representative of the *Petit Parisien*, Lucien; the special correspondent of *Izvestia*, Gari; and the special correspondent of the Tass agency. At the station the guests were met by the president of the regional Ispolkom [executive committee], Vassilenko, the deputy president of the Gorsoviet [municipal council], the agent of the Narkomindel [foreign commissariat], Shenshev, and representatives of the Moscow and the local press. After an exchange of greetings M. Herriot and his companions proceeded to their hotel, and after a brief rest went on to the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences.”

This was the second grand deception. After the achievements of Ukrainian agriculture, the visitors are now presented, in accordance with Moscow’s plan, with evidence of the care devoted to Ukrainian culture and science. The report says: “On the way to the Academy M. Herriot expressed the wish to visit St. Sophia’s [Cathedral], with its historically valuable mosaics.<sup>9</sup> M. Herriot was then received at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences by a number of members headed by the president Palladin, who explained the work of the various departments. A long stay was made at the Geological Museum, with its many valuable exhibits. Later the Ukrainian model town was visited, where the work of the museum for historical relics in the religious field and the valuable Potocki collection were studied.”

Thus, at the moment when the dictator [Pavel] Postyshev [Postyshev] was exterminating every trace of Ukrainian cultural individuality, and a few days after Lenin’s friend and co-founder of the Soviet State, the Ukrainian Communist [Mykola] Skrypnyk [Skrypnyk], had shot himself, when even Ukrainian Bolsheviks were protesting against the starvation of their countrymen, the Pan-Ukrainian academicians were enlightening M. Herriot about the splendid work done to promote the cultural endeavours of the Ukraine. At this very moment the Moscow delegate was speaking openly of the danger inherent in the activities of the Academy and other similar organizations: and a few days after the guests had left Kiev the members of another similar institute were expelled or arrested....

Other delights awaited the guests after their study of cultural movements in the Ukraine and the promotion of these by the central authority. The report says: “Comrade Vassilenko, the President of the District Executive Committee, gave a luncheon in honour of the guests.” The report is silent as to the menu of the lunch; but Ukrainian cooking has a good reputation, and it may be assumed that during his fortnight in Russia M. Herriot was one of the best-fed people in the country. No unpleasant interludes marred the feast, and none of the guests was reminded that during the summer thousands of innocent people had perished in that ancient metropolis. First-hand reports from foreign observers tell how in the summer of 1933 starving persons were collapsing in the streets of Kiev, and were often buried before they died. The common graves at

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<sup>8</sup> A former official of the OGPU well known for his activities.

<sup>9</sup> This interest in Tsarist church art had presumably not been anticipated in the programme; hence the *Izvestia* report ascribed this whim to the historical importance of the mosaics.

Kiev speak eloquently of the tragedy which visited that city, like Kharkov, Odessa, Rostov and many other towns during the months preceding the 1933 harvest....

Early on August 28 the illustrious travellers arrived at Kharkov, which at that time was the official capital of the Ukraine....

M. Herriot was particularly favourably impressed by Kharkov; his later articles expressed the view that it was “one of the best administered of cities.” Apparently he did not know that at Kharkov, as at Kiev, starving people were lying in the streets until just before his arrival, and that almost every other house was the scene of dreadful tragedies owing to passport and other Government regulations....

The preparation and execution of M. Herriot’s expedition must be admitted to be a masterpiece of Soviet propaganda, and any states arranging similar trips for foreign guests of honour could learn much from this collaboration of all Soviet officials in arranging the different stages of M. Herriot’s Russian journey....

The chief object was to get M. Herriot to deny the existence of the famine and the disastrous position of the Ukrainian population when he was actually in such centres as Odessa, Kiev, etc.; this would be in August, i.e. before the beginning of the League [of Nations] Assembly meeting, and at a time when news of the catastrophe was just beginning to spread in the West and in America and Cardinal [Theodor] Innitzer was initiating the Russian relief work in Vienna. Accordingly the ablest journalists had been sent from Moscow to meet M. Herriot at Odessa, their function being to wait for utterances from the French statesman. Nor did they have long to wait; after the impressive experiences at Kiev Herriot was “ripe” for making statements. His denial of the famine and of the sufferings of the Ukrainians made at the station at Kiev amounted to a striking success for the Soviet regime, and further declarations about the idyllic state of things in the Ukraine were not wanting. Daily the Russian correspondents were able to telegraph to Moscow, with appropriate comment, the written and spoken dicta of M. Herriot, and thence they were distributed throughout the world. The French journalists who accompanied M. Herriot and took part in the proceedings rendered valuable auxiliary service, some intentionally, others unintentionally....

M. Herriot cannot be conceded the right publicly to deny the existence of famine in the Ukraine and to represent it to be “propaganda by political fanatics.” His assertions that on the present occasion when “travelling through” the Ukraine “in various directions” he saw “nothing of the kind” (contrary to his experience ten years previously) are meaningless.... [H]e did not take the trouble, as a serious investigator, on whom the eyes of the world were fixed, should have made it his duty to do, to follow up the visible traces of one of the greatest human tragedies of the present day, a tragedy which had reached its climax in the days preceding the new harvest, immediately before his arrival. Such an investigation would have meant leaving his special coach, escaping his Moscow guides, and putting an end to the whole official mystification which was practised upon him during his five days’ visit, hour by hour, from morning to night, over a stretch of nearly 2,000 miles....

But there is another and more regrettable aspect of M. Herriot’s proceedings. Embarrassed by the controversy on the Russian position and especially on the famine in the Ukraine, he made the following statement in the lecture given in the Vichy Casino (*Journal des Débats*): “La famine russe, qu’on agite comme un épouvantail, n’est que le produit suspect de la propaganda hitlérienne.”<sup>10</sup> And in another connection he plainly declares that the Ukraine was

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<sup>10</sup> The Russian famine that we shake like a scarecrow is nothing but the suspect product of Hitlerite propaganda.

not so much endangered by hunger as by separatist machinations enjoying the support of German National Socialism.... In view of the tragic struggle now in progress between Moscow centralization and the various peoples living in the Soviet Union and anxious to preserve their individuality, it is perhaps unnecessary to insist on the arbitrariness of M. Herriot's interpretation of present events in the Ukraine. Of course there will always be interested parties willing and ready to exploit every current of feeling and every divergency of view. Such elements may be observed at work in a great many different countries. But to believe that real convulsions within or between the nations can be initiated by the work of 'agents' or 'propagandist machinations' implies a complete misconception of the real conditions in most European countries, and reveals an entire misapprehension of the problem of nationalities.

...[E]ven papers which cannot be suspected of being under National Socialist influence or of being anti-French vigorously oppose M. Herriot's thesis. Thus the *New York Herald-Tribune* (October 22, 1933) expresses doubts of M. Herriot's reliability.... Impartial observers, the paper added, had found that there was famine in the Ukraine, but had found no traces of National Socialist propaganda. M. Herriot's claim, therefore, must be either a sensational 'stunt' by a talented amateur writer or else a testimonial to the efficiency of Communist stage management.

M. Herriot is indignant at the alleged "campaign of defamation"...but is apparently not aware that his own account of the causes of recent developments in the Ukraine is a defamation of wide circles of an entire people, uttered at a moment when this people, deserted by the entire world, is fighting desperately for its future, for its nationhood, and perhaps for its bare existence.

**Fred E. Beal, *Proletarian Journey: New England, Gastonia, Moscow* (New York: Hillman-Curl, Inc., 1937). Excerpts, pp. 305–7, 310–12.**

Fred E. Beal (1896–1954) was a communist labor organizer who was arrested and convicted, along with several others, for the murder of the Gastonia, North Carolina police chief during labor disturbances there in 1929. Skipping bail, he fled to the Soviet Union, where he lived for three years (1930–33), with Kharkiv as his last place of residence. Returning to the United States, he lived underground for several years, during which he wrote his autobiography, *Proletarian Journey*, before surrendering to authorities to serve his sentence. Beal was also the author of *The Red Fraud: An Exposé of Communism* (1949).

In the spring of 1933, when the last of the winter snows had melted away, I made a random visit to a Ukrainian collective near the village of Chekhuyev [Chuhuiiv]. In company with a Russian-American comrade from the factory, I took the train from our little station of Lossevo and rode for two hours to Chekhuyev. From this place, we walked east for several miles. We met not a living soul....

The village we reached was the worst of all possible sights. The only human there was an old woman who passed us on the village street. She hobbled along with the aid of a stick. Her clothes were just a bunch of rags tied together. When she came close to us she lifted the stick as if to strike us but the movement petered out in weakness. She spat at us and mumbled something incoherent, something my friend could not make out, though he knew the language well. Her feet were dreadfully swollen. She sat down and pricked her swollen feet with a sharp stick, to let the water out of the huge blisters. There was a large hole in the top of her foot from continuous piercing of the skin. She was stark mad. She laughed when she sat down and screamed with pain when she squeezed her foot. She spat again at us. We moved on.

There was no other life. The village was dead. Going up to one of the shacks, we looked into a window. We saw a dead man propped up on a built-in Russian stove. His back was against the wall, he was rigid and staring straight at us with his faraway dead eyes. I shall always remember that ghastly sight. I have seen dead people who had died naturally, before. But this was from a cause and a definite one. A cause which I was somehow associated with, which I had been supporting. How that deathly gaze pierced me! How it caused me to writhe in mental agony! As I look back, I think that unforgettable scene had more effect than any other in deciding me to do what I could do to rectify my horrible mistake in supporting the Stalinists of Russia and the Third International.

We found more dead people in what had been their homes. Some bodies were decomposed. Others were fresher. When we opened the doors, huge rats would scamper to their holes and then come out and stare at us.

At one house, there was a sign somehow printed on the door in crude Russian letters. My friend read it: "God bless those who enter here, may they never suffer as we have." Inside two men and a child lay dead with an icon alongside of them....

Many of the houses were empty. But, in the rear, the graves told a story of desolation and ghastly death. More signs were stuck up on these graves by those who buried them:

I LOVE STALIN. BURY HIM HERE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!

THE COLLECTIVE DIED ON US!

WE TRIED A COLLECTIVE. THIS IS THE RESULT!

I had seen enough of villages and collectives and communes. On our way back, near the station, people told us that *that* village was to be burned. Three or four others in the vicinity had already been burned. Not a trace of the houses or of the dead bodies in them was left....

In 1933, I had the occasion to call on [Hryhorii] Petrovsky, the President of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, in his office in Kharkov. I was accompanied by [Isadore] Erenburg, my superior in the cultural-propaganda work at the [Kharkiv] Tractor Plant. "Comrade Petrovsky," I said, "the men at our factory are saying that millions of peasants are dying all over Russia. They see poverty and death all about them. They say that up to five million people have died this year, and they hold it up to us a challenge and a mockery. What are we going to tell them?"

"Tell them nothing!" answered President Petrovsky. "What they say is true. We know that millions are dying. That is unfortunate, but the glorious future of the Soviet Union will justify that. Tell them nothing!"

Now the Ukraine is known as the bread-basket of Europe. Its soil is as rich as that of Nebraska, Iowa, and Kansas. That black earth will grow anything, given only the seed and care. What then was the cause of this general starvation? One of the answers is Stalin's forced collectivization. The peasants stubbornly fought the campaign ordered from the Kremlin. Their seeds were confiscated and distributed only to collective and state farms. Their horses and cows were expropriated. The right of disposing of their crops was denied the individual peasants. Farm implements were made unavailable to them. Heavy taxes were placed upon peasant holdings and collected at the point of a gun. Scores of thousands were killed outright because they refused to go into the collectives. Red Army detachments were sent into the villages for that purpose. The inhabitants of hundreds of villages literally died in their tracks and, in thousands of other villages, the peasants abandoned their homes after the forcible seizure of from 60 to 90 percent of their grain. Great numbers took to the roads, flocked to the cities, and wandered as far as their legs could carry them. The tragedy of these living corpses, who were often without even the customary rags in the coldest weather, was more gruesome than the tragedy of the dead.

Heart-rending was the condition of the great swarms of homeless children let loose by the Stalin policy. It should be remembered that this new crop of waifs was not inherited from the Tsarist regime, from the early period of the Revolution. The Stalinists have a way of blaming the Tsar and the World War of nearly two decades ago for the latest wave of homeless children. These youngsters hated the Soviet factories, the G.P.U. and all the government institutions and restrictions. They preferred to ride the freight trains, to beg, to steal. Their parents had been starved to death, shot, sent to concentration camps far away, or were still roaming over the land lost to their children forever. All the stations and railroads of the country were infested with these waifs. They had a way of getting through the cordons of guards despite the vigilance of the G.P.U. officials.

On a trip that I made to Moscow from Kharkov and back, I encountered many little derelicts pleading for food. I was on board the International train and ate in the restaurant car. Across from me sat a characteristic Soviet bureaucrat with shaven head. He carried a brief case. Into this he put the remains of his meal, such as pieces of bread. Outside the window a dirty-faced kid, wearing a cap much too big for him, appealed to the bureaucrat: "*Dyadya, dai kusok khlieba!*" (Uncle, give me a piece of bread.)

"Go to work. You ought to be arrested for begging!" the bureaucrat said.

I gave the youngster my bread. The bureaucrat, who could speak English, told me that I should not spoil the waifs by giving them food.

"He is too young to work," I answered, estimating the boy's age to be about twelve.

"He could go to a Soviet institution," was the retort.

"But perhaps he does not want to go to an institution," I replied, thinking of the disgraceful Gorky Commune near Kharkov where the children received very little food and plenty of discipline.

"Well, he ought to be made to go! He and the rest are a nuisance to the government!"

Indeed, the more I saw of Russia the more convinced I became that not only the homeless children but all the common people of the country were a nuisance to the Soviet Government.

**Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1937). Excerpts, pp. 572–75, 577–78.**

Eugene Lyons (1898–1985) was an American journalist and writer who, after some time as a fellow traveler of the Communist Party, became highly critical of the Soviet Union. He served as United Press International correspondent in Moscow (1928–34). His major works include *Modern Moscow* (1935), *Assignment in Utopia* (1937), *Stalin, Czar of all the Russias* (1940), and *The Red Decade: The Stalinist Penetration of America* (1941).

"There is no actual starvation or deaths from starvation but there is widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition."

This amazing sophistry, culled from a New York *Times* Moscow dispatch on March 30, 1933, has become among foreign reporters the classic example of journalistic understatement. It characterizes sufficiently the whole shabby episode of our failure to report honestly the gruesome Russian famine of 1932–33.

The circumstance that the government barred us from the afflicted regions may serve as our formal excuse. But a deaf-and-dumb reporter hermetically sealed in a hotel room could not have escaped knowledge of the essential facts....

...Not a single American newspaper or press agency protested publicly against the astonishing and almost unprecedented confinement of its correspondent in the Soviet capital or troubled to probe for the causes of this extraordinary measure.

The New York *Times*, as the foremost American newspaper...was certainly not alone in concealing the famine. The precious sentence quoted above was prefaced with its correspondent's celebrated cliché: "To put it brutally—you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs." A later dispatch enlarged upon the masterpiece of understatement and indicated how the eggs were being broken. Asserting that "in some districts and among the large floating population of unskilled labor" there "have been deaths and actual starvation," he catalogued the maladies of malnutrition as "typhus, dysentery, dropsy, and various infantile diseases." The maladies, in short, that always rage in time of famine.

Not until August 23 did the *Times* out of Moscow admit the famine. "It is conservative to suppose," it said, that in certain provinces with a total population of over 40,000,000 mortality has "at least trebled." On this basis, there were two million deaths more than usual. In addition, deaths were also "considerably increased for the Soviet Union as a whole." This dispatch came one day behind an uncensored cable to the New York *Herald Tribune* by Ralph Barnes, in which he placed the deaths in his ultra-conservative fashion at no less than one million. The Barnes story was front-paged and the *Times* could no longer ignore the subject. Its own admission followed, raising Barnes' ante. By a singular twist of logic, the *Times* story introduced the admission of famine with this remarkable statement:

"Any report of a famine in Russia is today an exaggeration or malignant propaganda. The food shortage which has affected almost the whole population in the last year and particularly in the grain-producing provinces—the Ukraine, North Caucasus, the lower Volga region—has, however, caused heavy loss of life."

The dividing line between "heavy loss of life" through food shortage and "famine" is rather tenuous. Such verbal finessing made little difference to the millions of dead and dying, to the refugees who knocked at our doors begging bread, to the lines of ragged peasants stretching from Torgsin doors in the famine area waiting to exchange their wedding rings and silver trinkets for bread.

These philological sophistries, to which we were all driven, serve Moscow's purpose of smearing the facts out of recognition and beclouding a situation which, had we reported it simply and clearly, might have worked up enough public opinion abroad to force remedial measures....

All of us had talked with people just returned from the famine regions....

The truth is that we did not seek corroboration for the simple reason that we entertained no doubts on the subject. There are facts too large to require eyewitness confirmation—facts so pervasive and generally accepted that confirmation would be futile pedantry. There was no more need for investigation to establish the mere existence of the Russian famine than investigation to establish the existence of the American depression. Inside Russia the matter was not disputed. The famine was accepted as a matter of course in our casual conversation at the hotels and in our homes....

The first reliable report of the Russian famine was given to the world by an English journalist, a certain Gareth Jones, at one time secretary to Lloyd George. Jones had a conscientious streak in his make-up which took him on a secret journey into the Ukraine and a brief walking tour through its countryside....

On emerging from Russia, Jones made a statement which, startling though it sounded, was little more than a summary of what the correspondents and foreign diplomats had told him.

To protect us, and perhaps with some idea of heightening the authenticity of his reports, he emphasized his Ukrainian foray rather than our conversation as the chief source of his information.

In any case, we all received urgent queries from our home offices on the subject. But the inquiries coincided with preparations under way for the trial of the British engineers. The need to remain on friendly terms with the censors at least for the duration of the trial was for all of us a compelling professional necessity.

Throwing down Jones was as unpleasant a chore as fell to any of us in years of juggling facts to please dictatorial regimes—but throw him down we did, unanimously and in almost identical formulas of equivocation. Poor Gareth Jones must have been the most surprised human being alive when the facts he so painstakingly garnered from our mouths were snowed under by our denials....

I was not the first Moscow observer to remark that God seems to be on the side of the atheists. What the Kremlin would have prayed for, had it believed in prayer, was perfect weather, and that is what it received that spring and summer: perfect weather and bumper crops. The fields had been planted under the aegis of the newly established *Politotdyels* (Political Departments) with unlimited authority over the peasants. Food rations barely sufficient to sustain life had been distributed only to those actually at work in the fields. Red Army detachments in many places had been employed to guard seed and to prevent hungry peasants from devouring the green shoots of the new harvest. In the midst of the famine, the planting proceeded, and the crops came up strong and plenteous. The dead were buried—for the living there would be bread enough and to spare in the following winter.

Belatedly the world had awakened to the famine situation. We were able to write honestly that “to speak of famine *now* is ridiculous.” We did not always bother to add that we had failed to speak of it or at best mumbled incomprehensibly *then*, when it was not ridiculous. Cardinal Innitzer, Archbishop of Vienna, made the first of his sensational statements about Soviet agrarian conditions on August 20, when those conditions were already being mitigated. Certain anti-Soviet newspapers in England and America began to write about the famine at about the time it was ended, and continued to write about it long after it had become history: their facts were on the whole correct, but their tenses were badly mixed. The most rigorous censorship in all of Soviet Russia’s history had been successful—it had concealed the catastrophe until it was ended, thereby bringing confusion, doubt, contradiction into the whole subject. Years after the event—when no Russian communist in his senses any longer concealed the magnitude of the famine—the question whether there had been a famine at all was still being disputed in the outside world!

In the autumn, the Soviet press was exultant. Lazar Kaganovich was given most of the credit for the successful harvest. It was his mind that invented the Political Departments to lead collectivized agriculture, his iron hand that applied Bolshevik mercilessness. Now that a healing flood of grain was inundating the famished land, the secrecy gradually gave way. Increasingly with every passing month Russian officials ceased to deny the obvious. Soviet journalists who had been in the afflicted areas now told me personally such details of the tragedy as not even the eager imaginations of Riga and Warsaw journalists had been able to project. They were able to speak in the past tense, so that their accents were proud boasts rather than admissions.

The Kremlin, in short, had “gotten away with it.” At a cost in millions of lives, through the instrumentalities of hunger and terror, socialized agriculture had been made to yield an excellent harvest. Certain observers now insisted in print that the efficacy of collectivization had

been demonstrated; nothing, of course, had been demonstrated except the efficacy of concentrated force used against a population demoralized by protracted hunger.

**Freda Utley, *The Dream We Lost: Soviet Russia, Then and Now* (New York: John Day, 1940). Excerpts, pp. 50–57, 86–87.**

Winifred (Freda) Utley (1899–1978) was a scholar and writer. Her books include *Lancashire and the Far East* (1931); *Japan's Feet of Clay* (1937); *Japan's Gamble in China* (1938); *China at War* (1939); *The High Cost of Vengeance* (1948); *Last Chance in China* (1948); *The China Story* (1951); *Will the Middle East Go West?* (1956); and *Odyssey of a Liberal* (1970). A member of the British Communist Party from 1927 to 1930, she lived and worked in the Soviet Union and the Far East from 1928 to 1936. She left the USSR after her husband, Arkadii Berdichevsky, was incarcerated by the Soviet authorities in 1936.

In November 1929, Stalin announced the end of individual farming, ordered the “liquidation of the Kulaks as a class,” and the establishment of collective farms everywhere and for everyone. Stalin had decided to solve the agricultural problem “in a socialist sense” by violence and terror....

There began that terrible murder of the Kulaks by the state, which is almost unparalleled in history for its cruelty. I use the word murder deliberately, for although the Kulaks were not lined up and shot, they were killed off in a manner far more cruel. Whole families, men, women, children, and babies, were thrown out of their homes, their personal possessions seized, even their warm clothing torn off them; then, packed into unheated cattle trucks in winter, they were sent off to Siberia or other waste parts of the Soviet Union. A few of the men survived to start life again and build farms in the waste lands into which they had been exiled. The women and children perished. Hundreds of thousands of other peasants were herded off to the timber prison camps in the Arctic regions, to die like flies from hunger and cold and exhausting labor, whipped by the O.G.P.U. guards and treated like the slaves of Pharaoh or some other Asiatic tyrant....

Fear of reprisals by the desperate, starving, expropriated peasants drove the Party to attempt to exterminate all their victims. “We must destroy our enemies until not one is left,” was the cry. An orgy of cruelty raged in the countryside. One must go back to the days of the Mongol hordes who swept across Asia and eastern Europe in the thirteenth century, or to the massacres by the Assyrians in biblical times, for an historical parallel with the communist “class war” on the Russian peasants....

Who were the Kulaks now declared enemies of the state? In theory they were the exploiting peasants, those who rented extra land and employed hired labor, or who advanced money or seed at high rates of interest to the poorest peasants. Kulak means a fist, and the word meant an exploiter and a usurer. Under Stalin the word came to mean any peasant who dared to oppose collectivization....

...[S]ince in many parts of the country real Kulaks who “exploited” other peasants were hard to find, the designation was applied to every peasant who was a little better off than his neighbors, to anyone who owned two horses and two cows, or had managed in some way to lift himself a little above the miserably low general standard of life in the Russian village. It meant that hard work and enterprise were penalized wherever they were found....

Stalin, having at last decided upon collectivization, thought he could force it through by a terror exercised against the whole peasant population. He did it, but in doing it he laid waste the countryside and caused the death of millions from starvation....

Soviet morale has never recovered from those terrible years which were my first years of residence in the U.S.S.R. The Communist party and the Comsomols ("Young Communist League") became the expropriators of the people, an army of occupation in the countryside. Decent young men and women sent down to the villages were persuaded that it was their duty as Socialists to stifle all humanitarian scruples while driving the bewildered, sullen, and resentful peasants into the collective farms, and levying grain, milk, and meat from men and women whose children were to starve to death in consequence. Those who could not perform the terrible deeds expected of them were expelled from the Party as "rotten liberals." Both duty and hopes of a career compelled the Party member and the Comsomol to utter ruthlessness and inhumanity. Many of the young people became hardened and cynical careerists prepared to commit any atrocity commanded by Stalin. The war on the peasants was more brutalizing than war against another nation, for the peasants were unarmed and defenseless....

During my first winter in Russia (1930–31) it was believed that if once the peasants could be forced into the collective farms, the food problem would be solved.... Since they now no longer owned the land, since intensive industrialization and concentration on the production of capital goods meant that the state had even less to sell them than before in the way of manufactured goods, and since the state virtually confiscated the grain by taking it at nominal prices, the collectivized peasants worked less than ever before. They opposed to the government the same passive resistance as before the N.E.P. had been introduced, and sowed and reaped just enough to feed themselves. This fact, coupled with drought in the Black Soil region, reduced the harvest to a much smaller amount than in previous years. But the government nevertheless enforced its full demands, telling the peasants that it was their own fault if they were short of food, and leaving them to die of starvation. A terrible famine set in, especially severe in the rich corn-bearing lands of the Ukraine. This time there was no relief from abroad, since the Soviet Government denied that there was a famine and deliberately left the peasants to die of starvation.

Foreign journalists were not allowed to visit the South. All Russia knew what was happening; but the hacks of the foreign press, obedient to Stalin for fear of losing their jobs, sent out no word. Only a few brave and honest foreigners like Eugene Lyons of the United Press and Malcolm Muggeridge of the *Manchester Guardian* told the truth and were expelled from Russia, or put in a position in which they were forced to leave. The others followed the lead of Duranty of the *New York Times* and denied the existence of a famine, until years afterwards.

Foreign visitors, carefully shepherded by Intourist, and given huge meals in the hotels of the starving land, went home to deny the rumors of famine....

Arcadi [Berdichevsky, Freda Utley's husband] finally broke down when he went on a *Komandirofka* [Russ. *komandirovka*, business trip] to Odessa in April 1932. He came back white and miserable and shaken. Down there he had seen the starving and the dead in the streets. At each railway station en route there had been hundreds and hundreds of starving wretches, emaciated women with dying babies at their milkless breasts, children with the swollen stomachs of the starving, all begging, begging for bread. In station waiting rooms he had seen hundreds of peasant families herded together waiting transportation to the concentration camps. Children dying of starvation and typhus, scarecrows of men and women pushed and kicked by the O.G.P.U. guards. It sickened even those who were hardened to the sight of suffering in the Far East.

Arcadi had relatives in Odessa. From them he heard the facts of the Ukrainian famine. The picture he painted for me, a picture which had seared him to the soul and shattered the optimistic view he had until then insisted upon preserving, bore out all the rumors we had heard—was in fact worse. What perhaps shocked Arcadi most of all was to find that the train guards, conductors, and attendants were all speculators. They were buying food in Moscow, always better provided for than other cities, and selling it at fantastic prices down in the stricken southern land.

Starving children are the most pitiful sight on earth. There were enough of them in Moscow to make one's heart ache, but in the Ukraine they were legion.

Bodies of the starving lay in the streets, and pitiful wrecks of humanity, with great watery blisters and boils on their feet, legs, and arms, dragged themselves from place to place till they died in the vain quest for work and food.

In the summer of 1932 we went on a holiday to the Crimea, taking with us my mother, who had just come from England. We left Moscow well provided with food for the long journey. But by the end of the first day my mother had given it all away to the starving wretches at the country stations. With tears streaming down her face she called my attention to one wretched beggar after another, especially to the pitiful children. That journey was an ordeal I shall never forget. It was a sea of misery which the few bits of food we had could do nothing to assuage.

*Totia dai Kleb, Totia dai Kleb* (“Auntie, give bread”), will always ring in my ears as the national song of “socialist” Russia.

As in China, so in Russia, one hardened oneself to the sight of suffering in order to live. But at least in China the government does not hold it a crime to give aid to the starving. In Russia it tells you that the starving are Kulaks or counter-revolutionaries not to be aided, whereas in reality they are bewildered, ignorant, powerless wretches sacrificed to the insensate ambitions and fanaticism of a man and a party.

It was the contrasts which were always so appalling. The fat officials in the dining car, the well-fed callous O.G.P.U. guards, and the starving people. We and they, we and they, rulers and ruled, oppressors and oppressed.

In the Rest Home in the Crimea, where we had got places, there was abundant food. So abundant that bread and fruit, ices and cake were thrown away when left on the plates of the guest, or when too much had been provided. This place belonged to the Central Committee of the Soviets of the Crimean Republic.... It was so very “upper class” that we really had no business there, but it gave us an insight into the life of the Party aristocracy. The sight and sound of the starving was shut out from these former palaces and country houses of the Russian nobility, now as in the past. Only now there was a new aristocracy. That seemed to be the main difference.

**Victor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946). Excerpts, pp. 91–92, 111–13, 118–19, 130.**

Victor Kravchenko (1905–66) was a high-ranking Soviet official who arrived in Washington, D.C., in August 1943. On 4 April 1944 the *New York Times* announced Kravchenko's defection and published his sensational statement denouncing the brutal crimes of the Soviet regime. Kravchenko's memoir, *I Chose Freedom* (1946), was the most searing indictment of Stalinism of its time. An international bestseller, it contains a chapter, “Harvest in Hell,” devoted to the famine. In 1949 Kravchenko successfully sued the pro-communist French newspaper *Les Lettres françaises*, which had called his book a fraud. The trial, which became a cause célèbre in

Western Europe, is described in his second book, *I Chose Justice* (1950). After being granted asylum, Kravchenko lived in the United States and South America under a pseudonym. His death in 1966 was ruled a suicide. Victor Kravchenko's son, Andrew, has recently completed a book about his father, the secret family, and his parents' relationship. A biography by Gary Kern, *The Kravchenko Case: One Man's War on Stalin*, appeared in 2007.

...Through the Party office of the Institute I was instructed to report at the Regional Committee. The purpose: mobilization of Party brigades for work in the villages....

...We were being sent into the farm districts to help collect grain and speed up the final phase of the harvest. But we felt and behaved as if we were about to plunge into the thick of a bloody war.

Comrade [Mendel] Hatayevich [Khataevich], a member of the Central Committee of the Party, made a speech....

..."[I]t is absolutely necessary to fulfill the government's plan for grain delivery. The kulaks, and even some middle and 'poor' peasants, are not giving up their grain. They are sabotaging the Party policy. And the local authorities sometimes waver and show weakness. Your job is to get the grain at any price. Pump it out of them, wherever it's hidden, in ovens, under beds, in cellars or buried away in back yards.

Through you, the Party brigades, the villages must learn the meaning of Bolshevik firmness. You must find the grain and you *will* find it. It's a challenge to the last shred of your initiative and to your Chekist spirit. *Don't be afraid of taking extreme measures*. The Party stands four-square behind you. Comrade Stalin expects it of you. It's a life-and-death struggle; better to do too much than not enough."....

The first dividends of collectivization were death. Although not a word about the tragedy appeared in the newspapers, the famine that raged throughout southern Russia and Central Asia was a matter of common knowledge. We denounced as "anti-Soviet rumors" what we knew as towering fact.

Despite harsh police measures to keep the victims at home, Dniepropetrovsk was overrun with starving peasants. Many of them lay listless, too weak even to beg, around railroad stations. Their children were little more than skeletons with swollen bellies. In the past, friends and relatives in the country sent food packages to the urban districts. Now the process was reversed. But our own rations were so small and uncertain that few dared to part with their provisions....

Everything depended on the new harvest. Would the starving peasantry have the strength and the will to reap and to thresh in the midst of million-fold death? To make sure that the crops would be harvested, to prevent the desperate farmers from eating the green shoots, to save the *kolkhozes* from breaking down under mismanagement, to fight against enemies of collectivization, special Political Departments were set up in the villages, manned by trusted Communists—military men, officials, professionals, N.K.V.D. men, students.... I was among those mobilized.

Three hundred of us from various city organizations gathered at the Regional Committee headquarters. The head of the committee and one of the foremost Communists of the Ukraine, Comrade Hatayevich, made the principal speech. Again and again he referred to the "purge" of the Party scheduled for later in the year. The hint was too clear to be missed. Upon our success or failure in the famine regions would depend our political survival.

"Your loyalty to the Party and to Comrade Stalin will be tested and measured by your work in the villages," he declared ominously. "There is no room for weakness. This is no job for

the squeamish. You'll need strong stomachs and an iron will. The Party will accept no excuses for failure."

Armed with a mandate from the Regional Committee, I set out for the Piatikhatsky district in the company of a schoolmate who was also my friend, Yuri. The local officials of that district, we found, were unnerved by what they had lived through. We questioned them about the new crops, but they could talk only of the mass hunger, the typhus epidemics, the reports of cannibalism.

Yes, they agreed, we must prepare to reap and to thresh the new grain; but how to get started seemed beyond their paralyzed wills. The police stations and jails were jammed with peasants from surrounding villages, arrested for unauthorized reaping of grain—"sabotage" and "theft of state property" were the official charges.

We arrived at the large village of Petrovo towards evening. An unearthly silence prevailed. "All the dogs have been eaten, that's why it's so quiet," the peasant who led us to the Political Department said. "People don't do much walking, they haven't the strength," he added. Having met the chief of the Political Department, we were conducted to a peasant hut for the night.

A feeble "smoker" provided the only light in the house. Our hostess was a young peasant woman. All feeling, even sadness and fear, seemed to have been drained from her starved features. They were a mask of living death. In a corner, on a narrow bed, two children lay so quietly they seemed lifeless. Only their eyes were alive. I winced when they met mine.

"We're sorry to intrude," Yuri said. "We'll be no trouble to you and in the morning we'll leave." He spoke in an unnatural subdued voice, as if he were in a sick-room or a cemetery.

"You're welcome," the young woman said, "and I'm only sorry I cannot offer you anything. We haven't had a crust of bread in this house for many weeks. I still have a few potatoes but we daren't eat them too fast." She wept quietly. "Will there ever be an end or must my children and I die like the others?"

"Where is your husband?" I asked.

"I don't know. He was arrested and probably banished. My father and brother were also banished. We have surely been left here to die of hunger."

Yuri said he wanted to smoke and left the house precipitately. I knew that he was afraid of breaking down and crying before this stranger.

"Don't give way to despair, my dear," I said to the woman. "I know it's hard, but if you love your children you will not give up the struggle. Bring them to the table. My comrade and I have some food from the city, and you will all dine with us."

Yuri returned. We put all our provisions on the table and ate sparingly ourselves so that there would be more for the others. The children looked at the slab of bacon, the dried fish, the tea and sugar with startled eyes. They ate quickly, greedily, as if afraid that it would all vanish as miraculously as it had appeared. After she had put the children to sleep, our hostess began to talk.

"I will not tell you about the dead," she said. "I'm sure you know. The half-dead, the nearly-dead are even worse. There are hundreds of people in Petrovo bloated with hunger. I don't know how many die every day. Many are so weak that they no longer come out of their houses. A wagon goes around now and then to pick up the corpses. We've eaten everything we could lay our hands on—cats, dogs, field mice, birds. When it's light tomorrow you will see the trees have been stripped of their bark, for that too has been eaten. And the horse manure has been eaten."

I must have looked startled and unbelieving.

“Yes, the horse manure. We fight over it. Sometimes there are whole grains in it.”

It was Yuri’s first visit to the village. Afraid that the initial impact of the horror might unnerve him, I interrupted the woman’s story and insisted that we all retire for the night. But neither Yuri nor I slept much. We were glad when morning came....

What I saw that morning, making the rounds of houses with Chadai, was inexpressibly horrible. On a battlefield men die quickly, they fight back, they are sustained by fellowship and a sense of duty. Here I saw people dying in solitude by slow degrees, dying hideously, without the excuse of sacrifice for a cause. They had been trapped and left to starve, each in his home, by a political decision made in a far-off capital around conference and banquet tables. There was not even the consolation of inevitability to relieve the horror.

The most terrifying sights were the little children with skeleton limbs dangling from balloon-like abdomens. Starvation had wiped every trace of youth from their faces, turning them into tortured gargoyles; only in their eyes still lingered the reminder of childhood. Everywhere we found men and women lying prone, their faces and bellies bloated, their eyes utterly expressionless.

We knocked at a door and received no reply. We knocked again. Fearfully I pushed the door open and we entered through a narrow vestibule into the one-room hut. First my eyes went to an icon light above a broad bed, then to the body of a middle-aged woman stretched on the bed, her arms crossed on her breast over a clean embroidered Ukrainian blouse. At the foot of the bed stood an old woman and nearby were two children, a boy of about eleven and a girl of about ten. The children were weeping quietly and repeating in a plaintive peasant chant, “Mama, dear little mama.” I looked around and my eyes rested on the swollen, inert body of a man lying on the shelf of the oven.

The nightmarishness of the scene was not in the corpse on the bed, but in the condition of the living witnesses. The old woman’s legs were blown up to incredible size, the man and the children were clearly in the last stages of starvation. I retreated quickly, ashamed of my haste.

In the adjoining house we found a man of about forty sitting on a bench, repairing a shoe. His face was swollen. A tidy looking little boy, reduced to little more than a skeleton, was reading a book, and a gaunt woman was busy at the stove.

“What are you cooking, Nataalka?” Chadai asked her.

“You know what I’m cooking,” she answered, and in her voice there was a murderous fury.

Chadai pulled me by the sleeve and we went out.

“Why did she get so angry?” I asked.

“Because—well, I’m ashamed to tell you, Victor Andreyevich.... She’s cooking horse manure and weeds.”

My first impulse was to return to the house and stop her, but Chadai held me back. “Don’t do it, I beg of you. You don’t know how starving people feel. She might kill you in despair if you take away the contents of her pot.”

After we had been in a dozen homes, I yielded to Chadai’s urging that we stop the inspection. “It’s the same everywhere. Now you know enough,” he said.

My course seemed to me clear. The situation was too desperate for half-measures. Whatever the consequences to myself, I would ignore laws and orders. Unless I restored the strength of these peasants, everything would be lost. Returning to Chadai’s home, I wrote a letter

to Comrade Somanov, chief of our Political Department, and dispatched it by messenger. Toward evening the messenger returned with an answer:

“I am well aware of the conditions. I urge you to think the matter over again and to weigh all considerations. What you propose is a serious breach of our definite orders. If you see no other way out, however, you may do what you deem necessary....”

The answer satisfied me. At least he did not say no. What I proposed was to reap some oats to feed the horses and to mow a little barley at the sides of the fields for the population. Such premature reaping was being denounced, in the [Soviet central government newspaper] *Izvestia* spread before me, as “theft of state property” and “kulak sabotage.” Peasants were being arrested and deported for such “crimes.”....

A few days later, while I was inspecting one of the fields, I suddenly heard the honk of an automobile. I was astounded to see several big, handsome cars coming down the road... They stopped and half a dozen men stepped out. One came towards me. I recognized Comrade Hatayevich....

“Comrade Kravchenko...who gave you permission to cut the oats and barley and to divert government milk supplies?”...

“Comrade Hatayevich,” I answered calmly, “I could not do otherwise. Children were dying. Horses were dying. The collective farmers hadn’t the strength to do any harvesting.”....

Hatayevich took my arm. He pressed it in a friendly way that belied his harsh tones. Apparently he was making a scene “for the record.” He began to stroll out of earshot of his associates and guards.

“You’re a future engineer, I’m told, and a good Party man. But I’m not sure that you understand what has been happening. A ruthless struggle is going on between the peasantry and our regime. It’s a struggle to the death. This year was a test of our strength and their endurance. It took a famine to show them who is master here. It has cost millions of lives, but the collective farm system is here to stay. We’ve won the war.”

**Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1954). Excerpts, pp. 51, 55–56.**

Arthur Koestler (1905–83) was a Hungarian-born Jewish journalist, novelist, and essayist who wrote extensively about the Soviet Union, Europe, and contemporary affairs. A communist turned anticommunist, he was the author of numerous works of fiction, including *Darkness at Noon* (1940), his classic novel of totalitarianism, and nonfiction, such as *Von weißen Nächten und roten Tagen* (1934), *The Yogi and the Commissar* (1945), *Promise and Fulfillment: Palestine 1917–1949* (1949), and an essay in *The God That Failed* (1949).

The train puffed slowly across the Ukrainian steppe. It stopped frequently. At every station there was a crowd of peasants in rags, offering ikons and linen in exchange against a loaf of bread. The women were lifting up their infants to the compartment windows—infants pitiful and terrifying with limbs like sticks, puffed bellies, big cadaverous heads lolling on thin necks. I had arrived, unsuspecting, at the peak of the famine of 1932–33 which had depopulated entire districts and claimed several million victims. Its ravages are now officially admitted, but at the time they were kept secret from the world. The scenes at the railway-stations all along our journey gave me an inkling of the disaster, but no understanding of its causes and extent. My Russian travelling companions took pains to explain to me that these wretched crowds were

*kulaks*, rich peasants who had resisted the collectivisation of the land and whom it had therefore been necessary to evict from their farms.

Another incident was so slight that I only registered it half-consciously. As our train was approaching a river across which a bridge was being built, the conductor came walking down the corridor with an armful of square pieces of cardboard and blocked up all the windows. When I asked why this was done, my travelling companions explained with smiles that bridges were military objectives, and that this precaution was necessary to prevent anybody from photographing them. It was the first of a series of equally grotesque experiences which I put down as examples of revolutionary vigilance....

Less amusing, because difficult to contemplate without a feeling of constriction in the throat, was the bazaar. This was a permanent market held in a huge, empty square. Those who had something to sell squatted in the dust with their goods spread out before them on a handkerchief or scarf. The goods ranged from a handful of rusty nails to a tattered quilt or a pot of sour milk sold by the spoon, flies included. You could see an old woman sitting for hours with one painted Easter egg or one small piece of dried-up goat's cheese before her. Or an old man, his bare feet covered with sores, trying to barter his torn boots for a kilo of black bread and a packet of mahorka tobacco. Hemp slippers, and even soles and heels torn off from boots and replaced by a bandage of rags, were frequent items for barter. Some old men had nothing to sell; they sang Ukrainian ballads and were rewarded by an occasional kopeck. Some of the women had babies lying beside them on the pavement or in their laps, feeding; the fly-ridden infant's lips were fastened to the leathery udder from which it seemed to suck bile instead of milk. A surprising number of men had something wrong with their eyes: a squint, or one pupil gone opaque and milky, or one entire eyeball missing. Most of them had swollen hands and feet; their faces, too, were puffed rather than emaciated, and of that peculiar colour which Tolstoy, talking of a prisoner, describes as 'the hue of shoots sprouting from potatoes in a cellar.'

The bazaar of Kharkov was one of those scenes one imagines one could paint from memory, even after twenty years. Officially, these men and women were all *kulaks* who had been expropriated as a punitive measure. In reality, as I was gradually to find out, they were ordinary peasants who had been forced to abandon their villages in the famine-stricken regions. In last year's harvest-collecting campaign the local Party officials, anxious to deliver their quota, had confiscated not only the harvest but also the seed reserves, and the newly established collective farms had nothing to sow with. Their cattle and poultry they had killed rather than surrender it to the *kolkhoz*; so when the last grain of the secret hoard was eaten, they left the land which no longer was theirs. Entire villages had been abandoned, whole districts depopulated; in addition to the five million *kulaks* officially deported to Siberia, several million more were on the move. They choked the railway stations, crammed the freight trains, squatted in the markets and public squares, and died in the streets; I have never seen so many and such hurried funerals as during that winter in Kharkov. The exact number of these 'nomadised' people was never disclosed and probably never counted; in order of magnitude it must have exceeded the modest numbers involved in the Migrations after the fall of the Roman Empire.

Officially the famine did not exist. It was only mentioned in the terms of veiled allusions to 'difficulties on the collectivisation front.'

**Milena Rudnytska, "Borot'ba za pravdu pro velykyi holod" (The Struggle for Truth about the Great Famine), in idem, *Statti, lysty, dokumenty* (Articles, Letters, Documents) (Lviv:**

**[Misioner], 1998). Excerpts, pp. 421–30. Originally published in *Svoboda* (Jersey City), 5–8 August 1958. Translated by Bohdan Klid.**

Milena Rudnytska (1892–1976) was a journalist, politician, and feminist activist. During the interwar period she was a leading figure in the women’s movement in western Ukraine, serving from 1929 to 1938 as president of the Union of Ukrainian Women. As a political figure she was a cofounder and executive member of the Ukrainian National Democratic Alliance, and was elected to the Polish Diet in 1928 and 1930 as a member of that party. Besides numerous articles, she wrote four books, one of which deals with the Soviet occupation of western Ukraine in World War II.

Before Ukrainian representatives waged the main battle on the grounds of the League of Nations, they raised the issue of the Famine at the Congress of European Nationalities....

Such congresses were held annually, mainly in Geneva, on the eve of the September session of the League of Nations.... In 1933, the congress took place in Berne, the capital of the Swiss Federation, from 16 to 19 September....

The goal of the Congresses of Nationalities was to fight for better international protection of minorities and to defend their interests against the abuses of the ruling nations....

At the congress of 1933 there were four Ukrainian delegates. Bukovynians [Ukrainians under Romanian rule] were represented by Senator Volodymyr Zalozetsky and Deputy [Yurii] Serbeniuk [Serbyniuk]; the delegates from Galicia [Polish-ruled territory in western Ukraine] were Z[enon] Pelensky and M[ilena] Rudnytska.

In mid-September, when we arrived in Berne, the issue of the Famine was not on the congress agenda.... The president of the organization, Dr. Josip Vilfan, a Slovene from Trieste, spoke against the Ukrainian proposal, arguing that events in the Soviet Union were outside the competence of the Congress of Nationalities. However, we had an ally in the secretary, Dr. [Ewald] Ammende: as director of Cardinal [Theodor] Innitzer’s Vienna committee, he had already become actively engaged in the issue of the Famine. The Ukrainian proposal to introduce the Famine as a subject of debate at the congress was supported at a presidium meeting by delegates of the numerous German groups, since German colonists in Ukraine and the North Caucasus were also suffering from hunger. But it was not just considerations of national solidarity with their starving kinsmen that motivated the German delegates.... In Germany the first anti-Semitic laws had just been proclaimed. It was easy to foresee that that this issue would be raised at the congress and would attract the attention of the world community. Consequently, the Germans were interested in toning down the uproar over the anti-Semitic course of German policy by means of some other more acute issue. And this was the Famine, and only the Famine.

Thus, owing to a confluence of circumstances and behind-the-scenes bargaining, we achieved our goal: the Congress of Nationalities...would discuss the Famine.

This happened immediately at the inaugural session of the congress, on the afternoon of 16 September 1933....

Immediately after the opening of the congress by the president, Dr. [Josip] Vilfan, who specified in his opening remarks that the congress could address the Famine not from the political viewpoint but only from the humanitarian one, the floor was given to the “elder brother,” the Russian delegate M. Kurchinsky, representing the Russian group in Estonia.... In a long address on the Famine, he did not even once mention Ukraine or say a single word about

the causes of the catastrophe, nor did he even hint at collectivization and the nationality policy of the Soviet government....

I was given the floor following the Russian delegate. Without softening or passing over anything in silence, I explained [to the delegates] the calamitous famine that had struck the Ukrainian people and the criminal policy of Moscow that had caused the calamity, as well as the policy of the Great Powers, who, for the sake of good relations with the Soviet government, were closing their eyes to its crimes in Ukraine and thus also becoming co-responsible for them....

...[T]he international press picked up the main Ukrainian theses on the Famine, and the congress passed a separate resolution on the matter, directing the presidium to submit it directly to the president of the League of Nations....

...Whenever a session of the Council [of the League of Nations] was prepared, its agenda was confirmed in advance by the Secretariat, speakers on the various agenda points already designated, and questions to be brought before the Council studied by various committees and subcommittees long in advance. In that [situation], introducing the issue of the Famine into a Council session at the last minute through regular channels was out of the question.

And who was to do this? Only the governments of states that were members of the League of Nations had the right of initiative. It was hopeless to think that in the international situation of that time any state would want to scrap with the Soviet Union and take on the role of champion of the issue of the starving.... To gain access to the League of Nations through its Secretariat was therefore hopeless. Another way had to be sought.

The incoming president of the League of Nations Council in the autumn of 1933 was to be the prime minister of Norway and its minister of foreign affairs, Dr. Joh[an] L. Mowinckel. This presented us with a great opportunity, for the leadership of the League...was passing to a representative not of a Great Power, who would be held back by the demands of "high policy," but of a small country, to wit, Norway. Norway was proud of the tradition of Fridtjof Nansen, the organizer of assistance to the starving in [the Soviet famine of] 1921–22 and protector of political refugees. The issue, then, was how to find a way to Minister Mowinckel.

The permanent representative of the Norwegian government at the League of Nations was Rolf Andvord....

I immediately contacted Andvord, explained to him the matter at hand, and asked him to take me to his superior. Prime Minister Mowinckel received me the very next day....

...We could not have hoped for a better defender of our interests. By the end of the first long conversation he had already promised to do all he could. I asked him to place the issue of the Famine on the agenda of the Council of the League of Nations and persuade it to adopt a resolution on the organization of international aid under the auspices of the League of Nations.

Those Ukrainian delegates present in Geneva naturally did all they could to supply Minister Mowinckel with materials to help him with his planned presentation in defense of starving Ukraine.... Over the next few days, Minister Mowinckel received several dozen telegrams and letters asking him to urge intervention on the part of the Council of the League of Nations on behalf of starving Ukraine....

But the Secretariat of the League of Nations firmly resisted placing the issue of the Famine on the agenda of the Council session. The general secretary pointed out that, according to regulations, a question pertaining to a country that was not a member of the League could not be put forward for discussion, and, further, that the League's customs did not allow intervention in the "internal affairs" of states, and so on. There was no question that procedural regulations were against us.

However, there was one regulation in the League's statutes that left the gate open for our noble Norwegian. A sitting League president had the right to place before it any question that he, in his own opinion and preference, considered especially important. President Mowinckel wished to make use of this regulation....

...Informing me of his plan, he said: "Help me. See to it that a respected international organization addresses an appeal to me, as president of the League Council, on the issue of the Famine. That will give me the moral right to bypass procedural regulations, notwithstanding the opposition of the secretary general."....

At this very time, the Liaison Committee of International Women's Organizations, composed of representatives of the ten largest international women's organizations, together representing tens of millions of organized women, was meeting in Geneva. This was a time when women's organizations had great authority and extensive influence in international circles, particularly Geneva circles. The Lviv headquarters of the Ukrainian Women's Union had been a full-fledged member of one of these women's federations for many years, and we maintained semiofficial ties with two others. I had many acquaintances among the activists at the Liaison Committee meeting....

Following my conversation with Minister Mowinckel, I immediately contacted the president of the International Alliance [for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship], Mrs. [Margery] Corbett Ashby.... Explaining the situation to her, I asked her to convince international womanhood to intervene, which would allow Minister Mowinckel to speak on the issue of the Famine. Mrs. Corbett Ashby asked me to attend a meeting of the Liaison Committee, where I gave a presentation about the matter the following morning. The Liaison Committee unanimously passed a resolution in favor of my request....

President Mowinckel kept his word. Already on 29 September he called a meeting of the Council to consider the catastrophic famine in Ukraine. True, the meeting was not open to the public but "private," that is, confidential. On this alone he had to yield to the secretary general.... Only representatives of the governments of those countries that had a permanent or temporary seat on the Council were present. By this means the secretary general wanted, obviously, to avoid publicity, unpleasant for the Great Powers to which he was beholden, as well as for the Soviet Union....

The secret session soon became an open secret. Here is what the general public learned about it. The meeting of the Council was long and heated. Representatives of all fourteen countries then making up the Council were present. When the head of the Council explained the situation, no one, in essence, denied the fact of the famine. However, representatives of the countries that saw their interests lying in political and economic cooperation with the Soviet Union indicated formal obstacles to an official reaction on the part of the League of Nations concerning the Famine. They referred to the fact that that the matter pertained to a country that did not belong to the League of Nations and apparently had not expressed its own wishes [on the matter]. Mowinckel himself spoke four times. He tried to convince his colleagues of the need to come to the aid of Ukraine or at least make some gesture on its behalf. He declared that his small and poor Norwegian people was ready to make the greatest sacrifice to help the starving. He called on the Great Powers to speak out boldly and act generously. The president of the League was supported by the representatives of Ireland, Germany, and Spain. But most members were of the opinion that the Council of the League could not act directly. In the end, it was decided to refer the matter to the International Committee of the Red Cross and appeal to it to organize international relief for Ukraine....

Thus the League of Nations, under the pretext of procedural impediments, washed its hands in the manner of Pilate....

On 6 October Minister Mowinckel paid a visit to the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Professor Werner, to pass on material about the Famine and inform him personally of the position of the Council. The Presidium of the International Committee of the Red Cross immediately held a meeting and, after a long discussion, decided to consider the matter referred to it by the League of Nations. It was necessary to begin by confirming the “practical possibilities” for organizing assistance, that is, to turn to the Soviet government with a proposal to grant permission to organize international relief for the starving in Ukraine....

...After a while, a reply was received from Moscow: there was no famine, and no relief action of any kind was required. The letter was extremely insulting in form.

***Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970). Excerpts, pp. 73–74. Translated by Strobe Talbott.**

Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971) was first secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine from 1938 to 1949, during which time he oversaw the implementation of the Great Terror, the Soviet anti-German resistance, postwar reconstruction, and the destruction of the Ukrainian nationalist underground. After the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, Khrushchev served as first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1953–64). His “secret speech” at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU on 25 February 1956 denounced Stalin and introduced de-Stalinization in the USSR. He was the author of a memoir translated under the title *Khrushchev Remembers* (1970).

Subsequently the word got around that famine had broken out in the Ukraine. I couldn’t believe it. I’d left the Ukraine in 1929, only three years before, when the Ukraine had pulled itself up to prewar living standards. Food had been plentiful and cheap. Yet now, we were told, people were starving. It was incredible.

It wasn’t until many years later, when Anastas Ivanovich Mikoyan told me the following story, that I found out how bad things had really been in the Ukraine in the early thirties. Mikoyan told me that Comrade [Mykola] Demchenko, who was then First Secretary of the Kiev Regional Committee, 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. I think somebody had better inform Stalin about this situation.”

You can see from this story that an abnormal state of affairs had already developed in the Party when someone like Demchenko, a member of the Ukrainian Politbureau, was afraid to go see Stalin himself.

**Lev Kopelev, *The Education of a True Believer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980). Excerpts, pp. 224–26, 248–50, 256, 259, 267–68, 278–79, 283–86. Translated by Gary Kern.**

Lev Kopelev (1912–97) was a writer and Soviet-era dissident who emigrated to West Germany in 1980. A communist idealist, he served as a Party agitator during the collectivization of agriculture in Ukraine. Kopelev was arrested and sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment in 1945

for criticizing fellow Red Army soldiers for their inhumane and brutal treatment of the German civilian population. Released in 1954, he was stripped of his Party membership and expelled from the Writers' Union in 1968 for protesting the treatment of Soviet dissidents and for denouncing the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Kopelev's three volumes of memoirs were translated into English as *To Be Preserved Forever* (1977), *The Education of a True Believer* (1980), and *Ease My Sorrows* (1983).

The Mirgorod district had not fulfilled its plan of grain collections in December 1932. The oblast committee dispatched a visiting delegation of two newspapers, the *Socialist Kharkov Register* and our *Locomotive Worker*, to issue news sheets in the lagging villages. There were four of us: two lads from Mirgorod—a typesetter and a printer; and two from Kharkov—my assistant Volodya and myself....

In the village of Petrivtsy [Petrivtsi] the district GPU official related:

“There are counterrevolutionary elements in the villages here.... [T]hey went after us with weapons, they spilled our blood.... [W]e've got figures to show that weapons are hidden in a hundred fifty households.... The district is jam-full of people like that, people who never planted a day in their lives, but who fought under Petlyura, Makhno, Marusya, the Angel. In the Civil War there were as many bands of soldiers as Spot has fleas.”

We believed him without reservation....

The grain front! Stalin said the struggle for grain was the struggle for socialism. I was convinced that we were warriors on an invisible front, fighting against kulak sabotage for the grain which was needed by the country, by the five-year plan. Above all, for the grain, but also for the souls of these peasants who were mired in unconscientiousness, in ignorance, who succumbed to enemy agitation, who did not understand the great truth of communism....

I have always remembered the winter of the last grain collections, the weeks of the great famine....

How could all this have happened?

Who was guilty of the famine which destroyed millions of lives?

How could I have participated in it?...

We were raised as the fanatical adepts of a new creed, the only true *religion* of scientific socialism. The party became our church militant, bequeathing to all mankind eternal salvation, eternal peace and the bliss of an earthly paradise. It victoriously surmounted all other churches, schisms and heresies. The works of Marx, Engels and Lenin were accepted as holy writ, and Stalin was the infallible high priest....

Many things then began to be called a struggle....

We deliriously sang out the refrain of the “Budyenny March,” one of the most popular songs in those years: “And all our life is but a struggle!”

For what, against whom and how exactly we should struggle at any given moment was determined by the party, its leaders. Stalin was the most perspicacious, the most wise (at that time they hadn't yet started calling him “great” and “brilliant”). He said: “the struggle for grain is the struggle for socialism.” And we believed him unconditionally....

Our party, our state, waged war on the peasantry.

In August and September 1932, *Pravda* wrote that the peasants in the Ukraine were not delivering enough grain; they were “bazaaring” it, harbouring it.

Molotov and Kaganovich came to our factory. At a meeting held outdoors after the first shift, they spoke of “mistakes committed in the Ukraine in the grain collection policy.”.... What

they said about mistakes and shortcomings didn't alarm anybody. The tone was not ominous. And they didn't name any "concrete bearers of evil."

But now, looking through the newspapers and journals of those years, I realize that by the beginning of September 1932, one could have felt the underground tremors of the approaching catastrophe....

The struggle *for grain* had begun in 1932 with a strategic retreat. This was the situation in May and June.

But in August a sharp turn was taken. And the state launched a hectically disordered full-scale attack.

All the means of propaganda, all the powers of the regional administration, the party and Komsomol apparati, the courts, the procurator's office, the GPU and the police were enlisted to strive for one goal—the acquisition of grain.

Our traveling newspaper was one of the countless number of hastily mobilized military units—or better, subunits—of the panicking grain front....

Today I am convinced that no victories or attainments, neither the rout of Hitler's forces nor the flights of the cosmonauts, can exonerate us, can even be considered "mitigating circumstances."

And even less forgivable are all the intellectual and emotional factors which led to my guilt, my participation in those fateful grain collections, be they explained or predetermined by sociohistorical objectivity or purely personal subjectivity.

This sin cannot be prayed away. No one can pray it away. And it cannot be expiated by anything. It remains only to live with it as seemly as possible. For me this means: not to forget, not to cover over, but to try to tell as much truth as I can as precisely as I can....

In February 1933 I was sick. The comrades who came to see me told of train stations packed with crowds of peasants. Whole families with youngsters and elders were trying to get away somewhere, fleeing from the famine. Many were roaming the streets, asking for handouts.

Every night trucks covered with tarpaulins gathered up the corpses at the train stations, under the bridges, in the doorways. They cruised the city during those hours before anyone had come out of his house. Other trucks of the same kind rounded up the homeless on the streets. The completely wasted were driven to the hospitals. All the infirmaries in the city were filled to overflowing. The morgues too.

Children left without parents were sent to reception centers. But all those who were sturdier than the others were simply driven somewhere distant from the city and left there....

On February 19, 1933, Stalin delivered a long speech at the all-union conference of kolkhoz shock workers. He spoke of the famine of 1918–19....

By this time hundreds of thousands of peasants were already dying. They were dying in deserted villages, on the roads, in city streets. Famine was raging through the Ukraine, the Kuban, the Volga area.

But Stalin declared that it wasn't worth "serious discussion."

And so we did not discuss it.

Not only because it was already dangerous to doubt, let alone criticize, Stalin's speeches. And not only because one of the terrible marks of mass starvation was the feeling of helplessness, of preordained doom....

No, we did not discuss it, we did not object, because we were convinced that the disaster was not so much the fault of the party and state, as the result of inexorable "objective" circumstances. We were convinced that the famine was caused by the opposition of suicidally

unconscientious peasants, enemy intrigues and the inexperience and weakness of the lower ranks of the workers.

In the same speech Stalin solemnly promised “to make all the kolkhozniks well-to-do.”

After this all the public speakers, orators, lecturers, newspapermen and propagandists repeated his promises every which way. Praises to the leader and predictions of forthcoming kolkhoz benefits sounded in those days when people were starving to death by the hundreds of thousands. This dismally monotonous clamor served to drown out the moaning and groaning....

In the spring the village shops and kolkhoz storehouses distributed relief once or twice a week: little bags of flour, peas, groats, preserves, sometimes baked bread.

Women with kerchiefs wrapped over their fur and velvet jackets stood and sat in line. They were still cold, even on sunny days. Edematose faces, dull, apparently unsighted eyes. The men were fewer. Skinny, bent, they looked even more emaciated next to the swollen, wrapped-up women.

The silence of these lines was frightening. Both old and young conversed little, with weak voices. Even the most shrewish squabbled quietly and somehow without passion.

The chairman of the village soviet, very skinny, pale yellow, a mummy come to life, tried to buck up his spirits as he related to the big shots:

“For today we have a reserve improvement. Neither yesterday, nor the day before, was there any fatality. All this week only four were buried, and two of them were from various illnesses. They caught cold, and they were old people besides. But those from insufficiency of nourishment—that’s definitely down to a few. And you could even say some of them are doing it from lack of social conscience. Soon as they started getting relief, soon as the first grass came up, the first green shoots, they started eating like mad. But their health is weak. You have to do it a little at a time, go slow. But some of ’em, even though they’re fullgrown daddies, they’re worse than kids. Soon as they saw borscht or kasha, be it a potful or a bucketful, they wouldn’t leave off till they had downed the whole thing. And then their guts don’t turn over the way they’re supposed to. Just like a horse: if it eats too much clover or drinks too much cold water, it gets a belly like a mountain and kicks out its hoofs for good.... Or it happens that the old boy got fresh-baked bread for the whole family, a loaf and a half, or twice as much, and while he’s carrying it home he gobbled it all up. The kids cry with hunger, and he’s clutching his belly, groaning his groan. And then he ain’t breathing no more. That’s how they’re dying—not from hunger but from stupidity. This is mostly the muzhiks. The women—they’re more conscientious, you could say, about nourishment. Or more patient. And of course, they’re sorrier for the kids. The women don’t die that way.”

Not that way, but all the same the women died too. Even in May, when the weeding of the vegetables began. The work best suited for women.

A hot afternoon in May. The women weeders move down the dark furrows between the rows of bright green young leaves. They take heavy steps. Bend over slowly. Even more slowly stand back up. Some can only crawl on all fours. Dark and dingy clumps amid the fresh, gay greenery.

One has stopped. She didn’t exactly lie down, didn’t exactly sit down. An hour later someone notices.

“Oy, woe, Auntie Odarka, she’s up and died! And I thought her’s just taking a rest.”

But in the spring they were able to bury them in separate graves. And in coffins.

They were dying less and less often. In the second half of May there were no burials for weeks.

A day in June. The district agit brigade drove in to the kolkhoz field camp. Young lads in embroidered shirts, wide blue trousers; young lasses in ribboned garlands, blouses with even more variegated embroidery, multicolored skirts with petticoats, fancy dress boots.

Lunch break. Women behind wooden tables spooning up thick gruel from earthen pots. Cauldrons steaming on the fireplace under a canopy. The rich aroma of cooked millet.

The women are hot: they are wearing white kerchiefs, bright jackets or linen undershirts. And therefore their faces and hands, blackened by the smoke, become even darker. No edematose faces. Almost all the women are thin, dried up, hardened, like old bark on logs.

And they are no longer silent: even though they have worked since sunup—"checked" the sugar beets, banked the potatoes, burned off the weeds in the cabbage field. The young people laugh to one another, looking at the rigged-up visitors.

The agitators lined up in front of a table. The musical director, in a little pea jacket, announced in a rather hoarse tenor:

"In honor of the shock workers of the socialist fields, our choir will perform folk songs."

...I gaze at the heavens  
Their riddle to ponder...

They sang full volume, in one voice. And right away you could tell they were not from the city. They sang not in neatly rounded melodies, as on the stages and music hall platforms, but way up high, in long, drawn-out, sonorous phrases. The way they sing in the villages—at friendly get-togethers, at weddings.

The women leave the pots, put aside the spoons. Stand fixed to the spot. Some lean on each other, press into little clusters.

And suddenly one breaks out crying. And then another. Crying softly. Covering their faces with their bandannas.

The choir falters. The director looks around. Whispers. A slender young woman in a garland strikes up a merry tune:

Oy, beyond the grove,  
Grove so green, so green...

The choir picks it up quickly, in a slapdash manner:  
Here plowed a little lassie  
With bull so keen, so keen...

But the women keep crying. And another. And now another. First those who are older, then the young ones. And now they are crying openly, sobbing out loud.

She plowed, she plowed,  
Worked till she could scream,  
So she hired a little Cossack  
To play on his violin...

The singers begin to lose their places. The dressed-up girls in the choir wipe their eyes and wet cheeks. The director looks around anxiously.

"What is this, good, women, comrades? What's wrong? Who's making you sad? We're trying to make things more merry."

The women's crying is broken by a shout:

"It's not you, not you! Oy, good people! It's we ourselves. We will never sing again.... Oy, how we used to sing! We don't even hear those songs in our sleep anymore.... We've buried everything.... We ourselves are already dead.... Oy, Mamochka my own, where are your bones?"

Oy, children, my own little dears, my own little darlings, I didn't cry over your little graves.... I handed you over to a stranger to bury without any coffins."

Another, and still another, began to scream, to lament.

The singers bunched together. And several of the young women in garlands began crying out loud.

The director rushed to the brigade leader, who was standing to the side with the drivers who had brought the guests. The men were smoking roll-your-owns, looking off to the side. The cook sat down on the ground, covered her face with her bandanna. Her shoulders shook.

The brigade leader, a broad, almost square man with a reddish tan and a rusty stubble of many days growing up to his cheekbones, waved off the director irritably:

"Just take it easy, dear comrade.... Let the women have their cry.... Their tears have welled up.... They're crying for everyone now. Don't interfere. They'll cry it out, then things'll be better."

***Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics. Conversations with Felix Chuev, ed. Albert Reis (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993). Excerpts, pp. 243–44.***

Viacheslav Molotov (1890–1986), whose real family name was Skriabin, was a long-standing, high-ranking Communist Party and Soviet government official who held important posts during the Stalin era. In government he served as Soviet head of state (1930–41) and as minister of foreign affairs (1939–49; 1953–56); in the Communist Party he was a member of its Central Committee (1921–57) and Politburo (1926–57). In 1931–32 Molotov was deeply involved in managing the collectivization and grain-procurement campaigns. Together with Lazar Kaganovich, he served as one of Stalin's trusted emissaries and enforcers during this period.

#### Famine, 1933

*Among writers, some say the famine of 1933 was deliberately organized by Stalin and the whole of your leadership.*

Enemies of communism say that! They are enemies of communism! People who are not politically aware, who are politically blind.

No, in collectivization, you can be sure, hands must not tremble, you must not quake in your boots, and if anyone begins to shiver—beware! We get hurt! That's just the point. Now everyone demands everything ready-made! You are like children. The overwhelming majority of present-day communists come to us hands outstretched. They just demand that everything good we have be handed them on a silver platter. They act as if that is the meaning of life. But it is not.

People will be found who understand this. Such people will come along. The struggle against the petty bourgeois heritage must be merciless. If life does not improve, that's not socialism. But even if the life of the people improves year to year over a long period but the foundations of socialism are not strengthened, a crack-up will be inevitable.

*But nearly twelve million perished of hunger in 1933....*

The figures have not been substantiated.

*Not substantiated?*

No, no, not at all. In those years I was out in the country on grain procurement trips. Those things couldn't have just escaped me. They simply couldn't. I twice traveled to the Ukraine. I visited Sychevo in the Urals and some places in Siberia. Of course I saw nothing of the kind there. Those allegations are absurd! Absurd! True, I did not have occasion to visit the Volga region. It is possible that people were worse off there. Of course I was sent where it was possible to procure grain.

No, these figures are an exaggeration, though such deaths had been reported of course in some places. It was a year of terrible hardships.

[12-12-72, 8-15-75]

